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CAMUS AND TISCHNER: IN SEARCH OF ABSOLUTE LOVE

ABSTRACT

The paper provides a comparison of two chosen examples of searching for absolute love in the twentieth century philosophy.

The analyzed thinkers, Albert Camus and Józef Tischner, consider love to be the most important aspect of human existence. However, metaphysical foundations of this thesis accepted by each of them respectively are different.

Contrary to the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as the theistic existential philosophy of Karl Jaspers and Lev Shestov, Camus, despite his strong desire for the higher unity and Absolute, must admit that in his own experience he does not find an answer to the question whether the surrounding world has a transcendent meaning.

His agnosticism obliges him to recognize human position as an absurd one, seeing that without the absolute meaning of the world the tragic fact of human death remains unexplained.

In the situation of absurdity, love cannot be full, accomplished, and permanent, i.e. absolute; on the other hand, it can still be perfect. First of all, it is a great power which constitutes the basis of metaphysical revolt proposed by Camus. Secondly, perfect love makes the absurd freedom possible, i.e. the freedom from all rules of human acting, as it is only love that can establish any ethical principles. Finally, love can be identified with the passion of life – the fundamental aspect of the authentic existence.

Phenomenological personalism of Józef Tischner enriches this concept of love. We can find here a manifestation of contemplative knowledge about the deepest sense of reality, namely about God - the Absolute Love. Thus in Tischner’s conception, caritas possesses two inseparable sides: love of God (agape) and love of our neighbors and the world (Eros in Platon’s terms), whereas Camus considered only the latter.

As the follower of St. Augustine, Tischner recognizes absolute Love as a manner of participation in the Absolute Good. Man will be saved, i.e. will achieve eternal happiness only if he persists in true love. The soteriological motif makes Tischner perceive the fundamental task of Christian education in the awakening of hope for absolute love.
It is worth mentioning that despite their varied metaphysical standpoints, both philosophers appreciate the Franciscan spirituality with its life affirming love.

The most outstanding French existentialist Albert Camus (1913–1960) as well as the Polish well-known phenomenologist and personalist Józef Tischner (1931–2000) consider love to be the most important aspect of a human existence. According to them, it is only mature love that enables authentic happiness to arise within our complex and often difficult life.

We must keep in mind that Camus and Tischner lived in extremely tragic times – the era of the Second World War, of constraining many nations by communism, when fundamental, traditional values became relative. Both thinkers formulated equally radical and sharp diagnoses regarding their contemporariness.

The French writer, from the very beginning of his literary career and especially in *The Rebellious Man*, criticized a principal nihilism of his epoch. The nihilistic era, that rejected many values crucial for man, permitted false, or even sinister ideologies to arise and expand. At the same time Camus discovers that it is only a concrete human being that constitutes the primal and highest value irreducible to any idea or abstraction. The dignity of every man must be protected in the name of our “human metaphysical solidarity”.\(^1\) It means that in our world there is nothing beyond man that is worthy of love, and especially of the higher level of love which arises from the common human condition.\(^2\)

The Polish philosopher, on the other side, stresses that the world we live in, lost firstly the “body safety”, and, later, was dispossessed of “spiritual safety” (Tischner here uses Chantal Delsol’s terms).\(^3\) This resulted in the profound crisis of human hope. In his crucial work entitled *Myślenie według wartości* Tischner agrees with Martin Heidegger’s opinion that “the closing of holiness dimension” turned out to be fatal for our epoch. He calls for the returning to the original “indispensable” source of European thought, namely to love.\(^4\)

This voice of both thinkers calling for *metanoia* and actualization of the challenges of love in our lives as the only remedy for all the world’s maladies does not mean that their concepts of love are identical. At some points their respective ideas must differ because the metaphysical foundations accepted by Camus and Tischner are different.

Let us begin with Camus.

This Nobel Prize Winner of 1957 is usually recognized as a philosopher of the absurd, a devotee of metaphysical revolt who interprets the human condition in terms of mythical Sisyphus. However, despite the abundant literature referring to Camus’s creative output, not much is said on his acceptance of