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LIMITS OF LIFE SHAPED BY ETHICS: A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO TADEUSZ ŚLIPKO'S BIOETHICS

Bioethics is a fairly new, but very popular, discipline broadly present in the public debate of the Western Societies. It deals with difficult tasks and challenges faced by scientists to find ethical, social or political solutions to various problems created by modern science and technological growth.

An impressive exploration of several bioethical issues can be found in the works of the Polish Jesuit, philosopher and, now a retired professor, Tadeusz Ślipko (born 1918). For decades, his scientific attention, apart from theoretical topics, was focused on the issues important to everyday human life. He placed a lot of emphasis on finding ethical solutions to the difficult issues discussed in the postwar Poland¹. He authored the first Polish ethical monograph devoted exclusively to modern problems of medical and technological development and titled *Limits of Life. Dilemmas of the Modern Bioethics*, first published in 1988 and reprinted in 1994².

Selected bioethical books

Tadeusz Ślipko is the author of 10 books and more than 220 articles and reviews³. A direct reference to bioethics can be easily found among the titles of his most important books.

¹ R. DAROWSKI, *Filozofia jezuitów w Polsce w XX wieku. Próba syntezy – słownik autorów*, Kraków, 2001, p. 307-308.

² T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia. Dylematy współczesnej bioetyki*, Warszawa, 1988; 2nd edition Kraków, 1994.

³ R. DAROWSKI, *Ks. Tadeusz Tomasz Ślipko SJ*, in W. MACKIEWICZ (ed.), *Polska filozofia powojenna II*, Warszawa, 2001, p. 309.

Here are some of the titles:

Etyczny problem samobójstwa [*The Ethics of Suicide*] Warszawa, 1970, pp. 188.

Życie i płeć człowieka. Przedmałżeńska etyka seksualna. Etyczny problem samobójstwa [*Human Life and Sex. Premarital Sexual Ethics. The Ethics of Suicide*] Kraków, 1978, pp. 551.

Zarys etyki szczegółowej, I & II [*Outline of Practical Ethics, two volumes*] Kraków, 1982, pp. 444 & 388; 2nd edition Kraków, 2005, pp. 441 & 365.

Granice życia. Dylematy współczesnej bioetyki [*Limits of Life. Dilemmas of the Modern Bioethics*] Warszawa, 1988, pp. 449; 2nd edition Kraków, 1994, pp. 392.

Za czy przeciw życiu? Pokłosie dyskusji [*For or Against Life? Summary of Discussion*] Warszawa – Kraków, 1992, pp. 137.

Rozdroża ekologii [*Crossroads of Ecology*, the book written together with A. Zwoliński, T. Ślipko is the author of the first part of the book *Ekologiczna doktryna Kościoła*, in English: *Ecological doctrine of the Catholic Church*] Kraków, 1999, pp. 252.

Kara śmierci z teologicznego i filozoficznego punktu widzenia [*Capital Punishment from Theological and Philosophical Point of View*] Kraków, 2000, pp. 180.

Philosophical foundations of bioethics

According to Tadeusz Ślipko, life and ethics are inseparable in the context of modern biotechnologies. Therefore, the basic knowledge about bioethics can be derived from the etymology of the term bioethics. *Bios* (pointing out to life) and ethics, two key points for intellectual reflection, lead up to the precise definition of bioethics as follows: *bioethics [...] is a part of the practical philosophical ethics which provides moral evaluation and moral rules (patterns) for human interventions in borderline situations related to the beginning of life, sustaining of life and the end of life (death)*⁴.

The Polish thinker is clear about the approach that he takes during investigations of a particular moral problem. Bioethics is not a separate discipline with special methodology, but rather a part of a broad philosophical enterprise where every moral problem is analyzed in the

⁴ Bioetyka [...] stanowi dział filozoficznej etyki szczegółowej, która ma ustalić oceny i normy (reguły) moralne ważne w dziedzinie działań (aktów) ludzkich polegających na ingerencji w granicznych sytuacjach związanych z zapoczątkowaniem życia, jego trwaniem i śmiercią (T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, p. 16).

way elaborated by philosophy. There is a systematic and rigorous way that leads from the foundations of ethics, or even more precisely from the foundations of philosophical system to practical solutions of every bioethical dilemma⁵. There is no need to invent new methodology, but every single problem shall be reinterpreted by ethics according to its specific moral structure and confronted with the moral order.

Tadeusz Ślipko amplifies the basic concept of ethics in his monumental handbook *Outline of General Ethics (Zarys etyki ogólnej)*. His ethical research follows the ethical model constructed on the basis of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas' ethical ideas in the frame developed by Catholic moralists in XIX and XX century⁶. Tadeusz Ślipko's approach to ethics can be described as a theistic, spiritualistic and personalistic viewpoint. Also he strongly defends objective and absolute foundations of ethics and moral rules for human life⁷. His work apart from the two mentioned Christian thinkers is influenced by the modern ideas of phenomenology and existentialism⁸. However, the author clearly disagrees with the conclusions offered by both movements⁹. Additionally, the Church tradition and the Christian *ethos* also played an important role in the intellectual growth of the mentioned thinker. In his various works, the references can be easily found to the Church Fathers and the official teachings of the Catholic Church etc¹⁰.

Scope of bioethics

Many moral issues possibly exist between the beginning and the end of life. Not every question can be answered, but according to Tadeusz Ślipko, answers should be given to at least the most difficult among them. Especially the most dramatic situations which may influence human existence or destroy it. A number of the most characteristic issues discussed in the works of the Polish Jesuit will be shortly presented below.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS is focused on the issues related to the preservation of nature. Tadeusz Ślipko's proposal is contrary to

⁵ T. ŚLIPKO, *Zarys etyki szczegółowej. Tom 1. Etyka osobowa*, Kraków, 2005, pp. 20-22.

⁶ T. ŚLIPKO, *Etyka św. Tomasza z Akwinu w świetle współczesnych badań*, „*Studia Philosophiae Christianae*” 26 (1991) 2, s. 91-92; also T. ŚLIPKO, *Zarys etyki ogólnej*, Kraków, 2004, pp. 19-20.

⁷ R. DAROWSKI, *Ks. Tadeusz Tomasz Ślipko SJ*, p. 313.

⁸ T. ŚLIPKO, *Zarys etyki ogólnej*, pp. 20-21.

⁹ T. ŚLIPKO, *Zarys etyki szczegółowej*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ T. ŚLIPKO, *Rozdroża ekologii*, Kraków, 1999, pp. 14-54, also T. Ślipko, *Kara śmierci z teologicznego i filozoficznego punktu widzenia*, Kraków, 2000, pp. 26-87.

naturalistic or pantheistic oriented philosophies of other Polish thinkers (such as Zdzisława Piątek or Henryk Skolimowski). It is obvious that human life depends on environment, but the present industrial and technological growth rapidly impoverishes natural resources. So there is an urgent need to develop the moral rules to properly administer the nature. Human sovereignty over the nature needs to be adjusted to the abilities of the nature. Environment is a common good of all humankind including future generations, and not everything is at the disposal now. Human activities may not be drifted by unlimited consumption or greed. Tadeusz Ślipko proposed three imperatives that frame moral evaluation in the field of environmental ethics. First, all human beings have to respect the nature. Second, they have to preserve the nature from devastation and, third, use nature rationally. These three rules set up the balance between the abilities of the nature to survive and human rights to explore the nature¹¹.

ETHICS OF GENETIC ENGINEERING is another complex field examined by the Polish philosopher. New biotechnologies, especially those focused on the interventions in human life or a biological structure of the human being, need to be scrutinized in the view of human dignity. To analyze properly this area, adequate anthropology to deal with specific moral issues need to be developed. Among various issues the question of animation of the human embryo is treated seriously. Tadeusz Ślipko concludes his detailed analysis with the opinion, which finds critics and is contrary to the official Church teachings, that successive animation is the proper base for moral solutions¹².

Genetic engineering is recognized to be a tool to improve the human race. There are two types of eugenics to be distinguished, namely, positive eugenics and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics, which tries to promote desirable aspects of human biological potential, is based on utopian and false presumptions. An idea to build „a brave new world” – not new in the philosophical and social literature – according to Tadeusz Ślipko will never be accomplished because it is beyond the human means¹³. In the negative eugenics, the Polish author examines the moral value of different aspects of *in vitro* procreation and artificial insemination. For various ethical reasons he wards off the first sort of intervention as a means to remedy infertility, but he sees the plausible

¹¹ T. ŚLIPKO, *Rozdroża ekologii*, p. 139; also T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, s. 38-48.

¹² CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Donum vitae. Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*, I. 1, AAS 80 (1988) 70-71; also T. BIESAGA, *Bioetyka początków życia Tadeusza Ślipki*, in T. BIESAGA (ed.), *Bioetyka polska*, Kraków, 2004, pp. 25-26.

¹³ T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 132-136.

arguments in favor of moral permission for some kinds of an artificial homogenous insemination¹⁴.

There is also a controversial moral problem of selection of human beginnings, for example, as an indication of prenatal diagnosis, which could be put in the broader picture of moral permission for abortion¹⁵, sterilization or castration¹⁶.

ETHICS OF THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS includes several moral issues linked to various kinds of a medical treatment. The list of topics is long, but among those analyzed in numerous articles and *Limits of Life* are involuntary treatment, medical experiments, electroshock, psycho-surgery¹⁷, transplantations¹⁸, AIDS and problems related to this phenomenon¹⁹ etc.

ETHICAL CONTEXT OF HUMAN SUFFERING AND DYING bring up further important bioethical dilemmas. Tadeusz Ślipko joined an old ethical debate about euthanasia. In his exploration of the issue, there is no classical distinction between passive and active euthanasia. Instead he uses his originally developed categories of suicidal euthanasia and killing (murderous) euthanasia. The new categories are supposed to show better the moral specifics of actions taken to terminate human life conquered by suffering²⁰. The position of the Polish ethicist is definitely against any kind of euthanasia. However, he does not ignore subjective kind of arguments used in the thereupon controversy²¹.

Tadeusz Ślipko supports an idea that any benefit achieved by a suicide as a form of a self sacrifice is illicit, similarly as any permission for killing in order to achieve some sort of good. A person can not be treated as a means, but only as an aim. A respect for a human being should grasp also life, which constitutes every single existence²². It does not mean that every human life should be kept alive at all costs such as in the instance where a medical personnel has to fight aggressively to prolong life of the patients. Agony and dying are part of

¹⁴ T. ŚLIPKO, *Ibidem*, pp. 143-157.

¹⁵ T. ŚLIPKO, *Za czy przeciw życiu. Pokłosie dyskusji*, Kraków-Warszawa, 1992, pp. 120-125.

¹⁶ T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 178-182.

¹⁷ T. ŚLIPKO, *Ibidem*, pp. 197-206.

¹⁸ T. ŚLIPKO, *Etyka a transplantacja serca*, „*Studia Philosophiae Christianae*”, 1 (1975) 1, pp. 143-188.

¹⁹ T. ŚLIPKO, *Moralność seksualna – światopogląd – rodzina*, in J. RZEPKA (ed.), *Zagadnienia prorodzinnej edukacji seksuologicznej i profilaktyki HIV/AIDS*, Katowice, 1996, pp. 19-24.

²⁰ T. Ślipko, *Życie i pleć człowieka*, Kraków, 1978, pp. 492-496.

²¹ T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 254-256.

²² T. ŚLIPKO, *Ibidem*, pp. 271, 285-287.

the human existence, and sometimes in the situation of an incurable disease medical interventions should be withheld or withdrawn²³.

ETHICS CONSIDERING AGGRESSION AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT is a field where Tadeusz Ślipko offers his personal solutions. Argumentation built on the theory of values reveals specific mechanism impelled in the situation of conflict of values. Namely, in the situation of aggression a scope of one value is restricted by the other value. Moral evil committed in a subsequent situation is neutralized because an aggressive agent, is itself outside of the moral order. Theoretical solution seems to be clear in the case of a self-defense when one kills an aggressor in order to save ones own life, if there is no other way to escape a direct danger²⁴.

The same pattern is used in the argumentation in favor of the capital punishment. Tadeusz Ślipko permits use of this drastic form of punishment because justice has to be done to the victim who was murdered. Only in the case of a murder as an effect of aggression, a perpetrator could be killed²⁵. Although, the solution proposed by Polish ethicist is original, the author in his book *Capital Punishment from Theological and Philosophical Point of View* reconstructs the Christian theological tradition from the early Christianity to the recent official Catholic Church statements. This work of Tadeusz Ślipko provokes a debate in Poland about moral and legal aspects of the capital punishment and *ipso facto* provides arguments contrary to abolitionists side of discussion²⁶.

SEXUAL ETHICS, especially its premarital aspects, belongs to the early period of philosophical activity of Tadeusz Ślipko. His treatise *Premarital Sexual Ethics* was published in 1978. However some issues related to sexual ethics such as masturbation as a part of the process of artificial fertilization appeared in later books or articles²⁷.

Practical rules in the mentioned field of human behavior are based on the anthropological presumptions. Rational analysis of human sexuality leads to recognition of specific moral patterns for sexual selfness and proper expressions of sexual potential, for male and female relationships, the author differentiates various sexual features in social context. Tadeusz Ślipko offers practical deontological rules especially for autoe-

²³ T. ŚLIPKO, *Ibidem*, pp. 342-343.

²⁴ T. ŚLIPKO, *Ibidem*, pp. 301-307.

²⁵ T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 327-334; also T. Ślipko, *Kara śmierci*, pp. 129-140.

²⁶ T. Ślipko, *Kara śmierci*, pp. 149-161.

²⁷ T. ŚLIPKO, *Zarys etyki szczegółowej*, pp. 303-305; also T. ŚLIPKO, *Zapłodnienie pozaustrojowe – rodzenie czy technologia?* „Horyzonty wiary” 2 (1990) pp. 51-67; also T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 155-162.

rotic behavior and heterosexual behavior. His positive approach to human sexuality and a frequently emphasized importance of sexual life in the growth of every person does not mean that this human sphere is unrestricted. There is a need to rule out various kinds of sexual acts as illicit, among them are masturbation, castration or sterilization, homosexual behavior, contraception, rape, premarital sexual intercourse etc²⁸.

Human sexual life should be shaped by love. Tadeusz Ślipko constructs his sexual ethics on three fundamental principles: (1) moral value of human person, (2) human sexuality focused on the procreation and (3) erotic love as the way of entire [total] affirmation of the loved person. These three principles, properly balanced and harmonized, allow to build ethical evaluation system which can rule human sexual behavior²⁹.

There are other topics discussed in the bioethical works of Tadeusz Ślipko, for instance, related to social, political or legal dimensions of bioethics. The topics mentioned above are the most characteristic and the most present in the contemporary Polish ethical debates.

Two models of bioethics

Tadeusz Ślipko is aware of his philosophical identity. Repeatedly he points out two styles of thinking present in every bioethical discussion. Disagreement among thinkers usually is focused on practical solutions, which allows or prohibits a specific type of human activity. The truth is that roots that lead to the dissidence go much deeper than the ordinary reader of bioethical dissertations and articles notice. The Polish ethicist indicates that bioethical disputes are an effect of the two radically different anthropologies and two different types of epistemology used by bioethicists.

The first one is based on spiritual conception of humankind. It recognizes every human as a person (in moral sense) and a social being. Humanity implies apart from material element a presence of the soul. Every human should realize specific moral ends, and there is the a moral order to achieve them.

The second type of philosophy in bioethics is described as naturalistic and materialistic. Humankind is recognized only as a biological being, distinguished by specific psychical skills, driven by natural impulses

²⁸ T. Ślipko, *Życie i płeć człowieka*, pp. 244-322.

²⁹ T. Ślipko, *Ibidem*, p. 342.

and inclinations. This impulses and inclinations shape the moral attitudes and constitute every moral evaluation³⁰.

Hereby, two main and conflicting ethical approaches are present in bioethical debates: ethical relativism and ethical absolutism. Tadeusz Ślipko represents and defends the later one. According to him, the moral order is based on solid foundations. There are rules and norms which are unbreakable. However, to find the truth about any kind of action, it is necessary to recognize the moral structure and moral references of the evaluated act.

Conclusions

Tadeusz Ślipko belongs to the most active contemporary Polish ethicists. An impressive number of books and other publications speak for themselves. But the most important thing is the fact that he is a very scrupulous and creative thinker. Often he undertakes difficult and troublesome problems that are avoided by other moralists.

Through all the writings the intellectual growth and evolution of the ideas of the Polish philosopher can be traced. The purpose of this article is to show the English speaking readers a general approach to bioethics developed by the presented thinker³¹. It is not a comprehensive introduction since many interesting issues were not considered. There is much more to explore, but the article gives the introduction into the most important features of the philosopher.

It is impossible to understand Tadeusz Ślipko's approach without Christianity and Christian moral tradition. It is not a surprise that his Jesuit intellectual formation which includes amidst theological and philosophical, also sociological studies³² influenced his works. His work goes beyond a simple instrumental use of greatly accepted authorities and proves correct opinions just to support personal ethical ideas. His just criticism selectively distinguishes accepted and unaccepted elements in his investigations.

As it was mentioned Tadeusz Ślipko investigates some of the most difficult bioethical problems. Sometimes his moral solutions are contrary

³⁰ T. ŚLIPKO, *Za czy przeciw życiu?*, pp. 121-124; also T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 352-354.

³¹ There are two studies about Tadeusz Ślipko in German language: *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, hrsg. VON E. CORETH u.a., B. 2, Graz, 1988, pp. 812-813; R. DAROWSKI, *Tadeusz Ślipko SJ. Biographisch-bibliographische Daten und philosophische Einsichten*, „Forum Philosophicum” 7 (2002) pp. 29-48.

³² R. DAROWSKI, *Ks. Tadeusz Tomasz Ślipko SJ*, pp. 310-311.

to main stream opinions as in the case of the acceptance of successive animation or capital punishment. It is not easy to openly present not popular ideas. This attitude shows that this thinker rigorously follows his rational survey. However, the Jesuit philosopher also listens to the voice of his critics. Sometimes his opinions evolve, as it may be seen comparing both editions of *Limits of Life*.

Certainly, we may say that bioethics is not an easy field for the scientist because every thesis should be permanently watched and updated with new discoveries and progress in biomedicine and modern technologies. A human being is always the same, but knowledge we share about ourselves is expanding. As it is explained at the beginning of *Limits of Life*, Tadeusz Ślipko is aware of this temporal character of some bioethical judgments. Science may provide various new facts which may change the moral evaluation of a concrete intervention³³.

There are obviously a lot of moral problems which are not analyzed in the works of Tadeusz Ślipko such as stem cell research, transgenic transplantations or genetically modified food. These are fairly new problems which need the moral consideration.

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**ETYCZNY KSZTAŁT GRANIC ŻYCIA
KRÓTKIE WPROWADZENIE DO BIOETYKI
TADEUSZA ŚLIPKI**

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia w ogólnym zarysie dorobek naukowy Tadeusza Ślipki na polu bioetyki. Uczony ów poszczycić się może wieloma publikacjami z tej dziedziny, wśród nich wskazać można przynajmniej na siedem tytułów książkowych w części lub w całości poświęconych zagadnieniom bioetycznym. Na szczególną uwagę zasługuje wydawana dwukrotnie monografia *Granice życia. Dylematy współczesnej bioetyki*, która jest pierwszą polską publikacją poświęconą w całości bioetyce.

Bioetyka dla Tadeusza Ślipki jest przede wszystkim częścią filozoficznej etyki szczegółowej. Myśliciel ten nie próbuje zatem stworzyć nowej odrębnej dyscypliny naukowej, z własną specyficzną metodologią. Wpisuje się ona w nurt myślenia, który jest osadzony w konkretnej filozofii poznania,

³³ T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 17-18.

to main stream opinions as in the case of the acceptance of successive animation or capital punishment. It is not easy to openly present not popular ideas. This attitude shows that this thinker rigorously follows his rational survey. However, the Jesuit philosopher also listens to the voice of his critics. Sometimes his opinions evolve, as it may be seen comparing both editions of *Limits of Life*.

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³³ T. ŚLIPKO, *Granice życia*, pp. 17-18.

metafizyce i antropologii. Szczególnie zaś jest ona wpisana w konkretny system etyczny, z którym stanowi nieodłączną całość.

Polski myśliciel utożsamia swe etyczne ukierunkowanie z augustyńskotomistycznym modelem etyki ukształtowanym na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Jakkolwiek, jak można to zauważyć, niejednokrotnie wykracza on poza wypracowany podówczas wzorzec dodając doń elementy oryginalnie wypracowane w wyniku przeprowadzonych własnych badań. Etyka nie jest dla autora *Granicy życia* jedynie opisem rzeczywistości z jej określonymi fenomenami moralnymi, lecz ustala oceny i normy moralne, które mają odnosić się do konkretnych sytuacji życiowych człowieka.

Intelektualny dorobek Tadeusza Ślipki należy z pewnością rozpatrywać z perspektywy jego intelektualnej formacji, w trakcie której odbył on studia filozoficzne, teologiczne i socjologiczne. Mimo nie ukrywanego przezeń chrześcijańskiego charakteru uprawianej filozofii, za którą idzie głęboka znajomość chrześcijańskiej tradycji i obecnych w niej różnorodnych nurtów myślowych, jest on jej krytycznym interpretatorem i korzysta z dorobku myśli chrześcijańskiej w takiej mierze, w jakiej spełnia ona kryteria naukowych rygorów.

Tadeusz Ślipko wyznaczając formalnie zakres bioetyki, zamyka ją w ramy *ingerencji w granicznych sytuacjach* dotyczących ludzkiego życia. W praktyce poszukuje on najbardziej dramatycznych sytuacji, które mogą w sposób istotny zaważyć na ludzkiej egzystencji, jej trwaniu albo śmierci. W artykule przedstawiono w skrócie zagadnienia, którym polski jezuita poświęcił najwięcej uwagi lub zaproponował własne, oryginalne rozstrzygnięcia etyczne. Są wśród nich: etyka środowiska naturalnego, etyczne implikacje inżynierii genetycznej, etyka terapii medycznej, problemy etyczne związane z walką z cierpieniem oraz z umieraniem, kwestie etyczne podnieszone w związku ze zjawiskiem agresji i z karą śmierci, a także etyka seksualna.

Autor, którego poglądy są prezentowane w artykule, należy do najbardziej aktywnych współczesnych polskich etyków. Zwraca uwagę jego dociekliwość, rzetelny naukowy warsztat oraz kreatywność. Często podejmuje on tematy trudne i nie zawsze chętnie podejmowane przez moralistów. Tadeusz Ślipko wskazuje na dynamiczny wymiar bioetyki, nierozzerwalnie powiązanej z rozwojem nauki i postępem technologicznym. Wypracowane przez bioetyków moralne oceny należy sukcesywnie weryfikować w świetle nie znanych wcześniej faktów, których dostarczać mogą kolejne odkrycia naukowe. Zakres problematyki wchodzącej w skład bioetyki w szybkim tempie poszerza się o nowe kwestie wymagające namysłu i analizy. Nie dziwi zatem, iż wydłuża się lista praktycznych zagadnień, które nie zostały jeszcze opracowane przez polskiego myśliciela. Można wśród nich wymienić ksenotransplantologię, kwestionowane z przyczyn moralnych różnorodne wykorzystywanie komórek macierzystych, problematykę zmodyfikowanej genetycznie żywności itd. Należy żywić nadzieję, że znajdą się one w kolejnym wydaniu *Granicy życia*.