LESZEK KOPCIUCH


Professor Eugene Kelly, a lecturer on the Department of Social Sciences in the New York Institute of Technology, is a famed and esteemed American scholar interested for the contemporary German philosophy and especially for the conceptions belonging to the phenomenological ethics and axiology. Prior he published inter alia such studies as: *Max Scheler* (1977); *Structure and Diversity: Essays In the Phenomenological Philosophy of Max Scheler* (1997); *Material value ethics: Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann* (2008, the article) ¹.

The latest, third book of professor Kelly continues his previous research concerning the phenomenological ethics. In his previous publications the main person and an object of analyses was first of all Max Scheler. In reviewed book the general view is constructed basing on the philosophy of Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann. The book is very good published, has 253 pages, aside from the main text it contains a large bibliography including the English and German books and papers and the name and subject index. The Introduction (“The legacy and promise of Scheler and Hartmann”) wrote Philip Blosser, author of many valuable analyses concerning the philosophy of Max Scheler².

A general aim of professor Kelly is the orderly and systematical reconstruction and analysis of main theses formulated in the material value-ethics by

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M. Scheler and N. Hartmann. Kelly endeavor also to synthetic demonstrate some differences and parallels appearing in the positions of both philosophers. Indeed at the beginning already 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 the innerly 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 of differences do have a complementary character and they both can be used to found the moral theory. It must be accent that Kelly analyses mostly these moments of Scheler and Hartmann axiology which do have direct importance for the exactly ethical solutions.


For the detailedness of Kelly’s analyses I cannot discuss all its moments in this place. But I have to agree with the most interpretations proposed by author. It refers especially to his considerations concerning Scheler’s and Hartmann’s idea of the emotional value-cognition (chapter 2), Scheler’s and Hartmann’s critique of moral relativism and very precise demonstrate of detailed kinds of virtues and moral (chapter 7–8) . The same I must to say about Kelly’s considerations concerning the relation between moral and non-moral value as well as considerations referring to the human subjectivity and personality. Thus I must to agree with statement of Philip Blosser which 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 concerning the human freedom and the structure of human moral motivation. Kelly analyzes these questions 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 appearing in the philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann because his standpoint has not only phenomenological 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 indeed that the standpoint of Scheler in this matter contains many troubles but on the other hand he criticizes interpretation formulated by M. Palacios (in the paper 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). But, as constates Kelly, Palacios misinterprets the true Scheler’s position 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 accent 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. And Sokratic identity of moral knowledge and moral activity (the main thesis of the ethical intellectualism) refers only to situation when the value is self-given: „Palacios does not 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 argumentation only and do not refer to the essentials of reproach directed by Palacios to Scheler. In point of fact, as I think, the standpoint of Scheler concerning the question of free will and its place in a structure of human motivation is incorrect. First of all, as I mean, Scheler does not accept the human negative freedom in the relation to conation because he holds that conation is an 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 opens it only and places it in a clearly light. The moral freedom, in my view, is ever based on the negative free will of person! Right when value is self-given human being must have this negative freedom in relation to this self-given value. In other case 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 has no sense. Thus I do represent the moderate motivations-internalism. Scheler, as I mean, represented this internalism in 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 on has” (p. 55). On the one hand we have 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 to state that conceptions formulated in the German material value-ethics do not resolve this problem. It 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, eg. direct freedom, indirect freedom and cooperative freedom. The direct freedom means the human capability to initiate an activity. An act is also direct free when is a source of the existence of other acts or states of things. Analogy an act is cooperative free when existence of other acts do not depend from it but it can modify other acts which already exist. And an act is indirect free when it prepares an basis for other acts or states of things. The indirect freedom is characteristic for 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 identic with the relation between freedom and human will. Hildebrand, however, do not refuse the freedom of affective answer at all. Firstly, the person can sanction or disavow this answer. Secondly, the person cannot to produce such answer arbitrarily but she can prepare conditions to make possi-

bility of this answers. The personal freedom exists so both in the answer of human will as in the emotional (affective) answer of human heart.

However the theory of Hildebrand induces, in my view, several valid difficulties. What is a source of human decision vis-a-vis value? Such decisions, says Hildebrand, are ever descended from the personal fundamental attitude. But what determines this attitude? How is it chosen? A value and value-cognition cannot fulfil this role because the value and its cognition determine only when the person accepted already the 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. Analyses formulated by Hartmann are more precise than analyses proposed by Scheler. Hartmann, as I think, begins his analyses in this place in which Scheler have it already finished.

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


No doubts that the Polish reader will find in the book of professor Kelly an important complement of Polish phenomenological and axiological analyses.

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