

## Subjectivity in the European Thought. The Significance of Paweł Włodkowic's and Bartolomé de Las Casas' Philosophies



KRZYSZTOF WIELECKI\*

The concept of subjectivity is as central to the humanities as it is vague. In the era of a post-industrial crisis of civilization and the postmodern weakening of social thinking, however, it is worthwhile to attempt to adopt this term into academic language. While the idea has a solid standing in the language custom, it does not yield easily to academic rigor. However, should we abandon it altogether, we will be hard-pressed to express something that clearly exists in the ontological sense; something that encompasses a certain range of phenomena which are important even though they are not wholly understood or precisely defined. In my book *Subjectivity in an era of post-industrial crisis*.<sup>1</sup> I attempt to further develop the issues of subjectivity. It appears that a properly developed *concept of subjectivity* may become an invaluable aid in reflections on the ontological status of the individual and of a group, as well as on the relationships between people and societies, and the meaning of a person in societies.<sup>2</sup> I am of the opinion that such a concept may, and in fact ought to, be the starting point of a reflection upon

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\* Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw; e-mail: krzysztof.wielecki@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> K. Wielecki, *Podmiotowość w dobie kryzysu postindustrializmu. Między indywidualizmem a kolektywizmem*, Warszawa 2003.

<sup>2</sup> M. Rembierz, "The Play between Freedom and Power. On the Human Quest for Self-Determination and Subjectivity in Times of Ideological Fighting for Man's Appropriation," in: K. Ślodzińska, K. Wielecki (ed.), *Critical Realism and Humanity in the Social Sciences*, Warszawa 2016, *Archerian Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 149-160.

the society, the state, politics as well as upon the individual, their mental health, and their identity. I would argue especially fervently that a theory of subjectivity should be construed in our era of the above-mentioned crisis of civilization which is wont to forget individuals and values in its *liquid reality*.<sup>3</sup>

Any serious study of subjectivity must begin with a reconstruction of this term in the humanist and social thought. It is important to note what a 'good society' was considered to be in the past and what it is supposed to be now; how the thinking changed of human nature and duties of individuals who, out of necessity (though sometimes not without enjoyment), remain in mutual relationships with others. It is especially at a time when science is dominated by relativist and interactionist ideology that such a reflection is of fundamental importance.

This paper is a modest and very brief sketch of an overview of standpoints on the matter at hand. More information can be found in my book mentioned above (*Subjectivity in an era of post-industrial crisis. Between individualism and collectivism*). I hope that this sketch will prove useful in highlighting the contemporary meaning of the ideas of the selected authors – Paweł Włodkowic and Bartolomé de Las Casas – which I review here. They obviously represent the catholic school of thought, but there are curious coincidental similarities between their respective works. I believe that showing these among their ideas that relate do subjectivity may be of great importance for the concept of subjectivity as such.

### **An outline of the history of the concept of subjectivity**

The issue of subjectivity is for me a question of the relation between the individualistic and the collectivistic image of the individual and society. The thinker who first set foot on this long road of European thought was naturally Socrates, even though he himself obviously did not use this particular term. But any attempt at reconstructing the standpoint of this philosopher which could lead to a deeper understanding ends in the conclusion that on the grounds of Socrates' thought subjectivity is a task to be done, nay – a moral obligation to be fulfilled. The path leads through knowledge to virtue, without which a human being cannot be truly happy. As long as one follows that path, they need not fear death or

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<sup>3</sup>Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Ithaca, NY 1991.

any other misfortune. Scarcity of material goods and lack of sophisticated desires also help in attaining happiness. Beyond any doubt, those who want to be subjective, must be responsible for others. This is what drove Socrates to teaching. A sense of being true to himself and one of sensitivity towards, and responsibility for, others were payment enough and compensated for the mockery and verbal and physical abuse that were often his reward for the knowledge that he tried to impart. His chosen teaching methods, the elenchus and maieutics, angered his wretched students, who were not that interested in happiness and virtue (at least in their Socratic sense).<sup>4</sup> The final facet of his standpoint of ethical intellectualism was the belief in an inner voice (the *daimonion*) of a transcendental origin, that is – in a religious factor.

The key to unravelling the Socratic concept of subjectivity as I understand it here, is his ethics, with the assumption of a universal and objective nature of values, which in turn come from a supernatural source. A transcendental power placed the good inside humans, and now they must discover it by way of reason. Subjectivity according to Socratic thought has certain attributes, derived from the value which is the good. Amongst these attributes, apart from the already-mentioned responsibility for others, are: obedience to *polis* (as far as the limits of moral principles allow), courage, ability to withstand suffering, dignity, disregard for one's own needs.<sup>5</sup>

Plato also takes gods to be the source of values; gods who supply the soul with ready knowledge, which – sadly – is then forgotten. Learning is then remembering (*anamnesis*). Having made a distinction between the nature of the thing from its concrete instantiation, Plato ascribed the knowledge of the former to reason, while that of the latter – to senses. Especially the *universals*, or fundamental ideas, can only be known through reason. Gods are the source of the highest concept, that of the good. Subjectivity here is also a question of choosing one's way of life aimed towards good. It also needs intuition, faith and the practice of virtue. Subjectivity is the pursuit of knowing the good and living in accordance with the virtues which follow from it. The virtues

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<sup>4</sup> Diogenes Laërtius, *Żywoty i poglądy słynnych filozofów*, transl. I. Krońska et al., introd. K. Leśniak, Warszawa 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Platon, *Menon*, transl. and ed. W. Witwicki, Warszawa 1959; idem, *Obrona Sokratesa*, transl. and ed. W. Witwicki, Kraków 2007.

of the soul are above all order and harmony, which can be achieved by keeping a close rein on one's desires and passions. This calls for wisdom, courage and restraint (each of these virtues corresponds to one part of the soul) as well as mature love. Such love is achieved by progressing from sensual love through love for spiritual beauty, then love for the idea of beauty, finally to arrive at the adoration of the highest ideal, that of the good.<sup>6</sup>

Aristotle was convinced that the *rational soul* is meant to recognize and understand the good and to direct the will towards it. In turn, *practical reason* makes a human being a subject by directing their will towards life in accordance with the recognized good (*eudaimonia*). According to Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is a virtue accessible to all those who live according to the principle of *the golden mean*.<sup>7</sup>

In the Middle Ages, when the predominant perspective was that of religion, two figures played a crucial role. The one that came earlier, St. Augustine, referred back to Plato and his theory of ideas and universals. However, for St. Augustine the central point was the belief that the sole source of happiness for man can only be God and knowing Him. All good is linked to God and comes from God. Evil is thus the absence of good, he claimed. Probably the fullest explication of Augustine's philosophy of man, his happiness and subjectivity can be found in *De Trinate*.<sup>8</sup> Man is free, because it is he who can choose between good and evil. In order to understand God, that is – the nature of the good, however, man needs *divine illumination*, or enlightening. And in order for man to achieve salvation, that is – the ability to fully know God (this also refers to being in communion with God), man needs divine grace. Man's subjectivity, as a potential, is included in God's love for man and in the fact that man was created in God's image and likeness. The realization of subjectivity is achieved through one's development in the knowledge of, and love for,

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<sup>6</sup> Platon, *Uczta*, in: idem, *Dialogi*, transl. W. Witwicki, A. Lam (ed.), Warszawa 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 5: *Etyka nikomachejska, Etyka wielka, Etyka eudemejska, O cnotach i wadach*, transl. and ed. D. Gromska, L. Regner, W. Wróblewski, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Św. Augustyn, *O Trójcy Świętej*, transl. M. Stokowska, introd. J. Tischner, J.M. Szymusiak (ed.), Kraków 1996.

God.<sup>9</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas on the other had was closer to Aristotle and his ethics of *the golden mean* as a principle of moderation. He too saw the happiness of man in knowing God and in salvation, as the human soul has a natural desire (*desiderium naturale*) for eternal life. This desire may lead man to hope or to despair and resignation. After the original sin, says Thomas Aquinas, we humans lost the capability to strive for eternal happiness. However, Christ's crucifixion redeemed this sin, thanks to which we receive three *theological virtues*: faith, hope and charity, which return us onto the path to salvation. Man's sins make this difficult (venial sins) or impossible (mortal sins); conversely, gifts of the Holy Spirit are a boon.<sup>10</sup> The soul is guided by its own will. St. Thomas names four chief obstacles on the way to obtaining virtues: weakness of reason, especially as a consequence of sin, e.g. pride; perversity of will; moral weakness (sin weakens man); disorder (when man is overwhelmed by a desire).<sup>11</sup>

Yet another perspective on subjectivity, one I would call sociological, was provided by Immanuel Kant. The intersubjectivity of the practical reason, focused on the subject, has replaced the objectivity of moral criteria. According to Kant, great philosophical problems lie beyond the limits of certain knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Only faith can serve us here. And it is faith that told Kant that God exists and that man is equipped with a soul which is immortal and free. Such convictions are practical postulates, that is – assumptions taken without proof. They are necessary for man's morality. The mind is capable of distinguishing between good and evil thanks to practical reason. Kant was of the opinion that there is a moral law that exists beyond all experience and which is necessary for man's life. In order to discover it, one must consider what might be a principle which will withstand criticism from all people, a principle which will appear obvious

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<sup>9</sup> Idem, *Wyznania*, transl. and ed. Z. Kubiak, Kraków 2007

<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, London 1962–1986; See: also: F.W. Bednarski (ed.), *Skrót zarysu teologii (Sumy teologicznej) św. Tomasza z Akwinu OP*, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Kwestia o duszy*, transl. Z. Włodek, W. Zega, introd. Z. Włodek, Kraków 1996.

<sup>12</sup> I. Kant, *Prolegomena do wszelkiej przyszłej metafizyki, która będzie mogła wystąpić jako nauka*, transl. and ed. A. Banaszkiewicz, Warszawa 1993.

to everyone. He dubbed this principle *the categorical imperative*, which can be related as the recommendation: *Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.*<sup>13</sup>

Kant's idea of subjectivity can be reconstructed on the basis of his ethics. He wanted the human being to be treated as an end in itself, never as a means to an end. Kant put individuality in the centre of sense and meaning as well as an axiological fulcrum. What – in the absence of God – could make the emancipated man follow moral principles? According to Kant it was duty. It is because of a sense of duty that individuals limit their egotism. The very intention to fulfil one's duty determines moral judgement. Duty frees man from his individual undetermined latitude. And without such freedom there can be no subjectivity. As a side remark, Kant took the sense of moral duty to be the presence of God in man as certain and unperturbed as the starry sky above (*the starry skies above me and the moral law inside me*)<sup>14</sup>.

Quite the contrary was the case with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who not only did not take society and culture as a precondition for man's subjectivity, but claimed that they take freedom away from man and disfigure him. Subjectivity seems for Rousseau to be a state of harmony between the spirit and nature, which personifies perfection. It is therefore only outside of society that the natural good of the human being comes to the fore; this is a concept of a good man in bad culture and society. The source of social evil is private ownership, as it violates the fundamental principle of good among people – that of equality. In order to protect the inequalities arising from ownership, a *social contract* was drawn, and on it the state was built with its institutions, political system, culture with its morality, says Rousseau, this Columbus of European philosophy. Remember that Columbus was an explorer who set sail towards an unknown destination, returned from a place he did not know, and died thinking he had visited a place which in fact he had not.<sup>15</sup>

For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel subjectivity, as an attribute

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *Uzasadnienie metafizyki moralności*, transl. M. Wartenberg, R. Ingarden, Warszawa 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Krytyka praktycznego rozumu*, transl. and ed. B. Bornstein, Warszawa 2011.

<sup>15</sup> J.J. Rousseau, *The Confessions*, transl. A. Scholar, Oxford 2000 and idem, *The Social Contract' and Other Later Political Writings*, transl. V. Gourevitch, Cambridge 1997.

of an individual, has no value, other than perhaps as an instrument of the realization of *Spirit*. It lends itself to analysis in this great thinker's work only from the perspective of a historic process of development of a collective subject, mainly that of a nation. Subjectivity seems to begin and end as a step stool in the dialectic realization of *Spirit* in the idea of the state.<sup>16</sup>

What Karl Marx did was an organ transplant. He removed the concept of Spirit from Hegel's philosophy and replaced it with that of social justice, which, however, is for him not linked to benevolent nature, but rather to industrial production. The fundamental functions of Hegelian nation and state were to be taken over by social class. The process itself loses its idealistic character and becomes a materialistic process of the realization of the idea of social justice in the practice of industrial production. When this historic process encounters an obstacle, then – by way of some mysterious materialist metaphysics that Marx calls dialectic – the obstacle is necessarily removed by a revolution. By no means is it my desire to reduce the differences between Hegel's and Marx's philosophies to the ones outlined above, but from the point of view of the nature of subjectivity, the differences are not very substantial. In both cases man is but an element of a much larger historic order. For Marx the ultimate goal is the freedom of mankind (*the leap to the kingdom of freedom*)<sup>17</sup>, which can only be realized by removing inequality. Ironically, it is here that the idealist Rousseau spiritually meets the materialist Marx. The joke is that probably neither would have liked to live in the *paradise on Earth* envisioned by the other.<sup>18</sup>

It is difficult to say anything about the concept of subjectivity in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, for whom man is part of the irrational nature. This makes his life – wildly driven by unfulfilled desires – a veritable torment that must end in the catastrophe of death. One could hardly call subjectivity the rare lull in an otherwise permanent torture brought about by contemplation or sacrifice for others.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Wykłady z filozofii dziejów*, vol. 1–2, transl. J. Grabowski, A. Landman, introd. T. Kroński, Warszawa 1958 and idem, *Fenomenologia ducha*, vol. 1–2, transl. and ed. A. Landman, Warszawa 1963–1965.

<sup>17</sup> Must see: A. Walicki, *Marksizm i skok do królestwa wolności. Dzieje komunistycznej utopii*, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>18</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 1–2, Warszawa 1948.

<sup>19</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *O podstawie moralności*, transl. Z. Bassakówna, Kraków 2015; idem,

Friedrich Nietzsche adopted more than just the pessimistic air from Schopenhauer's thought. He referred to the above-mentioned aspect of practice, but gave it a broader meaning – that of life. It is life that is the source of morality. Everyone has the sort of morality they are comfortable with. The nature of subjectivity for Nietzsche seems to lie in *power*, the most important force of life. Subjectivity thus would probably be about personifying and displaying power. Those who are not subjective are slaves, upon whom the subjective individual can and should impose, by law of moral superiority, his egotist values. Sadly, numbers give the weak slaves an advantage, which allows them to impose upon the world the degenerate morality of relativity, love, compassion and altruism. One is tempted to note that the Nietzschean *power* seems rather weak, and what he deems weakness – oddly powerful. However, outside of this context of subjectivity Nietzsche points out another – that of dissent for the world as it is. Life is for him ceaseless activity and creation. A subject is the person who takes up the challenge of such a life, who accepts that subjectivity is not a constant, but a creative act, forever renewed. This is expressed in the Dionysian attitude that the philosopher recommends – one that is vivacious, rebellious, dynamic, focused on constant development.<sup>20</sup>

Before Rousseau, nature was feared as a dangerous force, an element in which subjectivity is dispersed. Rousseau disagreed, seeing in nature an opportunity for the fulfilment of the individual, while society, culture and civilization were for him a dangerous element. Similarly, Nietzsche created the concept of the *Übermensch*, a Super-human who has enough power to oppose reification by culture and society and who can tap nature for strength. Subjectivity in Nietzschean thought is then a dynamic phenomenon, and in its ceaseless becoming (otherwise there is no subjectivity) one can discover the order of development, with its clear phases (the camel, the lion, the child).

Subjectivity is thus a road, one which can be travelled thanks to one's ability to withstand suffering and hard work, to make sacrifices and

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*Metafizyka życia i śmierci*, transl. Józef Marzęcki, Warszawa 1995; idem, *Świat jako wola i przedstawienie*, vol. 1–2, transl. and ed. J. Garewicz, Warszawa 1994–1995.

<sup>20</sup> F. Nietzsche, *To rzekł Zaratustra. Książka dla wszystkich i dla nikogo*, transl. S. Lisiecka, Z. Jaskuła, Wrocław 2005; idem, *Poza dobrem i złem. Preludium filozofii przyszłości*, transl. S. Wyrzykowski, Łódź–Wrocław 2010; idem, *Wola mocy. Próba przemiany wszystkich wartości (studia i fragmenty)*, transl. S. Frycz, K. Drzewiecki, Warszawa 1911

rejoice at taking up the challenge of a travelling subject's fate. In such a way one can arrive at a narcissistic acceptance of one's strength, but also at a rebellion that destroys everything, needs no support, hates any governance or supervision, wants to be led solely by its own will, to re-evaluate all values. The third phase is one of creation, which builds with the same fervour that the lion destroyed. This is a phase of creating one's freedom. It requires the innocence of a child, and forgetting which frees one from being deformed by culture and society. The conclusion of the third phase cannot be a new order but never-ending creation, re-evaluation and searching.

In the view of William James it is life needs that make people act, and the psyche is largely shaped in accordance with the utilitarian principle; it is secondary to action. Henri Bergson pointed out the creative nature of life, in whose homogeneous stream two aspects may be distinguished: actions and experiences. Subjectivity, as I understand it in Bergson's thought, has its source in God, and is led mostly by intuition, which in turn is a function of the stream of experiences. The other aspect of the stream of life is action. A highly significant attribute of subjectivity is creation and development, understood as broadening one's horizons. In many ways it resembles the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, who seems to have understood subjectivity as the ability of the subject to sustain *unity of the stream of experiences*. He did away with the opposition between the subject and nature, as he believed that the world we have access to is not a *world in itself*, but rather *a world for someone* – in other words, it is the subject that establishes it.

A similar sentiment can be found in the works of Søren Kierkegaard. The torment of living, which was so pointedly stressed by both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, stems – according to the Danish philosopher – from trepidation. It is caused by the fear of death and the perspective of the mystery of the eternal God, which is difficult to bear for a mortal man. This drama of human existence is unsolvable. One can choose the way of the coward, that is escape into the future; alternatively one can escape into the past – this is the way of the hedonist. But there is a third way: that of subjectivity, which chooses the present and the truth. Religion does not have to be treated as an escape if one realizes that it will not save him from the torment of life; rather, the opposite will happen, it will worsen the torment by demanding sacrifices, by exacerbating the tension and despondency.

But this is the way of subjectivity. Therefore, as I understand it, subjectivity is for Kierkegaard a question of choosing one's way of life. In his *Either/Or* the philosopher nobilitates *authenticity*. Frankness in expressing who one is, necessarily preceded by actually being oneself, acceptance for oneself as one is, for one's choices – these would also be attributes of subjectivity.<sup>21</sup>

Gabriel Marcel understood the despair of man, but he saw a way out, one that could lead to God and other people. Being with others can be, to an extent, a communion with God. Hence springs forth hope, which – when it becomes reliance on God, meeting Him, communion in love – will cope with despair. Subjectivity as I see it in Marcel's thought is a particular way of existence. We are *substantiated* in existence through love. Existence is always *being-in*. Subjectivity thus appears to be the ability to commune, that is – to exist in-you through love. So it is not a shelter – *from* but an opening – *towards*. Nor is subjectivity a seat of originality (as it is for many thinkers before and after Marcel) which must be discovered and expressed in an act of authenticity, but rather an experience of a gift in the dialogical relation *I – you*.

The concept of a meeting was also central for the philosophy of Martin Buber. Man is a subject in the sense of being someone who can act as a free and responsible person. He can choose a monological relation with God and other people (I – it) or a dialogical one (I – Thou). The former impoverishes, reduces, depersonalizes; the latter places one on the road to developing oneself as a subject. It is man's own autonomous choice that decides whether good or evil will actualize itself inside him. Both potentials are there. God's participation in our subjectivity is not reduced to endowing us with the potentials and enabling us to choose. God gives us the grace of internal integration, without which there is no autonomy. But the subject is the source of their own subjectivity, as it is the subject who chooses and follows the path of their choice. Therefore dialogical opening, sensitivity towards other people, towards God, are significant attributes of such subjectivity. Of fundamental value is non-instrumental attitude towards *Thou*, responsiveness to their call. Buber understands man's trepidation and his suffering arising from fear of the future, death and the mystery of God and the world. Buber knows that man does not understand God or

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<sup>21</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Albo-albo*, vol. 1-2, transl. and introd. J. Iwaszkiewicz, Warszawa 1982, p. 237.

the world he lives in; that man doubts in the meaning of life. Experiencing God's realness gives meaning to life, but this perspective will not be fulfilled without love and choosing openness to *Thou*.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus chose the path of atheist existentialism. The latter is especially terrified by the *absurdity* of life. He knows there is no way out from this absurdity. All that is left is the courageous acceptance of a contemptible fate and the heroism of existence in spite of understanding that fate. This gives man a certain freedom, the freedom of a demiurge who has to make a choice and is proud to choose the more difficult path.

The problem that was central to entire generations of philosophers, namely whether man really exists, whether his being is not threatened by nature, other people, culture – this problem was of little significance for Martin Heidegger when confronted with the fact that man keeps losing himself, or at least (as I would put it) his subjectivity. This happens chiefly because man loses the truth of being. He also loses contact with the true being, which is a rapid, complex *stream of life*. Heidegger was mainly motivated by his fear for man, who, as Nietzsche proclaimed, lost God. We could add, following Józef Tischner, that he did so without noticing that he is losing himself in the first place.<sup>22</sup> It is true especially of the philosophy of the Enlightenment that the man is seen as the subject that establishes himself, chiefly in order to put himself face to face with being and feel its objectness, and thanks to it – his own power, to be able to rule. But this is not the truth about man. What is true, though, is that he is filled with trepidation which arises from his experiencing nothingness and the awareness of *being-toward-death*. The path to truth requires that one *enters the stream of life* before it becomes falsified by the instrumental reason and feels, experiences as a *being being-in*. Existence is happening. We need a *more subtle philosophy* than the traditional one. Truth is being. The truth about man is his *existence in being*. Truth is a more subtle matter than it used to be assumed and requires more refined thought. Man cannot understand the world, but he can ask questions, assume an open, creative, curious attitude. This and the courage to keep searching is where subjectivity manifests itself.

Subjectivity also manifests itself in freedom. But man is not free. He is conditioned by the world, diffused in everyday life, unable to change

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<sup>22</sup> K. Michalski, *Heidegger i filozofia współczesna*, Warszawa 1978, p. 209.

much, and especially unable to escape death. Human life is *being-toward-death*. But it is precisely this tragedy and the horror it evokes which may become an opportunity to realize that the only solution is to understand and take responsibility for one's life. Choosing responsibility, the responsibility itself, they are already a certain degree of freedom. Especially if, being aware of its end, we will direct our life as *being-toward-life-and-freedom*. Then, freedom is also the ability to give meaning to one's life. Subjectivity as we could interpret it in the context of Heidegger's philosophy is thus activity within the relation man-world which is oriented toward knowing the world through experiencing-understanding which denounces aspirations towards totality and certainty; through broadening the horizons of freedom, giving meaning to one's life and taking responsibility for it.

Man is a being torn between his materiality and spirituality. But the 'naturalness', fleshliness condemns us – according to Ferdinand Ebner – to suffering, loneliness and death. However, there is a spiritual element in man – the *I*. It exists only in a relation with *Thou*, that is – something which is also spiritual, but external to the *I*. In the relation *I-Thou* true spiritual life of man is found.<sup>23</sup>

The starting point for contemplating the nature of man was for Franz Rosenzweig the *experience of death*. It is the experience of death that reveals the falsehood of the reasoning of a totalizing thinker. Total thought is helpless faced with death, but also faced with the separation of God, man and the world, realities which in life are not separate, which 'transcend their nature' and enter into relations, as we can clearly experience.

We shall not devote space here to the interesting and complex creation of Rosenzweig's, the concept of 'Star of Redemption', made of the dimensions of God and the world, linked by Creation; God and man, joined by Revelation; and man and the world, bonded by Redemption. Instead, we will focus on another postulate, that God reveals Himself through love, through the word of the commandment of love. A dialogue, wherein love is expressed as transcending, stepping outside of one's self, a dialogue between people built on the word of God – this is a recurring theme in all the religious philosophies outlined here. For Rosenzweig freedom is limited by the self-criticism of the subject, incorporated into an axiological order; yet the subject is still a separate entity, disconnected

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<sup>23</sup> F. Ebner, 'Fragmenty pneumatologiczne', transl. J. Doktor, in: B. Baran (ed.), *Filozofia dialogu*, Kraków 1991.

not only from other people or various *totalities*, but also from the *Infinite*, which gives subjectivity a chance by retreating from the ontological space and leaving it to man.<sup>24</sup>

Emmanuel Lévinas finds a *fulcrum* in the Old Testament God and the Great Commission. But meeting God is always meeting another person. Apart from the face of the other person we encounter the *non-face* of God. In this philosophy it is crucial to make the distinction between need and desire. The former is a void that wants filling, is oriented towards something that can satisfy it. Desire, in turn, can never be satisfied, but rather fed; it is oriented towards *the Other*, which is not wanting, but rather striving for something that may not be defined and yet it speaks with great strength, the power of its meaning freed from all context. The object of desire can be that *absolute Other*. It may be God, or another human who *resembles God*, through whom we are bonded to God. For that a meeting is necessary, but a pre-condition for a meeting is loneliness which is a suffering, torture. Only through it can we discover the proximity of another and open to the meeting. *Separation* is necessary for a relation. The key here is the experience of the Face. It is a sort of *moral challenge* which awakens our freedom. But this challenge is also a border of sorts, a prohibition, a request from the other. And not just the particular other, but also from him whose Face and promise the other resembles. Here we come to ashamedness, enter ethics, which always leads to self-limitation.<sup>25</sup>

The German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas set about finding a new fulcrum for values and the despairing subject, now completely distrustful, especially toward all totality. And let us add that this subject after cancelling God went on to cancel itself – through the criticism of subjectivity, through the unconsciously suicidal orientation of the subject toward its own subjectivism, the expression of its tormented originality, autonomy and authenticity, etc. Habermas found his fulcrum in the *communication community*, oriented towards mutual agreement as a result of the practice of *open discourse*. This community is the source

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<sup>24</sup> F. Rosenzweig, *Gwiazda zbawienia*, transl. and ed. T. Gadacz, Kraków 1998; idem, 'Nowe myślenie. Kilka późniejszych uwag do *Gwiazdy zbawienia*', transl. T. Gadacz, in: J. Tischner (ed.), *Filozofia współczesna*, Kraków 1989.

<sup>25</sup> E. Lévinas, *Całość i nieskończoność. Esej o zewnętrzności*, transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, introd. B. Skarga, Warszawa 1998; idem, *Humanisme de l'Autre Homme*, Montpellier 1972; idem, *O Bogu, który nawiedza myśl*, transl. M. Kowalska, introd. T. Gadacz, Kraków 1994.

of values which are created as intersubjectivity established in the course of non-violent practices. It also mediates truth.<sup>26</sup>

For Zygmunt Bauman, as I understand it, subjectivity is taking responsibility for one's own identity in an era of *liquid modernity*. One must accept one's alienness and loneliness as well as their inevitability, understand that we are all being *devoured* and constantly *vomited out* from the illusion of order. Each person must ceaselessly *re-anchor their drifting identity in the ambiguous modernity*.<sup>27</sup> The contemporary post-modernity is without a doubt a source of suffering, Bauman says, travestying in the title of one of his books<sup>28</sup> the title of a famous work by his namesake, Siegmund Freud<sup>29</sup>, but this is a necessary price we have to pay for the freedom to self-construct our identity. This, it seems, is what man's subjectivity consists in; this and the respect for the stranger-ness of others and for their right to author their own identities.

The concept of subjectivity in the philosophy of Józef Tischner must be sought, I think, in two perspectives of his theory: the philosophy of drama and the philosophy of dialogue. According to Tischner, we live our lives in *encounters* with other people; these encounters make it necessary for us to confront one another and choose between good and evil. This gives human existence a dramatic character<sup>30</sup> while at the same time opening an *agathological* horizon, that is, introducing into human life and humanist thought *the good* as a central point of reference<sup>31</sup>; the good thus becomes *rooted* in our lives and its real tragedies.<sup>32</sup> First, *I* experiences himself/herself as a value. Even though the axiological *I* realizes itself as a value only in particular forms, it is still in its essence an *irreal value*. However,

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<sup>26</sup> J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1-2, transl. T.A. McCarthy, Boston Mass. 1981; idem, *Theory and Practice*, transl. J. Viertel, London 1977; idem, *Filozoficzny dyskurs nowoczesności*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz. Kraków 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence...*, Ithaca, NY 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Idem, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Z. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, London 2002; published in Poland as literally: 'Culture as a source of suffering' - see: idem, *Kultura jako źródło cierpień*, transl. J. Prokopiuk, R. Reszke (ed.), Warszawa 1995.

<sup>30</sup> J. Tischner, 'Spór o istnienie człowieka. Z księdzem profesorem Józefem Tischnerem rozmawia Tadeusz Gadacz', *Nowe Książki*, vol. 3 (1998), p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, *Filozofia dramatu*, Kraków 1998, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *Myślenie według wartości*, Kraków 1982, p. 369.

the primary source of ethical experience is the Other, his/her presence.<sup>33</sup> The meaning of an encounter lies in the fact that humans are open beings, which means, among other things, that we are inevitably characterised by desiring the Other. Here is the reason for a *dialogical opening*. The Other, through his/her very presence, words, gestures, glances even, *asks a question* and issues a *claim* for a response.<sup>34</sup> The *claim* establishes an encounter and a dialogue, which result in a *dramatic thread*.<sup>35</sup>

The human being is free in the sense of choosing values, and especially choosing between good and evil; also, by choosing who he/she is and thus creating himself/herself. A dramatic tension between good and evil appears in the *agathological space*, which is at the same time the *space of the meeting*. As Tadeusz Gadacz writes, relating Tischner's views: *In the meeting a two-faceted nature of transcendence reveals itself: the meeting steps towards the other to whom it bears testimony as well as towards the Other – God – in front of whom it bears testimony. Thanks to a meeting, aimless meandering may become shared pilgrimage and the refused land – the land of promise. The essence of a meeting is the Good.*<sup>36</sup> But there the drama (and sometimes – tragedy) of human existence is also revealed, as in a meeting *evil is also possible: escape instead of meeting, a hideout instead of a home, forced labour instead of a workshop, damnation instead of salvation. The horizon of hope is thus revealed in the other dimension of the transcendence of a meeting – the divine one.*<sup>37</sup>

In the thought of Karol Wojtyła the concept of subjectivity makes sense only from the perspective of the freedom of the human being in relation to God. The starting point for reflection on subjectivity may be the phenomenological discovery of the experience 'I can – I do not have to – I want to'. It is here that man's causality is revealed<sup>38</sup>, and the problem arises of his subjectivity and freedom, as freedom is a characteristic peculiar to humans. Other fundamentals for man's subjectivity are reason and spirituality. Spirituality, in turn, means inner life, which is centred around

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<sup>33</sup> Idem, 'Etyka wartości i nadziei', in: D. von Hildebrand (et al.), *Wobec wartości*, Poznań 1982.

<sup>34</sup> Idem, *Filozofia...*, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku*, vol. 2, Kraków 2009, p. 637.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, Lublin 1994, p. 151.

truth and the good. This determines man's two central orientations: one directed towards understanding the ultimate cause of everything, and the other directed toward the good. Yet man is not solely spiritual, we belong to the outside world as well. We want to *leave our mark* in it, as this is what human nature demands. The same nature gives us the power of *self-determination*, or free will.<sup>39</sup> Subjectivity understood as self-determination is not simply the freedom to do what you will. A condition here is that of self-possession, that is, being a person *sui iuris*, which enables *self-governance*. Will transcends a person in action.

Here we reach the other experience, of fundamental nature for this paper – that of the phenomenological obviousness of shame as something that refers us to *something still other*, which in turn directs us towards the transcendental value of the human being.<sup>40</sup> Let us return to the 'I can – I don't have to – I want to' trio, where the horizon of man's freedom is revealed; man who *does not have to*, for whom *inclination* is not determination, who can choose as he wishes. Thus the subject becomes entangled in ethics, as the choice is in fact often between good and evil. According to Wojtyła, we become free, in the sense of freedom from the determinism of feelings, by being obedient to truth.<sup>41</sup> A *person* is a *substance* but also a *relation*. Especially a relation with another human being. In the words of Zofia Zdybicka: *The fundamental source of Wojtyła's philosophical reflection was experiencing the human being: directly, objectively, understandingly. Man can experience himself, his inner self, thanks to reflection accompanying every activity (deed). A reflective analysis of every act, an understanding experience, lead to the discovery of the subject – the doer of the act and one who experiences his own subjectivity – and therefore to the discovery of the person.*<sup>42</sup> The way we enter these relations determines our subjectivity, that is whether we will be able to lead our human being to *the fullness of being-ness*. We can see that subjectivity is a task to fulfil the potential that we have as humans. A condition here is treating the other non-instrumentally, as that would strip the person of the *dignity* that springs

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<sup>39</sup> Idem, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, Lublin 1986, pp. 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., part III.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, *Osoba i czyn...*, p. 150, passim.

<sup>42</sup> Z.J. Zdybicka, 'Wojtyła Karol (Jan Paweł II)', in: A. Maryniarczyk et al. (ed.), *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 9, Lublin 2008, p. 816.

from the fact that humans are children of God. It is possible to be fully oneself, that is – fully subjective, above all in a *meeting* with Jesus Christ, in whom God reveals himself and the truth about man. The only possible sort of relation in response to the dignity that man receives as grace is love. Love which is not so much an emotion as it is a choice, or will, and which takes Christ crucified as its model. Here lies the reason for subjectivity to be considered as obedience to truth and love, like in Christ who served God and people. This kind of communion which joins God and man through love ought to be followed in the practice of human relations. Only in practicing so understood love towards others, love rooted in the love of God, man's subjectivity is possible.<sup>43</sup>

### **The significance of Paweł Włodkowic and Bartolomé de Las Casas for the concept of subjectivity**

Before focusing on the philosophy of Paweł Włodkowic, we must necessarily mention another great name of that era, Stanisław of Skalbmierz (formerly Skarbimierz). Born ca. 1365 he was a lawyer, a canon priest in the Wawel cathedral chapter in Kraków, the first rector of the Kraków Academy (reconstituted in 1400), again appointed rector in 1410. Having studied in the faculties of *atrium* and law of the Prague University, Stanisław received his Doctorate in law in 1396. After his return to Poland he was royal confessor, cathedral preacher, vicar general to the Kraków bishop. Together with the slightly younger Włodkowic, Stanisław of Skalbmierz is considered to be one of the fathers of the Polish school of international legal thought. In 1422 he was appointed by the Gniezno archdeacon Mikołaj Kiczka his representative in the lawsuit against the Teutonic knights which was taking place in the papal court in Rome. Before his death in 1431 Stanisław of Skalbmierz penned some 500 sermons. In this work of particular interest is especially his sermon *On just wars (De bellis iustis)*. Therein he questioned the then commonplace belief that no treaties should be made with heathens and that war against heathen states is naturally good and just.

Paweł Włodkowic himself, who, as has already been mentioned, owed much to Stanisław of Skalbmierz, was born in early 1370s. Like Stanisław, he graduated from the *atrium* and law faculties of the Prague University and then continued his studies in the University Padua (1404–1408) and the Kraków Academy, where he received his doctorate (ca. 1411)

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<sup>43</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn...*, part II, II and IV.

and subsequently the post of a lecturer. King Władysław Jagiełło appointed him his emissary for the purposes of the lawsuit against the Teutonic Knights. Between 1414 and 1418 Włodkowiec actively participated in the Council of Constance.<sup>44</sup>

It was there that on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1415 Włodkowiec presented his treatise, *Tractatus de potestate papae et imperat* (*On the power of the pope and the emperor with respect to non-believers*).<sup>45</sup> He based it on the assumption that it is possible for Christian and heathen states to coexist in peace. He was convinced that non-Christians have a right to be politically sovereign and that forced Christianisation flies in the face of the fundamentals of religion. Taking their belongings, their rights, their land is unacceptable, Włodkowiec said, as they came to have these things without committing any sins. Pagans have also been created by God in his likeness and image.<sup>46</sup> In this matter, apart from support from Stanisław of Skalbmierz, Włodkowiec could have been referring to the work of Wincenty Kadłubek, who criticised using force against non-Christians.<sup>47</sup> *Non-believers – says Włodkowiec – can own land and estate as well as be in a position of power without committing any sin, since all these things were created not only for the faithful [=Christians], but for all rational beings.*<sup>48</sup> These ideas are closely related to the theory of warfare that Włodkowiec was then working on, and which referred back to his predecessors. As Magdalena Płotka writes<sup>49</sup>: *Włodkowiec's theory of warfare is also linked to theories by Raymond of Penyafort<sup>50</sup>, Spanish Dominican friar who attempted to list the necessary conditions for warfare*

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<sup>44</sup> See: L. Ehrlich, *Paweł Włodkowiec i Stanisław ze Skarbimierza*, Warszawa 1954, p. 45; idem (ed.), *Pisma wybrane Pawła Włodkowica*, vol. 1–2. Warszawa 1966–1968.

<sup>45</sup> M. Bobrzyński, *Starodawne prawa polskiego pomniki*, vol. 5, Kraków 1878; See also: K. Baczkowski, 'O władzy papieża i cesarza wobec niewiernych 1416', in: idem, *Dzieje Polski późnośredniowiecznej. 1370–1506*, Kraków 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> S.F. Belch, *Paulus Vladimiri and his Doctrine Concerning International Law and Politics*, vol. I, London–The Hague–Paris 1965, p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> See: M. Kridl, W. Malinowski, J. Wittlin (ed.), *Polska myśl demokratyczna w ciągu wieków. Antologia*, Warszawa 1987, p. 118.

<sup>49</sup> M. Płotka, 'Od prawa natury do praw człowieka. Teoria prawa naturalnego w ujęciu Stanisława ze Skarbimierza i Pawła Włodkowica', *Edukacja Filozoficzna*, vol. 54 (2012), p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> In addition to Raymundus, Paweł Włodkowiec followed into the footsteps of pope Innocent IV, Thomas Aquinas and Petrus de Anchorano. See: S.F. Belch, *Paulus Vladimiri...*, p. 80.

*to be just: the condition of person, object, reason, spirit and mandate.*<sup>51</sup> These conditions are also discussed by Stanisław, who argues in line with [St.] Augustine that the only kind of war that can be justified is war aimed at restoring peace.<sup>52</sup>

According to Paweł Włodkowic, war is just only if it does not result from hate or revenge or greed, but seeks betterment and love, justice and obedience, as it is not sinful to make war, it is sinful to make war for profit.<sup>53</sup> At the same time Włodkowic condemns acts of violence and looting, while postulating holding the aggressor responsible for the consequences of his violence, including the necessity to make reparations. Thus the only justifiable war is one that results from attempts to keep or restore peace.<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, the basis for thinking so is the idea of natural law and an assumption – philosophical and anthropological *par excellence* – of the nature and rights of the human being: every person, regardless of their nationality and religion, has a right to keep himself alive, which includes the right to defend himself.<sup>55</sup> For Włodkowic, war is contrary to human nature, which relishes peace and harmony.<sup>56</sup> He is clearly of the opinion that all people are brothers, and therefore pagans are also brothers for Christians. What follows from this is that we must treat them with love and friendliness.

Bartolomé de Las Casas (Bartomeu Casaus) was a Spanish Dominican friar, and – like Włodkowic – a lawyer. He was born in Seville in 1484, half a century after the Polish scholar's death, the son of a merchant who travelled with Christopher Columbus in 1493. Having graduated from the law faculty of the University of Salamanca he himself participated in an expedition to the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti) in 1502. During his decade-long stay there, Las Casas witnessed the brutal colonization of the Antilles. This left a deep mark on his psyche: in 1510 he was ordained priest

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<sup>51</sup> *Unde ad evidenciam clariorem procedencium et sequencium sciendum quod quinque requiruntur ad hoc ut bellum sit iustum secundum Ostiensem post Raymundum (loco peoxime allegato), scilicet persona, res, causa, animus et auctoritas* (Paweł Włodkowic, 'Saevientibus, I', in: L. Ehrlich (ed.), *Pisma wybrane Pawła Włodkowica*, vol. I, Warszawa 1968, p. 66).

<sup>52</sup> See: R. Tokarczyk, *Klasycy praw natury*, Lublin 1988, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> Paweł Włodkowic, 'Saevientibus...', p. 66–68.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> See: M. Płotka, 'Od prawa natury...', p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Paweł Włodkowic, 'Saevientibus...', p. 59.

and began an animated campaign against colonialism. In 1516 Cardinal Francisco de Cisneros appointed Las Casas Protector of the Indians. A Dominican friar since 1522, he visited Cuba, Peru, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Mexico, where he was bishop of Chiapas between 1543 and 1547. Upon his return to Spain in 1547, Las Casas continued to campaign for better treatment of Indians and to oppose barbaric Christianization, slavery, abuse and bloody terror.<sup>57</sup> His work inspired king Carlos I (emperor Charles V) to issue *New Laws*, which outlawed slavery and forced labour.

Las Casas famously polemicised with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550, upon which polemic the modern sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein based his book *European Universalism*.<sup>58</sup> Sepúlveda presented Indians as hateful, obtuse barbarians who are prone to *godless* customs, including human sacrifice. For their own good these barbarians needed the *Spanish yoke*. Bartolomé de Las Casas opposed that view saying that wicked people, barbarians, can be found everywhere in similar proportion – including in Catholic countries. All societies are morally equal, and therefore nothing can justify colonization, violence and cruelty.<sup>59</sup> Las Casas was convinced that any war waged for religious reasons must necessarily be unjust. Non-Christian societies in Catholic countries are not under the jurisdiction of the Church, therefore neither should people who have never heard of God or the Church. Any deeds done by them which are sins against God, like idolatry, can only be judged by Him. That innocents should be saved, e.g. children killed as sacrifice, is refuted by Las Casas, who argues that committing a terrible crime in the name of a lesser of two evils, and punishing entire societies for the crimes of but a handful, is not doing good. And for the purposes of this paper of paramount importance is Las Casas' opinion that it is good to convert people to the rightful faith, but only while respecting the free will of those being converted, and by means of love, the word of God, kindness, charity, and the good example of one's own life, and never through violence.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> B. de las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, transl. H. Briffault, Baltimore 1974.

<sup>58</sup> I. Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power*, New York 2006.

<sup>59</sup> B. de las Casas, *Apologia, o Declaración y defensa universal de los derechos del hombre y de los pueblos*, V.A. Castelló et al. (ed.), Valladolid 2012, pp. 15–44.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

### Summary

The aim of this paper was to present a certain way of thinking about man and society which has always been present in Europe since ancient Greece. While Europe could and did often think differently, yet there has never been a shortage of scholars whom I would like to include in one intellectual, cultural and moral formation; in a very strong, though sadly not always dominant, tradition of the concept of subjectivity. Living as these scholars did in different times and areas of the continent, nevertheless they were an important voice which spoke out in support of a subjective treatment of people and societies. One cannot fail to notice that many of the viewpoints sketched out here arose in reaction to evil happening in Europe of done by Europe.

The Polish medieval thinkers mentioned above developed their philosophies in defence of the fundamental values which were being threatened by Teutonic knights, a knightly order of ruthless robbers who acted under the guise of defenders of faith, and who plundered and murdered innocents while claiming to be spreading Christianity. The Spanish philosopher in turn reacted against the barbarism and cruelty of European bandits who also did evil deeds while justifying their actions with a religious rhetoric.

It is worthwhile to stress at this point the great traditions of the European Catholic Church, as these scholars were all priests and ecclesiastical intellectuals. Clearly, the Catholic thought, and more broadly – the Christian thought, creates in Europe a noble tradition of orientation towards subjectivity. It is highly likely that the distinct philosophies of father Józef Tischner and Karol Wojtyła (the late Pope John Paul II) fall broadly into the school of such thinkers as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas on the one hand, while on the other being rooted in the great tradition of Polish Catholic thinking, whose medieval exemplars have been mentioned here. However, it remains true that both Wojtyła's and Tischner's viewpoints are easier to understand if one remembers that they represented a church oppressed, contested even more fiercely than the rest of the society by a state which was ideologically under the spell of the communist Soviet Union.

This paper was thus meant to show a certain image of Europe. True, not of the entire continent; I do not propose to claim that the Catholic tradition, or the Christian tradition, is the only one which cherishes subjectivity, both on the individual and group levels. It is significant, but only one

of three positive schools of thought that together make up European culture. I will happily devote other papers to the ones I was forced to exclude here for reasons of space. Especially since it was one of my goals to show the Polish contribution to this age-old tradition, and the scholars I mentioned were not all Catholic or even religious at all. Thus this paper is also a story of secular thought about subjectivity. A noteworthy factor is a very significant ingredient of European culture, that of Judaic, which oftentimes sounds in beautiful harmony with Catholic thought. All this points towards an intriguing and fascinating intertwining of influences and trends in European culture, rooted as it is – as is commonly known in the literature – in its Judeo-Christian tradition.

One other goal was on my mind. I wanted to remind the reader of all this history (though by necessity in a sketchy and fragmented fashion) of the subjective thought in order to suggest that it may provide a good context for reflection on problems that are both quite modern and not solely European. In a world that is becoming more and more conflicted and rife with tension, it is most worthwhile to recall the beautiful tradition of European subjective thought.

It was not my intention in writing this overview to discuss subjectivity in any depth, reasons of space preclude this. Voluminous books would be needed for that purpose, one of which I have already authored and published, while others will hopefully soon follow. What I did attempt to indicate, though is that this centuries-old discussion about human nature and the nature of societies revolves around certain common themes and tropes, which means that today we do not have to start the debate *ab ovo*. Perhaps this discourse, spanning centuries and thousands of kilometres, bears witness to an age-old tradition of opposing real evil; but it also shows that lack of acceptance for ideologies and practices that defy subjectivity is strong and lasting. So much so that it suffices to delegitimize evil and any attempts at relativising good. In the face of this powerful intellectual tradition one cannot pursue such ideals in clear conscience. I am of the opinion that the time has come to bring subjectivity to the forefront of our thinking and discourse.

In my opinion, it is worth paying attention to how a philosophical thought about the nature of human person, culture and society can become a reference point for the sociological concept, explaining and interpret-

ing specific social conditions from the perspective of the most important human qualities and values that co-constitute its essence. From this point of view, it is worth reminding the views of the former masters, such as Bartolomé de Las Casas, and in particular Paweł Włodkowic. Their thought enlightens our problems today in a modern way, such as the attitude towards migrants, or those who are thinking otherwise or those which we refuse to honor as being fully human. For this reason, reading, especially the texts by Paweł Włodkowic should be obligatory at civic education lessons, but also in the education of sociologists, lawyers, political scientists and politicians. In this way, we also remind you of the beautiful tradition of the Jagiellonian Poland, which is worth using today, as fully as possible.



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