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THE VALUE OF FREEDOM IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPLATIONS ON VALUE INNOVATION OF SOCIETY (LEGACY OF JEAN PAUL SARTRE)

Summary. One of the basic questions of the applied ethics is the question: “How to successfully and efficiently implement ethics into the life of society or, in other words, how to “shape” ourselves?” We focus the central role of the value of freedom in the context of contemplations on innovation of the society, innovation in which ethics should play a key role. The value of freedom, as outlined by Sartre, should represent a boundary for our effort to improve the society, where we should not forget the destructiveness of laying certain projects or practices above the other ones.

Keywords: ethics, applied ethics, anthropotechnics, innovation, freedom.

WARTOŚĆ WOLNOŚCI W KONTEKŚCIE ROZWAŻAŃ NA TEMAT INNOWACJI WARTOŚCI SPOŁECZEŃSTWA (DZIEDZICTWO JEANA PAULA SARTRE’A)

Streszczenie. Jednym z podstawowych pytań etyki stosowanej jest: „Jak skutecznie i wydajnie wdrażać etykę w życie społeczeństwa lub, innymi słowy, jak ‘kształtować’ nas samych?” Skupiamy się na centralnej roli wartości wolności w kontekście kontemplacji na temat innowacji społeczeństwa, innowacji, w których etyka powinna odgrywać kluczową rolę. Wartość wolności, jak podkreślał Sartre, powinna wyznaczać granice dla naszego wysiłku, żeby polepszyć społeczeństwo, przy czym nie powinniśmy zapominać o destrukcyjności przedkładania pewnych projektów czy praktyk ponad inne.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka, etyka stosowana, antropotechnika, innowacja, wolność.

The question of the status of applied ethics in Slovakia is more than topical today and can be perceived as an indicator of ethical innovativeness of our social space. Nearly fifteen years have passed since the establishment of the first Department of Applied Ethics at the Matej Bel

University in Banská Bystrica and nearly twenty years since the declaration of the academic representatives of the effort to innovate, in ethical sense, social conditions and relations. Since then, several workplaces have been established at Slovak universities, plenty of books and articles in scholarly journals of various qualities have been published. However, we believe that it is the time to take a critical look at, and examine, where the applied ethics has moved during this time under the conditions of Slovak science, what are the basic problems and challenges, which of its goals and ambitions have already been attained, and which are still standing in front of it as a mountain that needs to be conquered. A fleeting glance will make it clear that we can be anything but satisfied and that there is a long journey in front of the applied ethics in Slovakia of a qualitative change of the society that we are a part of.

One of the basic questions of the applied ethics is the question: “How? How to successfully and efficiently implement ethics into the life of society or, in other words, how to “shape” ourselves?” The ambition of this short article is not to answer this question. Our effort is to point out, as the title indicates, the central role of the value of freedom in the context of our contemplations on innovation of the society, innovation in which ethics should play a key role.

The current philosophical and ethical discourse experiences revival of the reflection of the ancient notion of caring for oneself¹. Considering the above lines, we cannot but mention that the so frequent declarations of the need for value rooting or uprooting of the contemporary society as well as the issue of caring for oneself as developed by Peter Sloterdijk evidence the growing importance of ethics. Sloterdijk enters the discussion on the notion of man in 1999 at the conference at Elmau castle that the history of philosophical anthropology perceives as the second most important in the 20th century; there, he delivers his *Rules for the Human ZOO*. As Sisáková states in her article, this conference discussed Heidegger’s² work that Sloterdijk reflects, which is also indicated by the subtitle of his lecture: “*A Response to the Letter on Humanism*”.³

In the context of our thoughts, Sloterdijk’s shift of thoughts and reflections on man from the context of the classical philosophical anthropology to the context of thoughts on man (enriched with Heidegger’s philosophy) as something that becomes man as a result of the ability to use certain anthropotechnics as auto-formative processes of man is more than just interesting. The effort to understand or “grasp” man thus moves to the area of behaviour or

¹ Look at FILOZOFIA Vol. 69, No. 10.

² Heidegger can be considered to be one of the greatest challengers of the philosophical anthropological approach to the object of its investigation – to man as such. This came fully to the surface in Davos in 1929 where Heidegger, as Sisáková puts it: “...in a debate with Cassirer refused philosophical anthropology as anthropologism in favour of the priority of fundamental ontology also in the question of man.” (Sisáková, 2014, p. 859).

³ Sisáková O. 2014. “Musíš menit’ svoj život” – k novej antropológii Petra Sloterdijka. In: Filozofia, Vol. 69, No. 10. 2014. p. 859-868.

self-realisation – that is to the area of ethics⁴, which definitely changes the role that Sloterdijk gives it. Anthropotechnics that we use to create ourselves as human beings are co-defined by the cultural and social space filled with various dichotomous differences some of which are perceived as attractors and the others as repulsive values tied to attractors between which a vertical tension⁵ is created. And it is our relation to dichotomous differences that creates us as human beings.

With his anthropotechnics, Sloterdijk returns back to the ancient notion of *askésis*. Sloterdijk's man is an auto-plastic being creating himself in various forms of practices: „Being human means existing in an operatively curved space in which actions return to affect the actor, works the worker, communications the communicator, thoughts the thinker and feelings the feeler. All these forms of reaction, I would argue, have an ascetic, that is to say a practicing character.“⁶ Under the notion of practice he understands: „...any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared practice or not.“⁷ And it is the perception of life as practice that predefines the role of ethics in the context of his thoughts.

As we already mentioned, Sloterdijk says that man is aware of the difference between higher and lower forms of life, which means that he disposes of a certain sense of verticality in relation to values (attractors and repulsive values etc.). Sloterdijk sees the role of ethics in its penetration into the space of vertical tensions and response to the question why certain forms of life (practice) are considered to be more valuable, better, more correct, more important than the others etc. The diversity of individuals means the diversity of practice employed to create their lives – their own selves, and the feedback tied with their bent living space, in which they co-exist with others, is a key factor. And so, the role of ethics is not only to speak of that, which should be, but to speak of why it should be. It seems that the role of ethics lies in a legitimate defence and co-creation of the “high” life practices. Logically, the role of applied ethics is the implementation of these values materialised in socially beneficial forms of life into the life of society in its individual segments. The aim of this article is not to give a detailed analysis of Sloterdijk's thoughts and we had to use simplification to some extent following our objective. We see a potential danger in jeopardising or abandoning diversity of the forms of practices in favour of unification or substantial superiority of certain practices or, in other words, of certain types of manhood over the other ones. We have already seen the consequences of such reasoning at full strength many times in the history of mankind.

⁴ The “anthropotechnic turn” mentioned in this context means a paradigmatic turn alternating the anthropological turn in the 20th century (Sisáková 2014).

⁵ It is the dichotomous differences that put the area of human possibilities of behaviour in opposed classes of values (Sisáková 2014).

⁶ Sloterdijk, P. 2009. Du musst dein Leben ändern. Über Antropotechnik. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 175.

⁷ Sloterdijk P. 2009. Du musst dein Leben ändern. Über Antropotechnik. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 14.

Sloterdijk's idea to perceive man as a processional being is not isolated in the history of philosophy and it seems, just like with the other thinkers who analyse man in this way, that Sloterdijk is motivated by an effort to grasp man in his incompleteness with the goal to maintain man's freedom as the core of human existence. Sloterdijk's thoughts are, in many aspects, similar (self-creation, role of society and the others), while in many other aspects they are substantially dissimilar (sense of verticality etc.) to the thoughts of Jean Paul Sartre. We believe that Sartre's analyses of the *Spirit of Seriousness* from the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness* should not be ignored in the value innovation of our society announced also by Sloterdijk. The value of freedom, as outlined by Sartre, should represent a boundary for our effort to improve the society where, in our effort for a qualitative change, we should not forget the destructiveness of laying certain projects or practices above the other ones.

The legacy of Jean Paul Sartre cannot be reduced to the below lines only, but this aspect of his work fully reveals the consequences of Sartre's ontological freedom forming the fundamental core of his concept from the times of *Being and Nothingness*. Thinking about ethics in the context of Jean Paul Sartre's philosophical work is quite complex considering the so diverse development of Sartre's ideas that do not form one whole or a compact philosophical corpus. During 1947 – 1948, Sartre is writing his *Notebooks for an Ethics* that are published after his death and, rather than forming a comprehensive ethical theory, they represent a set of notes and contemplations. The promise of a consistent ethical theory is provided at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, as was already mentioned. But Sartre speaks of ethics in several works, while not all works have been published, and this makes the situation even more difficult.⁸

There are various opinions on the possibility to build an ethical theory based on Sartre's existentialism from the *Being and Nothingness* era. Objections of opponents of the idea of a consistent existential ethical theory can generally be summed up in two points as outlined by⁹:

1. Existentialist approach to reality is based on a specific ontology, which makes description of reality outside the distorting view of one's own "perspective" difficult.
2. Existentialism, and particularly the Sartrean variant, is considered to be an example of moral subjectivism where morality is reduced to the question of personal preferences.

We believe that both objections are refutable by the Sartre's notion of value¹⁰ and the second one is responded to by Sartre in his work *Existentialism is a Humanism*, as is generally

⁸ Pellauer D., 1992, Translator's introduction. In: *Notebooks for an ethics*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. p. vii – xxiv.

⁹ Crowe J., 2004, Is an existentialist ethics possible? Available at: https://philosophynow.org/issues/47/Is_an_Existentialist_Ethics_Possible.

¹⁰ The consequence of setting freedom into the consciousness of existence is the establishment of values on the subjectivity of an individual. Freedom as a permanent structure of human being reveals values and bestows being of values on them only based on the fact that human being considers them to be that. „...my freedom is the

known. However, what is interesting about Sartre's approach is his emphasis on the value of freedom and the consequences of his approach. We do not have enough space to give detailed system of values as presented by Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* and, therefore, we will have to rely on reader's insight in this matter.

Since values do not precede the choice of one's self, but on the contrary, choosing our selves we also choose certain values, we do not find a firm scale of values that could become a benchmark for judgment¹¹. Consequently, it means that human projects, just like all value scales, are equal. As Sartre writes in *Being and Nothingness*: "It amounts to the same thing, whether one gets drunk alone, or is a leader of nations (...) and in this case it will be the quietism of the solitary drunkard which will take precedence over the vain agitation of the leader of nations."¹² If we base values on the subjectivity of existence, just like Sartre did, we will not find the benchmark to be employed in comparison of individual projects¹³. If the world around us does not possess a meaning, if everything is the result of the choice of existence, what could work as an objective benchmark? We have found nothing like that in the context of these thoughts. However, Sartre does not totally exclude the possibility of mutual judgment of projects – practices.

The possibility of mutual judgment of individual projects takes place on the level of a purely logical judgment where one project is labelled as based on truth and the other one as based on an error. As Sartre writes: „Since we have defined the situation of man as one of free choice, without excuse and without help, any man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a self-deceiver. (...) I define his self-deception as an error...“¹⁴ Self-deception is the obscure knowledge of that, which is sincere.

unique foundation of values...*nothing*, absolutely nothing justifies me in adopting this or that particular value.“ (Sartre 2006, p. 76) Adoption of a particular scale of values thus results from the free choice of existence and neither existence nor this choice seeks justification. It is then existence “as freedom that is responsible for the choice made...” (Smreková 2005, p. 296-297) Existence is then the being, thanks to which values exist. Values are without foundations, since they are based on being that is its own nothingness. This fact is revealed by the anxiety that penetrates existence “from time to time” as a sudden realisation of this freedom. Anxiety reveals the possibility to transform the scale of values because „values, due to the fact that they are essentially revealed to a freedom, can not disclose themselves without being at the same time „put into question,“ for the possibility of overturning the scale of values appears complementarily as *my* possibility.“ (Sartre 2006, p. 76). However, we are not creators of values. We only are those who bestow being on values through our choice. We uncover values in the world through our behaviour. They are the values that make our behaviour meaningful.

¹¹ In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre mentions three values that can be considered to be fundamental values, since they are often revealed by the choice of one's self, and these values are: baseness, grandeur and respectability. „The immediate is the world with its urgency; and in this world where I engage myself, my acts cause values to spring up (...) My indignation has given to me the negative value „baseness,“ my admiration has given the positive value „grandeur.“ (...) The bourgeois who call themselves „respectable citizens“ do not become respectable as the result of contemplating moral values. Rather from the moment of their arising in the world they are thrown into a pattern of behaviour the meaning of which is respectability.“ (Sartre 2006, p. 76-77).

¹² Sartre J.-P., 2006, *Bytí a nicota: pokus o fenomenologickou ontologii*. Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2006, p. 711.

¹³ This aspect of his thinking changes in the course of time in the *Notebooks for an Ethics* considering the scale of values reflecting the stages of freedom gradually overcoming alienation: value of purity, innocence, origin, frankness.

¹⁴ Sartre J.-P., 1997, *Existencializmus je humanizmus*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1997, p. 42.

However, considering self-deception or sincerity we cannot judge projects using value judgments, but “only” logical judgments, that means as those based on truth and those based on an error¹⁵.

The preceding thoughts could make us think that such perception of values gives rise to the understanding of freedom as pure arbitrariness. But it is the opposite considering the Sartre’s notion of responsibility that in this context means the possibility of universalisation of values. So freedom “is not degraded to fancy, arbitrariness, and neither is it reduced to purposeless living.”¹⁶ The possibility of universalisation of values means that an individual act implies the general value connected with such an act. As Sartre puts it: „...if (...) I decide to marry and to have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am thereby committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole, to the practice of monogamy.”¹⁷ In his responsibility, man covers the entire *mankind*¹⁸, for „...in creating the man that we want to be, there is not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be.”¹⁹ Responsibility is a permanently present idea of that which would happen if everyone acted like we do.

It is obvious that Sartre does not believe in development, progress, a forward movement. Man is generally the same all the time, he does not become better or worse. There is nothing in relation to which man could become better, since there is no objective benchmark to which such improvement could relate. „...man is always the same, facing a situation which is always changing, and choice remains always a choice in the situation.”²⁰

The future of man is thus constantly open. Anything can happen and whatever happens is without excuse. Sartre’s thoughts culminate in his analysis of the spirit of seriousness. This *Spirit* considers values to be desirable „...transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity, and it transfers the quality of “desirable” to their simple material constitution.”²¹ Owing to such morality, existence is released from responsibility and is presented with ready solutions and manuals. The *spirit of seriousness* referring to the various forms of determinism represents *insincerity* that the existence seeks in an effort to hide from own freedom. “People maintaining seriousness believe that their mission is to become lost as man to give rise to the absolute.”²² Searching for a firm basis for interpretation of their world, they deprive themselves of themselves. They hunt something bigger than themselves, something that

¹⁵ Any totalitarianism that represents determinism is thus revealed as an error. There, existence vainly wishes to surrender its freedom and, therefore, responsibility and to become “dissolved” in the world.

¹⁶ Smreková D., 2005, Sartrov projekt morálky. [in:] *Filozofia* Vol. 60, No. 5, p. 301.

¹⁷ Sartre J.-P., 1997, *Existencializmus je humanizmus*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, p. 22.

¹⁸ „In fashioning myself I fashion man.“ (Sartre, 1997, s. 22)

¹⁹ Sartre J.-P., 1997, *Existencializmus je humanizmus*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, p. 21.

²⁰ Sartre J.-P., 1997, *Existencializmus je humanizmus*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, p. 55.

²¹ Sartre J.-P., 2006, *Bytí a nicota: pokus o fenomenologickou ontologii*. Praha: OIKOYMENH, p. 710.

²² Smreková D., 2005, Sartrov projekt morálky. In: *Filozofia* Vol. 60, No. 5, p. 301.

would bestow permanent shape on the world, making the world and themselves meaningful. They miss the point that “man is that being whose existence is questioned in his being.”²³

As Simone de Beauvoir puts it in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, we do not hesitate to impose on the others the values once recognized as objectively valid²⁴. And this is the permanent danger in all efforts to improve the world. To the contrary, being free in the Sartrean sense of the word means constant uncertainty, incessant possibility of failure as well as success. It is conscious assumption of responsibility logically resulting from our freedom. Freedom thus imposes a constant and irrecusable requirement on existence of never-ending formation of man. As Dagmar Smreková puts it: “The morality that Sartre advocates is connected with the ability to overcome the behaviour, attitudes and practices embodied in the spirit of seriousness.”²⁵ The central value framing our efforts for improvement of society or the world around us should be the value of freedom, while applied ethics should, among others, warn of the dangers in case we violate it.

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²³ Sartre J.-P., 1983, *Cahiers pour une morale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1983, p. 490.

²⁴ Beauvoir S., de. 1962, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*. Paris: Gallimard, 1962, s. 370.

²⁵ Smreková D., 2005, Sartrov projekt morálky. [in:] *Filozofia* Vol. 60, No.5, p. 306.

Omówienie

Współczesne społeczeństwo ulega wielu zmianom, które przynoszą zmianę postrzegania człowieka i społeczeństwa jako takiego. Jednak prawie wszystkie te poglądy mają ze sobą coś wspólnego – jest to odmowa przedkładania odgrywania podstawowej roli stosunków gospodarczych człowieka na rzecz zobowiązań społecznych człowieka lub, innymi słowy, moralnej parametryzacji sfer publicznych w życiu jednostek. Troska o siebie jest coraz bardziej akcentowana, jak pokazano w pracy P. Sloterdijka. Jednak pojawia się pytanie, czy nie jest to wartość, która powinna ograniczać nasze wysiłki w poprawianiu społeczeństwa? Wtedy przywołujemy myśli Jeana Paula Sartre’a z obszaru etyki stosowanej w ogóle, ponieważ wierzymy, że nie chodzi o to, czy etyka Sartre’a jest możliwa, ale czy może być, w duchu aktywizmu Sartre’a, stosowana na poziomie społecznym.