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IN SEARCH OF LOST UNITY

Science and culture

Culture in its broadest sense is the sum of all humanity's actions and goals, past, present and future. Until the nineteenth century it provided guidance on how to live and what to aim for in order to be happy, offering systemised value hierarchies that simplified the taking of both trivial and weighty decisions. Nowadays it no longer does. Contemporary cultural elites appeal for the return of ethical order in culture, but mechanisms have developed that effectively block the application of any kind of justified valuation. We are at a crossroads, longing for a moral structure to bring order and meaning to our actions, but acting according to the standards of the "pluralist society", which prohibit the (re)establishment of such order. Culture is our creation, but equally we are a product of our culture. Nowadays science has the strongest influence on the way culture develops. Francis Fukuyama even asserts that science is competing for control of the moral sphere with liberal democracy[1]. Its goals and methods are being absorbed into social practice. The media feeds us an oversimplified "scientific world view" defining the accepted way of perceiving the world, while politicians and marketing folk in all guises exploit scientific advances, further increasing the impact of the scientific vision of the world on social structures.

Much suggests that scientific and technological progress and the resultant "scientification" of human culture are achieved at the cost of other areas of our existence. As Gabriel Marcel puts it, the progress of technology and the habit of considering discovery a technique that costs the practitioner nothing have contributed enormously to our blindness[2]. In hisbid to dominate and transform nature, man develops his skills in one

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[1] Cf. F. Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, New York 2002.

[2] Cf. G. Marcel, *Być i mieć*, transl. P. Lubicz, Warszawa 1986, p. 164; in English: *Being and Having*, Westminster 1949.

direction, forgetting that it is equally important to master, transform and develop other areas of his potential.

This train does not stop – no-one will forgo the conveniences that contemporary science offers or the opportunities it has provided and continues to reveal. Nor can its momentum even be slowed, for as long as it offers solutions to problems that arise, it will remain in motion. The key issue is to ensure that it is not shunted into a siding. Similar fears to these, surrounding the role of science, the path it takes and the speed it picks up, seem to have been driving Kant when he stressed the imperative of preserving the unity of knowledge. He was convinced that only criticism of reason can guarantee the preservation of that unity, for reason is the sole delineator of the conditions and possibilities of all knowledge and scientific cognition. As he wrote, "Criticism alone can sever the root of materialism, fatalism, atheism, free-thinking, fanaticism, and superstition, which can be injurious universally"[3] In his view, the effect of science, as the dogmatic procedure of reason in its pure knowledge, should be the unity of knowledge. The critique of reason postulated by Kant did not oppose the demands of science, a fact that he stressed unequivocally: "This critique is not opposed to the dogmatic procedure of reason in its pure knowledge, as science, for that must always be dogmatic, that is, yield strict proof from sure principles a priori"[4]. And what of those who disagree with this method of scientific procedure? Kant's answer is as follows: "Those who reject both the method of Wolff and the procedure of a critique of pure reason can have no other aim than to shake off the fetters of science altogether, and thus to change work into play, certainty into opinion, philosophy into philodoxy."[5] Sadly, unity of knowledge has not been preserved, science has become increasingly pluralistic, and in today's world scientific research is not always guided by reason. The connection between science and culture is at present so strong that there appears to be a need for a definition of the place and role of science in the shaping of our human culture and its future.

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[3] I. K a n t, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg 1956, p. 30: "Durch diese kann nun allein dem Materialismus, Fatalismus, Atheismus, dem freigeisterischen Unglauben, der Schwärmerei und Aberglauben". In English: *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. N. Kemp Smith, New York 1929, p. 32.

[4] Ibid., p. 31: "Die Kritik ist nicht dem dogmatischen Verfahren der Vernunft in ihrem reinen Erkenntnis als Wissenschaft entgegengesetzt (denn diese muß jederzeit dogmatisch, d. i. aus sicheren Prinzipien a priori strenge beweisend sein)".

[5] Ibid., p. 32: "Diejenigen, welche seine Lehrart und doch zugleich auch das Verfahren der Kritik der reinen Vernunft verwerfen, können nichts anderes im Sinne haben, als die Fesseln der Wissenschaft gar abzuwerfen, Arbeit in Spiel, Gewißheit in Meinung und Philosophie in Philodoxie zu verwandeln".

The fissured unity of contemporary culture

The human world is expanding and everything within it intermingling. Cultures mix, peoples and ideas are constantly migrating. Yet the various areas of human activity and dimensions of our existence are becoming dislocated and separated, and human life is becoming increasingly segmented. We live in a polyphonic culture buzzing with information, in which truths, dubious truths and obvious falsehoods are all valid tender. We are in chaos. We are aware that this "best of all possible worlds" offers us no sense of security, while our feeling of pointlessness and impotence grows ever stronger.

This awareness of chaos and lack of clear rules is spreading. The first symptoms of this malady were noticed already at the beginning of last century, when Albert Schweitzer noted down observations that are chillingly accurate today. He spoke of the process of the self-destruction of culture, warning that contemporary man's potential to create culture is diminishing, for his environment is shrinking and psychologically damaging him[6].

Science makes possible incredible achievements. But it has progressed from discovering the truth about reality to altering it, and ultimately to creating its own truth. Man's pride and claims have upset the natural process of the revelation (or creation) of values and their hierarchies within societies and the creation of a stable social order harmonising mankind's goals. The first "researcher" to practise "scientific" criticism of the existence of a rational order within the human world was Niccolò Machiavelli[7] The idea was later negated by positivism, denying us the right to pronounce sensibly on anything outside the "scientific point of view" ordained by the positivists.

The world founded on scientific formulae is collapsing, partly due to the modern concept of man, who is treated as an autonomous unit (note: not person but unit). The scientific model of society places particular emphasis on the correct functioning of the individual, while the meaning and reason for his functioning are of secondary importance. We do not need to understand why, it is enough that we know how and that we function. An example of this functional non-comprehension is the pastime of watching popular science programmes. One programme is interesting, the next also... The superficiality and sheer amount of information do not

[6] Cf. A. Schweitzer, *Die Schuld der Philosophie an dem Niedergang der Kultur*, quoted after Erich Fromm: *Mieć czy być?*, transl. J. Karłowski, Poznań 2003, p. 211.

[7] Cf. P. Manent, *Intelektualna historia liberalizmu*, transl. M. Miszalski, Kraków 1994, p. 32–33; in English: *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, Princeton 1996.

foster understanding but merely satisfy curiosity. Knowledge is consumed, but increased consumption, even of knowledge, does not increase wisdom. It offers at most a good feeling at *possessing* a broad knowledge.

A simplified, superficial perception of the world leads to individualism, which fragments society. An extreme example of this is the concept of intellectual property. Discoveries are not the sole achievement of any individual, they are the effect of the maturing of cultural and social conditions: other discoveries have to have been made, the scientific community and society must be prepared to accept them, society and previous generations have to educate the discoverer... All the "activator" has to do within the systems that he finds is to pinpoint the connection that escaped the attention of others. Yet today's discoverer appropriates the entire success (and the profits flowing from it), and claims it as "mine", because "I was first". Another source of this individualism is the objectification of man. Not "I am", but "I possess myself"[8], a unit equipped with a range of attributes necessary for its correct functioning and for achieving success. But is this "I" in my possession a human being?

Models and dimensions of humanity

As Joachim Ritter noted, the history of the human mind is split into two paths[9] Descartes' "method" points us down one, while the other is signposted to Pascal's "logic of the heart". Throughout the triumphal march of the sciences attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of man in the categories of the "Cartesian" natural sciences. This has stripped man of several significant dimensions of his existence. As the sphere of our spirituality shrinks, so does that of human culture.

Scientific segmentation has "annulled" questions that for centuries stimulated humanity's development. Moreover, science (and culture) has begun to lose sight of man himself. Only scattered aspects, functions and events remain. But where and what man is, the why and the wherefore, is no longer significant, because man in the classic sense of the word has ceased to exist... And one can no longer talk of man, his essence, his nature, for that would be unscientific. But even scientists are increasingly suggesting a need to redefine the role and aims of science. Scientific

[8] Cf. E. Fromm, op. cit., p. 211.

[9] Cf. J. Ritter, "Hegel und die Französische Revolution", [in:] *Metaphysik und Politik. Studien zu Arystoteles und Hegel*, Frankfurt a. M. 1969.

knowledge is seeking its place. Previously it seemed that there were only two roads from which to choose: that of meeting "society's needs" for new and useful discoveries, or gathering knowledge for itself.

There is another road. Science is an important channel for discovering man's potential. Scientists are noticing, after Heidegger, that man's technological achievements are not so much altering nature as revealing its – and hence his own – latent possibilities[10]. It is time that knowledge began to serve man in acquiring wisdom. Only progress that puts man's improvement first can justify the efforts of science in broadening our cognitive horizons.

But in order to speak of improving man we must first establish w h a t m a n i s, how he functions, and why. Anthropology attempts to answer some of these questions, conceiving man as a kind of whole functioning in various areas of the human reality, all of which are equally important. In the terminology of Alfred L. Kroeber, four autonomous levels of organisation are necessary for man to function and develop harmoniously: body, mind, society and culture[11]. Science can only claim to have been successful at the basic level. It is unable to access more advanced phenomena.

Max Scheler attempts to define what s h o u l d characterise the knowledge stimulating man's development. He distinguishes three prime development aims that knowledge can and should serve. Firstly, the growth and all-round development of the "knowing" person – this is "knowledge that nurtures". Secondly, the growth of the world and the growth of the supreme principle itself, which only discovers the true "purpose" of its development in our human and all possible knowledge. This knowledge he calls "liberating" or "redeeming" knowledge. Thirdly, the knowledge of positive "science", empowering or achievement-oriented knowledge[12]. Only the harmonious development of all these types makes man's fullest development possible.

Contemporary culture needs *reminding* that man does not live by possessing alone, and that without returning him all the dimensions of his existence, fully developing his cognitive powers and showing him his human identity, culture cannot function. To return unity to culture man must first find such a sense of unity within himself.

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[10] Cf. M. H e i d e g g e r, "Die Frage nach der Technik", [in:] *Die Künste im technischen Zeitalter*, Munich 1956.

[11] Cf. A. K r o e b e r, *Istota kultury*, transl. P. Sztompka, Warszawa 1989, p. 281; in English: *The Nature of Culture*, Chicago 1952.

[12] M. Scheler, *Pisma z antropologii filozoficznej i teorii wiedzy*, transl. S. Czerniak and A. Węgrzecki, Warszawa 1987, p. 372–373.

Breaking down barriers

Many people feel the need for solid foundations for their actions. Yet we also believe that the present structure of the world is man's natural habitat and reflects his innate potential and needs. There are at least two ways out of this situation. Either we echo the pessimists in concluding that nothing can be done, the world is doomed to destruction; or we perceive in the existent chaos the germ of a future order[13]. I prefer the latter, optimistic attitude, which seeks opportunities in this seemingly hopeless situation rather than simply commenting pessimistically on the *status quo*. Indeed, the pessimistic reasoning is only seemingly rational. It is erroneous, for it takes no account of man's latent potential, which enables him to recover from every fall and build a better, more beautiful order on the ruins of each previous one.

We seek (and, given a little luck, find) an order in which we will be able confidently and sensibly to rediscover and confirm our identity, find proof that our decisions and choices are right, and confirm our own value. In chaos, anything goes, no action is destructive because there is nothing to destroy. But out of chaos emerges order, fragile and vulnerable to a single irresponsible act. Times of chaos were fresh in the memory of the Greeks and so they sought to preserve the equilibrium that had been achieved, which made possible order within the soul, at the level of society and in the cosmic dimension. Such order cannot be created by some superior authority, *ex nihilio*, and a previous order cannot be restored. But, in line with the proposition of Juergen Habermas that just as a scientific system cannot intentionally revert to below the level of cumulative knowledge already achieved, so a system of morals – once practical discourse has developed – cannot forget a collectively achieved level of moral awareness[14], the beginnings of a new order can be founded on the wreckage of the old, containing both elements drawn from existing tradition and entirely new facets[15].

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[13] Cf. A. de Tocqueville, *O demokracji w Ameryce*, transl. M. Król, Warszawa 1996, p. 418–419; in English: *Democracy in America*, transl. D. Gilman, New York 1985.

[14] Cf. J. Habermas, *Teoria i praktyka*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, Z. Krasnodębski, Warszawa 1983, p. 474; in English, *Theory and Practice*, transl. J. Viertel, Boston 1990.

[15] There are, at least at present, and for a variety of reasons, no prospects for unity in the sense of a global unity of system (e.g. unity of a philosophical or scientific, let alone theological nature, of the ilk of a "grand medieval synthesis"). Nevertheless there are no obstacles to – indeed there are increasing indications in favour of – intensifying the trend towards localised unity of action, on both the individual and society levels, in the form of the will to engage in dialogue and seek solutions to problems, including problems of an ethical nature. Real-life examples of such developments are the teams and groups that form within the orbit of academic

The key to a future new order seems to be the concept of "humanity". Today this is still an abstract concept, an overused hypostasis, but if we bear in mind the relentless march of globalisation, technological progress and the "shrinking" of our world it will be easier to accept Scheler's hypothesis that humanity as a whole was in neither a racial nor cultural sense the point of departure for history, but is its direction and goal[16].

The new role of ethics

Practice defines the intellectual, social and cultural content of the world that man creates. Social practice produced not only technology but also morality and culture. It is hard to imagine that anything but further social practice could restore unity – a common focus on man's development – to science, religion and other aspects of human culture. To attain, even seek, such unity, however, the present rivalry for mastery of man must be replaced with humble service of man. We also need to return to true responsibility, especially as mastery of the world requires attention to global living conditions and man's chances of surviving in the distant future[17]

Ethics can and should be equal to such great challenges. Not ethics in its present form, naturally, construed as it is by most ethicists as a theoretical field and treated by methodological purists as akin to poetry. It must return to its source, as a science dealing with man's practical activity, as defined by Andrew Van Melsen: a normative science dealing with good and evil as characteristics of man's activity, all forms of that activity[18]. This brand of ethics is not about moralising; it would be a discipline seeking signs of an emerging order, clearing its path and, where necessary, warning of the hazards of certain new ideas.

This form of ethics, which I call mediatory, would draw on the observations of the natural sciences, philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology and specializations dealing with social communication to define the conditions that must be met by society in order for people to

circles to undertake various interdisciplinary ventures, and that bring together representatives of different fields of knowledge, many of them eminent experts, often Nobel prize winners, in common reflection.

[16] Cf. M. Scheler, op.cit., p. 372–373.

[17] Cf. H. Jonas, *Zasada odpowiedzialności*, transl. M. Klimowicz, Kraków 1996, p. 33; in English: *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago 1996.

[18] Cf. A. G. van Melsen, *Nauki fizykalne a etyka*, transl. S. Zalewski, Warszawa 1970, p. 7; in English: *Physical science and ethics*, Pittsburgh, PA 1967.

want and be able to realise their potential fully. It would also analyse and promote the values best able to balance human strivings given that aims and intentions that account for the common good are not achieved once for all and in full, but step by step and in approximation[19].

Its vast area of activity would range from proposing regulatory principles to create lines of communication between communities (and members of communities)[20], to designing new models of education to popularise the pursuit of knowledge and teach society, decision-makers, the media and scientists themselves rational, responsible thought. These models would nurture the development of all aspects of human existence, and lay bare the artificiality and ideological nature of many present problems.

One practical example of involvement of ethical reflection in a specific area of human existence and culture is the emergence in the 1970s of ethics in technology as an autonomous scientific discipline (often in combination with scientific ethics). This came about in connection with a "normative revolution" in the practice of the then current philosophy of technology. This revolution is linked to the rejection of the thesis claiming the axiological neutrality of technology (and the thesis of technological determinism), which stated that only the way in which technologies are used is subject to valuation, and not the technologies themselves. Ethics in technology in its present form takes the view that all technologies are subject to valuation, both at the stage of design and initial trial applications, and in their mass application, and as such can be shaped and controlled by societies. An expression of this normative revolution at the institutional level is the creation of the European Academy for the Study of Consequences of Scientific and Technological Advance (*Die Europäische Akademie zur Erforschung von Folgen wissenschaftlich-technischer Entwicklungen*) in Bad Neuenahr. National ethics councils have been created by the parliaments of some European states, and ethics (or bioethics) committees by academic centres. Numerous chairs of ethics in technology have also been established (chiefly in German-speaking areas).

Another area in which mediatory ethics could have much to contribute would be abortion. For the *mediatory* ethicist this is not a problem of ethics, as both its advocates and its enemies consider it evil. It is a techni-

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[19] Cf. E. W. Böckenförde, *Wolność – państwo – Kościół*, transl. P. Kaczorowski, Kraków 1994, p. 254.

[20] I discussed a proposal for using ethics to propagate the principle of "preservation of the species" as one such acceptable regulative principle during the ESSSAT Conference in Nijmegen (19–24.03.2002); cf. W. Zuziak *Conformity and the Responsibility of Science*, "Studies in Science and Theology" 9 (2003/2004), p. 95–104.

cal issue that needs to be addressed so as both to curb the evil of abortion and to find a solution satisfactory to both sides. Existing legal bans, such as the prohibition introduced in America, will not solve the problem, because they do not reduce the number of aborted children. Evil remains evil, even swept under the carpet of the law. Moralists have clean hands, but their inflexibility allows unscrupulous people to profit. The ethicist's role here might be to promote a more effective way of combating abortion, e.g. the establishment of adoption clinics, where mothers of unwanted children could give birth and the babies be taken by couples who want children. Such a solution would not satisfy everyone, for it requires more work than pronouncing oneself in favour of either view, but it would create real potential for acting to solve an important social problem – and hence for breaking down ideological barriers, opening people up to one another, and teaching them to communicate and understand each other.

This idea can be accused of arbitrariness in its definition of the scope and aims of ethics, but if ethics is not to be reduced to anthropology or the history of ethics we must realise that it needs to have a real impact on social reality. We should also remember that all previous ethical systems have been no more than syntheses and extrapolations of the values of specific societies[21]. Values develop in society spontaneously and order themselves into hierarchies. Individual communities within a pluralist society have no way of communicating, so the conditions for developing a value hierarchy are absent. Communication needs to be reinstated.

There are plans for ways to unify knowledge at the ethical level all ready and waiting, and though their radicalism provokes understandable controversy, they can be hailed as the forerunners of future, more balanced projects. Notable in this regard are Edward O. Wilson's consilience and Owen Flanagan's ecological ethics. Wilson claims that by learning about the biological reasons behind moral behaviours we can achieve wiser and more durable consensus on ethical values than ever before[22]. Flanagan, on the other hand, perceiving that some kind of reconciliation between obvious and scientific notions is possible[23], conceives ethics as a form of ecology[24].

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[21] Cf. A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności*, transl. A. Chmielewski, Warszawa 1996, p. 475; in English: *After virtue: A study in moral theory*, Notre Dame, Indiana 1984.

[22] Cf. E. O. Wilson, *Consilience. The Unity of Knowledge*, New York 1998. In this article I make use of the Polish translation: *Jedność wiedzy*, transl. J. Mikos, Poznań 2002, p. 361.

[23] Cf. O. Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul. Two Visions of Mind and How to Reconcile Them*, New York 2002, p. 265.

[24] Cf. ibidem, p. 266.

Ethics, as a link between all the spheres of human existence, covering every dimension of man's practical affairs, would work to overcome the disintegration of contemporary culture and ease the process of what one hopes is the inevitable, though long-term uniting of human society within a new cultural synthesis.

W POSZUKIWANIU UTRACONEJ JEDNOŚCI

Streszczenie

W artykule zostały omówione negatywne dla rozwoju ludzkiej kultury skutki rozpadu współczesnej nauki na szereg autonomicznych nauk szczegółowych. Wskazano sfery, które w wyniku redukcji naukowej znikają z koncepcji człowieka oraz kulturowe efekty tej redukcji. Nauka, pierwotnie poznająca prawdę o rzeczywistości, zaczyna przekształcać rzeczywistość i tworzyć nowe „prawdy". Uznanie przez naukowców, że tylko badane przez naukę i poddające się eksperymentom naukowym obszary rzeczywistości mogą być uznane za „prawdziwe" prowadzi do zubożenia zarówno całej sfery kultury, jak i wizji człowieka, gdyż ograniczenia metodologiczne z założenia uniemożliwiają penetrację wielu sfer rzeczywistości. Wpływ religii, która badała sferę sacrum i wskazywała możliwości harmonijnego rozwoju wszystkich wymiarów człowieka jest marginalizowany.

Pomiędzy wszystkimi istotnymi sferami aktywności ludzkiej pojawia się coraz większy rozziew, przyczynia się do tego również rozpad nauki na niezależne specjalności. Brak w nauce metody i języka, który umożliwiłby stworzenie spójnej wizji świata i człowieka. Można wszystkie odseparowane dziedziny na nowo zintegrować jedynie przez przywracanie w ramach praktyki społecznej możliwości komunikowania się reprezentantów poszczególnych sfer, które realizują aspiracje różnych wymiarów człowieczeństwa.

Wielką szansę w przywracaniu jedności kulturze ludzkiej może mieć etyka, rozumiana jako dziedzina zajmująca się praktyczną działalnością człowieka. Taka etyka musiałaby korzystać z obserwacji innych nauk. Jej zadaniem byłoby stwarzanie warunków umożliwiających komunikację pomiędzy wspólnotami i członkami tych wspólnot. Równocześnie celem takiej etyki byłoby określanie warunków, jakie musi spełnić społeczeństwo, by ludzie mogli i chcieli rozwijać pełnię swoich możliwości, wspierać korzystne dla harmonijnego rozwoju człowieka i społeczeństwa wartości a także ukazywać zagrożenia, do jakich prowadzi jednostronny rozwój. Zaproponowany model etyki mógłby przyczynić się do przezwyciężenia postępującej dezintegracji kultury i dać oparcie dla poszukiwań i aspiracji współczesnego człowieka.