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MAŁGORZATA ŁOBACZ

THE PROBLEM AND THE MEANING OF MATERIAL POVERTY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION.
THE ETHICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ASPECT

> Let us . . . quietly accept our times, with the firm conviction that just as much good can be done today as at any time in the past, provided only that we have the will and the way to do it.
>
> —Étienne Gilson[1]

Material poverty and all human difficulties and sufferings are regarded by man as a difficult reality. For some, this situation is a challenge to which they try to respond, others—especially the extremely poor—surrender, as they live day by day, trying to make their ends meet. At stake are also the disparities between rich and poor which increase with time, unfortunately to the detriment of the latter. The poorer half of humanity has as much wealth as the eight richest people in the world. At this point one deals with a question of globalization whose purpose is the integration and interdependence of countries, the desire to create "one world," and so—greater solidarity and mutual support.

MAŁGORZATA ŁOBACZ — John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
e-mail: gkolomanska@wp.pl ▪ ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1476-8278

[1] Étienne Gilson, "Medieval Universalism and Its Present Value in the Concept of Freedom," in *Freedom: Its Meaning*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), 162.

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However, a confrontation of these ideas with reality shows something radically different. Hence, how is it possible for the poor to find a meaning for their lives, how can they live their poverty through and avoid downgrading themselves as persons? These issues will be the central topic of discussion in this article.[2]

Poverty and Globalization

Poverty is one of the largest and most common problems of humanity. There are countries where poverty touches only a small part of the population, but also there are those in which poverty affects a significant or even predominant number of population. The effects of poverty do not affect only the persons experiencing it, but also—in aspect of durability and range, it may affect the rest of society, including the ones considered wealthy in terms of material goods. Such situation raises many adverse phenomena, ranging from the biological and social degradation of the poor and their families, to the pathological behaviour (such as alcoholism, drug addiction) and crime.[3]

A very serious problem of modern times is hunger and malnutrition. Studies show that predominantly it occurs in Africa, mainly sub-Saharan part. FAO data show that the largest number of residents, about 20% (over 230 million), is struggling with natural disasters and malnutrition.[4] Such difficult situation can also be found in Chad, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. In these

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[2] This article seeks to develop my previous considerations on poverty, published as: Małgorzata Łobacz, "The Role of School in Preventing the Marginalization of Poor Students," *Journal of Preschool and Elementary School Education* 7 (2015): 95–110.

[3] Janusz Sztumski, "Ubóstwo jako problem społeczny [Poverty as a Social Problem]," *Polityka Społeczna* 8 (1995): 43.

[4] Marta Tomaszkiewicz, "Codziennie niemal miliard ludzi cierpi z powodu głodu [Almost a Billion of People Suffers from Hunger Every Day]," *Newsweek* (2016), accessed Aug 7, 2017, http://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/glod-na-swiecie-ktore-kraje-najbardziej-dotkniete-sa-glodem-raport,artykuly,377357,1.html.

countries the proportion of malnourished people in relation to the number of inhabitants varies from 33 to 48 percent. In addition, except for the areas in war: Syria and Iraq, the North Koreans are the most hungry among the Asian nations. Malnutrition touches there 41.6 percent of the population, that is, 10.5 million people.[5]

This situation arises from injustice in today's world. It takes place when some people gain disproportionately large share of the riches, and after that they isolate themselves from the rest of society.[6] Then, a sudden diversity among people happens, which is reflected in the increase in number of extreme groups with the lowest and highest income, and automatic reduction of the size of the group with the average income. Among other reasons, modern globalism leads to this situation. "It contributes to the economic development of the world, but its achievements are not distributed equally. The rich benefit more and the poor relatively less."[7] The financial gap between very wealthy people and those living in poverty constantly increases. In Oxfam's report, 3.6 billion of the poorest people in the world (half of the population) has about 426 billion dollars, which is as much as the eight richest people in the world have to their disposal. Around 795 million people in the world is starving. Starvation is not equally spread, geographically it concerns mainly the countries of the global South. Every ninth person

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Władysław Zuziak, "Etyka chrześcijańska wobec rozwarstwienia materialnego [Christian Ethics towards Material Disproportion," in *Etyczne aspekty bogacenia się i ubóstwa* [*Ethical Aspects of Getting Rich and Poverty*], ed. Adam Węgrzecki (Kraków: Akademia Ekonomiczna, 2003), 73.

[7] Włodzimierz Malendowski, ed., *Świat u progu XXI wieku. Wybrane problemy* [*The world on the beginning of the 20 century*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe INPiD UAM, 2003).

in the world is starving, but every third person in the world suffers for some form of malnutrition.[8]

The existing crisis clearly has showed that the impact of globalization on poverty reduction is rather insignificant. Slowing economic growth stems largely from deep recession in countries that are big exporters of raw materials, in emerging markets and developing economies. Close to 60% of the countries referred to as emerging markets have had an increase lower than the long-term average. Developing countries exporting raw materials have increased by only 0.3 percent. The economists of the World Bank indicate that weak economic growth in 2016 was the result of not only lesser economic activity or a decline in foreign direct investment, but also the political uncertainty.[9] This situation favours the extension of poverty as well as social problems. The problem, however, does not lie in the fact of possessions, but in the way they are used.

Wealth often brings risks associated with selfish greed, desire for possession, laziness, sensual temptations and dishonesty. This, in turn, causes a threat both for the community and for the individuals.[10] Plato, in his famous dialogue "The Republic," claims that people focused on acquiring and enlarging their assets enhance their greed, which becomes a major obstacle in their spiritual development. Excessive wealth makes people lazy, brings luxury and triggers subversive aspirations.[11] The problem of "unnecessary needs" luring men from what really mat-

[8] United Nations Children's Fund: A humanitarian organisation being a part of the UNO. It provides with medical care and helps in crisis, and elementary education for children in developing countries.

[9] *Bank Światowy* [The World Bank], accessed Aug 10, 2017, http://biznes.onet.pl/wiadomosci/ swiat/bank-swiatowy-w-2017-roku-globalny-wzrost-gospodarczy-wyniesie-2-7-proc-zagrozeniem/6qjsep.

[10] Andrzej Zwoliński, *Etyka bogacenia się* [*Ethics of Getting Rich*] (Warszawa: WAM, 2002), 251.

[11] Platon, *Państwo* [Plato, *Republic*], vol. 2, trans. Władysław Witwicki (Warszawa: Alfa, 1994), 113–22.

ters was also noticed by ancient Christian moralists. Complaining about the so-called *polyktemosyne* (focusing on an excessive multitude of things in life), they urged to seek true values, thanks to which men could "grow" as persons.[12]

Wars and hatred in the world, and the division of humanity to the rich and the poor, contribute to poverty and, thus, to the dehumanization of those who must endure it. The power over the needy and excessive quest for prosperity multiply the clusters of both material and spiritual misery. And though food production is growing faster than population, a significant number of people die of hunger. This condition is a result of a big waste of life sustenance in the hands of the rich, while it would feed almost all the hungry people.[13]

The basis of growing poverty can be also found in capitalist economy and unemployment, as well as the lack of skills that come into being in the new system due to a habit to make a claim on the state institutions. This situation is even more difficult to overcome as the institutions responsible for social assistance do not have adequate funds to help people in need and restrict their support to the most drastic situations.

Poverty, being a significant social problem, causes clearly negative effects in this area. It reduces demand for goods, and at the same time market capacity which inhibits economic development. It prevents or significantly impedes the use of the existing opportunities to acquire education and maintain good health by the poor. It contributes to the growth of crime, and especially offences against property. It promotes the development of social pathology too, such as drug abuse and homelessness.[14] This problem was already noted in the 16th century, when

[12] *Ibid.*, 52–3.

[13] *Ibid.*, 272.

[14] Tadeusz Kowalak, Ewa Leś, "Kwestia ubóstwa [A Problem of Poverty]," in *Polityka społeczna*, ed. Antoni Rajkiewicz et al. (Warszawa: Interart, 1996), 142.

there was a push for taking care of the poor in order to protect the public against the hotbeds of epidemic and criminals.

Misery is particularly severely experienced by those who are socially excluded, among which those chronically sick, unemployed, single mothers, people with disabilities, victims of the pathology of family life, and elder people are often found. They experience discrimination due to the lack of proper legislation, existing biases and stereotypes. The excluded people have limited access to relevant institutions which could help them improve their financial situation. They possess features that hinder them from using the common social resources due to the disability, dependence, long-term illness or other reasons.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI in his *Message for the World Day of Peace*, stressed that one of the main ways of building peace is globalization for the common good of the whole human family. He noted, however, that in order to do this, what is needed is a strong global solidarity between rich and poor countries, as well as within individual states, also the rich ones. "A 'common code of ethics' is also needed, consisting of norms based not upon mere consensus, but rooted in the natural law inscribed by the Creator on the conscience of every human being."[15] He emphasized, therefore, that in this world it is becoming more and more obvious that peace is built only when the possibility of equitable growth is provided to all. The failures of unjust systems sooner or later will have to be taken into account. "It is utterly foolish to build a luxury home in the midst of desert or decay. Globalization on its own is incapable of building peace, and in many cases, it actually creates divisions and conflicts."[16] Globalization centered on the welfare of every human being should head toward the solidarity of all humanity.

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[15] Benedict XVI, "Message for the 42nd World Day of Peace," #8, accessed Aug 7, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages.index.html#messages.
[16] *Ibid.*, #14.

Ways of Helping the Needy

Therefore, how should the poor be helped? Above all, the essential aim of any action for the poor should be breaking isolation and including them in the normal course of social life.[17] Existing forms of aid are grants and other payments for those in need which only perpetuate the social dependence of the poor. It is, therefore, illusionary help. "Granting unemployment benefits by the state . . . is in fact closing eyes to the need for a reform of the labor system, which in turn comes down to the need to reform the whole economic structure."[18]

That is why, such conditions need to be created so as to work and income have precedence over the financial aid.[19] To prevent this, the modern system of aid should, in lieu of gifts and loans, enable professional development of the poor.

Service to the poor and the needy in today's reality is a must not only social and charity organizations should face, but also individual countries and their specialized institutions. Eliminating the causes of poverty and the prevention of its effects become the challenge of social policy in each country. It is essential here to shape the appropriate allocation of state goods and services produced in the economy so that no one is excluded from access to them, and thereby, to ensure that it can satisfy at least the everyone's necessary needs.

To remedy a social problem namely poverty, international organizations such as the United Nations and ILO (International Labor Or-

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[17] Jerzy Boczoń, Witold Toczyski, Anna Zielińska, "Ubóstwo jako zjawisko społeczne oraz przedmiot pracy socjalnej [Poverty as a Social Phenomenon and a Subject of Social Work]," in *Pedagogika społeczna* [*Social Pedagogy*], ed. Tadeusz Pilch, Irena Lepalczyk (Warszawa: "Żak," 1995), 364.

[18] Czesław Strzeszewski, *Praca ludzka: zagadnienie społeczno-moralne* [*Human Work: Social and Moral Issues*] (Lublin: TN KUL, 1978), 240.

[19] Danuta Zalewska, *Ubóstwo: Teorie, badania* [*Poverty: Theories, studies*] (Wrocław: Uwr, 1997), 11.

ganisation) are trying to enact specific actions to eliminate poverty in the world. Their poverty alleviation programs involve, first and foremost, increasing employment, pursuit of a sustainable economic development (available thanks to preservation and protection of resources), introduction of family planning, granting rights to resources to groups and local organisations.

Every development and every progress must put the human person in the center. Great changes and improvements, which we experience, cannot affect a human being, especially a poor and injured one; they cannot be implemented at all cost, if they are really to be worthy of man.[20] In his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, John Paul II stresses that the constitutive element of the human progress "is the continual reappraisal of man's work, both in the aspect of its objective finality and in the aspect of the dignity of the subject of all work, that is to say, man."[21] Therefore, he pushes for the national and international programmes to take into account the "creative initiative" of every person, and activate them to work, instead of relieving them from poverty by giving donations.

Today, poverty is considered as a structural defect of specific communities. Among the reasons that cause this phenomenon one should name: unemployment, inadequacy of wages in relation to the work performed, the rate of change in economy exceeding the adaptation skills of workers finding new occupations and facing various forms of discrimination in the labor market.

In the Third World countries hunger and chronic malnutrition are mass phenomena. The populations of South Asia and Africa live in permanent malnutrition. Despite the progress in economic development and industrialization, the extent of hunger in many countries has a

[20] John Paul II, "Sollicitudo rei socialis" (Rome 1987), #27–34, accessed Aug 10, 2017, http://w2. vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en.html.
[21] *Ibid.*, #18.

growing tendency. A multitude of people suffer from starvation, not having access to drinking water and medical care.

Along with deepening material difficulties, numerous forms of assistance to those in need develop. Among the foreign organizations some deserve attention, these are: UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund),[22] WFP (World Food Programme),[23] Save the Children,[24] Oxfam (Oxford Committee for Famine Relief),[25] a French Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger),[26] or Doctors Without Borders.[27]

In Poland, aid for the needy is provided in various forms. There are many organizations that support those in need: Polish Humanitarian Action, Polish Center of International Aid, Education for Democracy Foundation, Polish Medical Mission, Hear Africa Foundation, World Culture Foundation. The number of foundations is increasing, as well as *ad hoc* actions are often undertaken to help those suffering materially and physically: "Runnig for the Future," "Join us!," "A layette for a student," "Gold Rush," "The Campaign to Fight with Hunger," "The Truth about Aids," "Christmas Work to Help Children," "A Slice of Bread."

The existence of organizations and actions for the needy is a promotion of due respect for human dignity. The civilizational, technological and economic development and progress should never be done at the expense of a person. Moreover, poverty does not give anyone the

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[22] See note 6.

[23] The biggest humanitarian organisation in the world brought up to fight with hunger in the world.

[24] An international organisation whose aim is to introduce exceptional aid as well as long-lasting international development and activity focused on children and their families.

[25] An international humanitarian organisation whose aim is to fight with hunger in the world, and provide help in developing countries.

[26] An international organisation to fight with hunger in the world.

[27] An international organisation whose aim is to enable access to medical care to all people, especially in the war zone.

right to deprive the poor of their dignity. While being poor, men should see themselves as persons destined to grow in their humanity.

Poverty: A Chance for Personal Development

In accordance with the universal ethical principles all people should be treated in the same way, especially those most suffering from illness or spiritual and material deficiencies. The weak require special care, therefore they are first to be given support and help.[28]

Paradoxically, experiencing weakness and human infirmity can contribute to the development of human personality. Awareness of the fact of the inadequacy and finiteness of their lives can direct poor and suffering persons to look for and discover absolute, unchangeable values in which they could find support and meaning. Such an effect, however, is not easy to be brought about, as it requires that the poor and suffering accept their limits and take an active attitude to them, for—as Adam Rodziński writes—"suffering is a work."[29] It is also an expression of man's transcendence to his tangible and intangible deficiencies. It allows discovering unchangeable living structures in the reality of openness to the supernatural. Awareness of such structures gives meaning to human life in the realm of contingency. Through the potentiality of human nature, persons are able to rebuild goodness encapsulated in themselves.

Poverty is also a special chance for those who stay with the needy to fulfill their humanity. Giving aid to the weak, they also help themselves, growing up as people. A kind of selflessness and treating people, especially the poor, sick and suffering, in a spirit of goodwill is that which is characteristic for such people. A man becomes mature

[28] Cf. John Paul II, "Sollicitudo rei socialis," #17.

[29] Adam Rodziński, *Na orbitach wartości* [*On the Orbits of Values*] (Lublin: RW KUL, 1998), 282.

when he can see a particular value of the person, as the fullness of humanity is only reached in seeing others in the light of love. In overcoming one's limits by living with values, one finds his own fulfilment as a human person.[30] Through it, one achieves a form of self-possession and self-governance. "In the action the person achieves his own accomplishment by becoming 'somebody' and the being 'somebody' is his manifestation of himself,"[31] and thus the transcendence of the acting person occurs. Next to the pursuit of "life according to a pattern," the person can also, although he should not, grow up to final split between what we are called to do and who we are as a result of specific self-determinations.[32] However, if he wants to achieve his fullness, the person needs to realize his contingency. These days, people are generally reluctant to think of their natural fragility and limitations, and escape into the wide variety of ideologies demanding pragmatism, consumerism or hedonistic lifestyle.[33]

A man as a person is multilaterally entangled in relationships, and at the same time he realizes that he is a subject of these relationships; he is self-aware of being a subject of his activity and experience. He also knows the nature of his ties with society; he knows that without community he could not be born as he needs parents, he could not get education or live personal life as he needs other persons to experience relationships which connect him with community. The first foundation of the need to establish social relationships seems to be contingency and potentiality of humanity. As a contingent being, man does not pos-

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[30] *Ibid*., 113.

[31] Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 157.

[32] Rodziński, *Na orbitach wartości*, 128.

[33] Wojciech Chudy, "Powołanie osoby niepełnosprawnej w nauczaniu papieża Jana Pawła II [The Calling of a Disabled Person in the Teaching of John Paul II]," in *Osoba niepełnosprawna i jej miejsce w społeczeństwie* [*The Disabled Person and His Place in the Society*], ed. Dorota Kornas-Biela (Lublin: RW KUL, 1988), 130.

sess himself or goods necessary for life by himself as his own. As a potential being, he is aimed at good in order to complement his humanity. The inclination of the human person toward self-fulfilment is natural, i.e. necessary. The self-fulfilment of man as his natural assignment is carried out through specific relations with human and non-human beings in various human activities. Thus, in man as a personal being, there is a number of layers through which his personal life is actualized.[34]

The difficult situation of a poor person is an invitation for others to make a self-gift whereby they have a chance to enrich themselves. It all depends on them what they will do, which way they will choose, and how deeply they will engage. Will it be a journey of moral obligation connected with love to the person in need in the center? Or, will it be the road full of selfishness, leading to apparent happiness? Plato, who identified ethics with the theory of happiness, found that happiness is the source and reason for the existence of man. The essence of happiness, which is the final goal of human activity, is described as a moral obligation or valuable act which is ethical, i.e. serves man's self-realization. The excessive luxury which means an access to all types of material goods, often makes people "slaves" of property and immediate satisfaction, who regard nothing apart from proliferation of goods which they already possess, or replacing them with others, more perfect. This is what is called "civilization of 'consumption' or 'consumerism', which involves so much 'throwing-away' and 'waste'."[35]

The spread of various forms of social and economic injustice which touch masses of people, provokes the outrage of many whose fundamental rights have been denied and trampled upon. It calls for a radical renewal of individuals and societies "capable of ensuring jus-

[34] Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, "Osoba i naród wobec globalizmu [The Person and the Nation towards Globalism]," *Człowiek w Kulturze* 14 (2002): 5–16.

[35] John Paul II, "Sollicitudo rei socialis," #28.

tice, solidarity, honesty and openness."[36] The actual respect for human dignity and rights will not be possible unless individuals and communities overcome "self-interest, fear, greed and the thirst for power."[37]

Conclusion

People living next to each other are in a way dependent on one another. While meeting with each other, they experience each other, as they are "Others" in an ontological sense: I am not you, but you are not me.[38] People met and experienced are also "Others" in a physical and spiritual sense as those who are richer or poorer. There is a kind of asynchrony in relationships with the "Other" who is a weak, a poor, a widow, an orphan, etc., while I am rich and powerful.[39]

Help given to "Others" allows to find, experience and understand their dignity and human value. Such an attitude liberates help-givers from selfishness focused on the pursuit of their own benefits, enhances their readiness to help, arouses compassion, and makes them more aware of our contingency.

Each person lives in a certain social reality, at a specified level of existence. Within its borders, i.e. standards adopted by the community, they must find indispensible minimum needed for living. However, people affected by poverty, limited by economic barriers, may fail to

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[36] John Paul II, "Veritatis splendor," #98, accessed Aug 10, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals.index.html#encyclicals.

[37] John Paul II, "Address to the Young People in *Rizal Park*," Manila, Saturday, 14 January 1995, #16, accessed Aug 10, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995.index.html#speeches.

[38] Anna Walczak, "Koncepcja rozumienia Innego w kategorii spotkania [The Conception of the Understanding of Anothers in the Category of Meeting], in *Pedagogika społeczna* [*Social Pedagogy*], vol. 1, ed. Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka (Warszawa: PWN, 2006), 432.

[39] Emmanuel Levinas, *Czas* i to, co *inne* [*Time and the Other*], trans. Jacek Migasiński (Warszawa: KR, 1999), 94.

fully meet the standards of participation in social life. This, in turn, most commonly entails the social exclusion, rejection, or isolation of the poorer part of the population. In the source literature, the term "poverty subculture" is used to describe the poor and their way of life. A man who is located within the range of influence of such subculture, is subject to many psychosocial mechanisms which determine his attitude and behavior.[40]

Poverty improperly dealt with by society may lead to or cause a depersonalization of both the poor and their neighbors. For the former are always exposed to danger of being attached with tags, ostracized, marginalized, stigmatized, and the latter—of missing the chance for personal fulfilment. In order to avoid the threat of depersonalization, then, poverty should be approached not only as a social problem, but also as a valuable lesson of humanity.

THE PROBLEM AND THE MEANING OF MATERIAL POVERTY IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION. THE ETHICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ASPECT

SUMMARY

The author discusses the social and anthropological problem of material poverty from the ethical and pedagogical perspective. The article consists of three sections which respectively concentrate on the following topics: (a) poverty and globalization, (b) ways of helping the needy, and (c) poverty as a chance for personal development. The author concludes that poverty improperly approached by society can lead to a depersonalization of both the poor and those who live with them: the former are attached with tags or marginalized, and the latter miss the chance for personal development. In order to avoid depersonalization, then, poverty should be understood not only as a social problem, but also as a valuable lesson of humanity.

[40] *Ibid.*, 232.

KEYWORDS

material poverty, ethics, pedagogy, society, globalization, poor, needy, person, other, personal development, depersonalization, humanity.

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