LESZEK KOPCIUCH


Professor Eugene Kelly, lecturer in the Social Science Department, New York Institute of Technology, is an outstanding American scholar interested in contemporary German philosophy and particularly in the conceptions of phenomenological ethics and axiology. He had published such studies as, among others, *Max Scheler* (1977), *Structure and Diversity: Essays in the Phenomenological Philosophy of Max Scheler* (1997); *Material Value Ethics: Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann* (2008, article)¹.

The recent, third book by Professor Kelly continues his previous research into phenomenological ethics. In his previous publications the main subject of analyses was Scheler; here he explores the philosophy of Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann. The 253-page book is excellently published; alongside the main text, it contains a vast bibliography including English and German books and articles, as well as the name and subject index. The Introduction (“The Legacy and Promise of Scheler and Hartmann”) was written by Philip Blosser, author of many valuable analyses concerning the philosophy of Max Scheler².


Professor Kelly’s general aim is the orderly and systematical reconstruction and the analysis of the main theses formulated in the material value-ethics of M. Scheler and N. Hartmann. He endeavors also to demonstrate synthetically some differences and parallels in the positions of both philosophers. At the very beginning, Kelly notes (p. 3-6) several fundamental ideas which distinguish both theories (especially a theological problem and a question of the moral subject), but he also holds that the material ethics of value is an internally compatible project: “Material value-ethics, we will argue, is a coherent and synthetic effort to establish ethics upon a fundamental phenomenological axiology. It offers a systematic means towards a personal response to the Socratic question, how should we live? There are many incompatible ways of living successfully and happily, but they are all founded in the right knowledge of the values themselves” (p. 16). Kelly notes that both conceptions, despite differences, do have a complementary character and they both can be used to found a moral theory. It must be emphasized that Kelly analyzes mostly these points of Scheler’s and Hartmann’s axiology which are of direct importance to the strictly ethical solutions.


Because of the detailed aspect of Kelly’s explorations, I cannot discuss all of them here. But I have to agree with most interpretations proposed by the author. This refers especially to his considerations about Scheler’s and Hartmann’s idea of the emotional value-cognition (chapter 2), Scheler’s and Hartmann’s critique of moral relativism and a very precise demonstration of detailed kinds of virtues and moral values (chapter 7-8). I must say the same about Kelly’s discussion of the relationship between moral and non-moral value as well as considerations referring to human subjectivity and personality. Thus, I must agree with the statement of Philip Blosser who notes that “Kelly’s book represents a milestone in the history of phenomenological moral reasoning and material-value ethics” (s. XIV).

However more in details, I would like to discuss a question of human freedom and of the structure of human moral motivation. Kelly analyzes these issues basing on the position of Scheler first of all. But he states also clearly that it is impossible to present in this book the detailed distinctions and considerations in the philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann because his standpoint has not only a phenomeno-
logical but also an ontological character: “His view on the problem of freedom is too detailed to be given adequate treatment in a book on material value-ethics, which may proceed on the mere hypothesis of genuine or ontological personal freedom” (p. 56).

On the one hand, Kelly notes that the standpoint of Scheler in this matter contains many problems, but on the other hand he criticizes interpretation formulated by M. Palacios (in the article Vorziehen und Wählen bei Scheler)³. Palacios holds that Scheler takes the Socratic positions and in this way runs into the fallacy of ethical intellectualism: “Yet how can one develop such moral insight if a condition for it is moral goodness itself? Palacios believes that Scheler does not resolve this antinomy” (s. 103). Yet, as Kelly concludes, Palacios misinterprets the true position of Max Scheler because Scheler distinguishes between the only rational knowledge about values (the ethical knowledge) and the emotional feeling of value. And only this emotional feeling recognizes really the value and only in this feeling is value self GIVEN. Kelly emphasizes also that Palacios does not take into account that in Scheler’s opinion value may be given with very different degrees of clarity and distinctness. The Socratic identity of moral knowledge and moral activity (the main thesis of ethical intellectualism) refers only to the situation when value is self GIVEN: “Palacios does note that Scheler says that willing or conation is determined morally only when a value is self-given. He notes only that, according to Scheler, the value-component in a conation is given with perfect clarity and distinctness. […] But there is no doubt that Palacios has conveyed a fundamental feature in Scheler’s position: the deeper our acquaintance, through reflective acts of feeling and preferring, to the realm of values, the greater our moral vision and the greater our capacity for virtue, that is, our determination to strive after what ideally ought to be in the various situations of life. Thus not conation as such, but morally good conation, is determined by whether a value is self-given” (p. 102).

The critique proposed by Kelly is efficient and convincing. However, I hold that it rebuts the way of Palacios’s argumentation only and does not refer to the essence of the reproach directed by Palacios to Scheler. In fact, as I think, the standpoint of Scheler concerning the question of free will and its place in the structure of human motivation is incorrect. First of all, as I argue, Scheler does not accept human negative freedom in relation to conation because he holds that conation is the origin of every human activity. But the statement that value-feeling determines human will only when value is self-given does not resolve the problem of freedom in Scheler at all. This statement only opens it and places it in a clear light. Moral freedom, in my view, is ever based on the negative free will of person!

When value is self-given, the human being must have negative freedom in relation to this self-given value. In other cases, the person will be free only when she does not know the value in its self-presentation. Such freedom would be founded on the moral ignorance and all true emotional value-knowledge would be determining - this standpoint would make no sense. Thus I do represent moderate motivations-internalism; Scheler, as I think, represented this internalism in a most radical form.

Still I agree with Kelly saying: “Clearly, another model than scientific naturalism is required if we are to solve the problem of human freedom and moral responsibility. It is not to point to criticize Scheler for not having solved the problem of human freedom; no one has” (p. 55). On the one hand, one has to say that the question of the relation between human freedom and moral values belongs to the most important ethical problems because this freedom founds ever an ethical character of human action. And on the other hand, we must state that conceptions formulated in German material value-ethics do not resolve that problem. This refers not only to Scheler, but also to theories proposed by Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand and Hans Reiner. Hildebrand speaks about several kinds of freedom, e.g., direct freedom, indirect freedom and cooperative freedom. Direct freedom implies human capability to initiate activity. An act is also directly free when it is a source of the existence of other acts or states of things. By analogy, an act is cooperatively free when existence of other acts does not depend on it, but it can modify other acts which already exist. And an act is indirectly free when it prepares a basis for other acts or states of things. Indirect freedom is characteristic of human action and answers given by human will. Hildebrand says: “Nur der Wille allein ist frei in dem strikten Sinn, daß er in unsere unmittelbare Macht gegeben ist, die affektiven Antworten sind nicht frei in diesem Sinne. Wir können keine affektive Antwort durch ein fiat hervorbringen, noch sie durch unseren Willen kommandieren wie irgendeine Tätigkeit. Liebe z.B. ist uns immer als ein Geschenk verliehen”\(^4\). The relationship between human freedom and affective answer is not identical with the relation between freedom and human will. Hildebrand, however, does not refuse the freedom of affective answer at all. Firstly, the person can sanction or disavow this answer. Secondly, the person cannot produce such an answer arbitrarily, but she can prepare conditions to create a possibility of this answer. Accordingly, personal freedom exists both in the answer of human will and in the emotional (affective) answer of the human heart.

However, the theory of Hildebrand induces, in my view, several valid difficulties. What is the source of human decision vis-à-vis value? Such decisions, says Hildebrand, are ever descended from the personal fundamental attitude. But what determines this attitude? How is it chosen? Value and value-cognition cannot fulfill

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this role because the value and its cognition determine only when the person has already accepted a specific attitude...

Therefore, I hold that Scheler’s and Hartmann’s theories of freedom do not have the same importance and validity, even if we accept that a problem of freedom is in totality insoluble. The analyses formulated by Hartmann are more precise than the analyses proposed by Scheler. Hartmann, as I think, begins his analyses in this place in which Scheler has finished.

The question of moral freedom and the structure of human motivation is only one of many the detailed problems examined in the book of E. Kelly. Many important considerations appear also e. g. in the context of Scheler’s and Hartmann’s personalism.

In English-language scholarship the book of Eugene Kelly parallels the analyses published in Poland - in the Polish language (e. g., J. Galarowicz, The Phenomenological Ethics of Value (Max Scheler - Nicolai Hartmann - Dietrich von Hildebrand); P. Orlik, The Phenomenology of Axiological Consciousness (Max Scheler - Dietrich von Hildebrand); L. Kopciuch, Freedom and Values. Max Scheler - Nicolai Hartmann - Dietrich von Hildebrand - Hans Reiner; W. Prusik, The Phenomenology of Value. Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann).

Without a doubt, the Polish reader will find in the book of Professor Kelly an important complement to Polish phenomenological and axiological analyses.

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