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CULTURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF REALISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Modern theoreticians of culture emphasize that the notion of culture is so complex and so diversely used that it is impossible as well as unnecessary to define its basic meaning.¹ The word “culture” is one of the most ambiguous and complex expressions in the English language and its meaning constantly undergoes changes, modifications and dispersion.² Proliferation of senses related to the notion of culture “went so far that the humanists-researchers sometimes seem to be helpless, abandoning completely attempts to put in order the existing chaos and freedom in referring to the notion of culture. Hence, we read the recurring conclusion that ‘culture is everywhere’, that ‘it can be everything and nothing’ . . .”³

If my reasoning is correct, we can and should talk about a basic, source understanding of culture which is the ground for various individual perspectives. It has to be underlined that this is a philosophical understanding, which is not in contradiction to the functioning of different definitions of culture in individual cultural sciences.⁴ If there are different concepts of culture and different cultural sciences, there has to be a source understanding, the principal understanding of culture.⁵ In my deliberations, as defined

¹ Ch. Jenks, *Kultura*, trans. W. Burszta (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 1993), 7.

² See R. Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976).

³ W. J. Burszta, M. Januszkiewicz, *Słowo wstępne: kłopot zwany kulturoznawstwem*, in *Kulturoznawstwo. Dyscyplina bez dyscypliny?*, ed. W. J. Burszta, M. Januszkiewicz (Warszawa: SWPS “Academica,” 2010), 7.

⁴ See M. A. Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze* (Warszawa: “Gutenberg-Print,” 1996), 148.

⁵ See M. A. Krąpiec, P. Jaroszyński, “Kultura,” in *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 6, ed. A. Maryniarczyk (Lublin: PTTA, 2005), 136.

by the scope of the article, I will underline the moments that define this basic, metaphysical understanding of culture as used in realistic philosophy. According to this concept, culture in its most basic feature is rationalization (intellectualization) of nature. The article will focus on the following areas: genetic-exemplarist analysis of cultural works and definition of culture from the perspective of realistic philosophy.

In realistic philosophy, the understanding of culture is not primal or independent so that we have to refer it to more primal philosophical concepts—a general theory of reality. Hence, in the context of analysis of culture the existence of a pluralist world, constituting a multitude of beings, is assumed. We are also within the framework of an objective and realistic theory of cognition, and this influences the understanding of the fundamentals of culture. A second assumption we have to make is the thesis of the existence of a special structure of man who presents himself as a potentialized personality (a concretely existing, unique rational nature), developing slowly but with almost unlimited possibilities of actualization. In this context it ought to be emphasised that the understanding of culture is strictly connected to the understanding of man and his actions. According to a third assumption, when discussing matters related to culture we have to take into account the analogical nature of being which demonstrates itself in the fact that every being is unique, has its own “face” and “there are no rules that strictly, univocally bind its actions even though we find the same essential (but only general) structures in other similar beings.”⁶

A general understanding of the notion of “culture” and the shift in its meaning in the history of societies belong to the history of culture.⁷ Within philosophy the significant question is: “thanks to what” (wherefore) is culture the fruit of the personal life of man as a person?

The Subject of Culture

The term “cultural sciences” is significant only if we assume the existence of a universal category of a so-called “cultural order,”⁸ that is, a rational order. Already ancient thinkers discovered that all rational order, and

⁶ M. A. Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” in M. A. Krąpiec, *Odzyskać świat realny* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1999), 378.

⁷ See A. Kroeber, C. Kluckhohn, *Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

⁸ See F. Znaniecki, *Nauki o kulturze*, trans. J. Szacki (Warszawa: PWN, 1971), 22.

thus culture, originate from man.⁹ In a philosophical explanation of the order or the phenomenon of culture in general we have to go back to its origins—to the traits and acts of man as a person, and so to conscious and voluntary activities. We have to look at all that is called culture and see the principal characteristic occurring in all these phenomena.¹⁰

It appears that “man can be found in all these cultural phenomena as the one who reflects on his thought and the activity originating from it which usually finds its expression in some kind of artefact, namely, cultural artefact.”¹¹ In this context a cultural phenomenon is everything that comes from man. If we conceive man as an *animal rationale*, then the phenomena in which there is a visible moment of interference of man as man, i.e., as rational being, will be regarded as cultural phenomena.¹² Hence, a trait common to all cultural phenomena is that they originate from man as a rational being.¹³

Areas of Culture: A Genetic Analysis

Philosophical analysis of cultural artefacts from a genetic perspective requires us to refer to the findings of Aristotle regarding the triple order of intellectual cognition: theoretical, moral and creative.¹⁴

Cognition is the fundamental human activity, and it leaves its mark on all experiences of a person as a person, on human moral behaviour, religious acts and acts of creative effort. “There can be no human (as human) activities or their artefacts—explains Krąpiec—without cognition guiding the acting,”¹⁵ and therefore there can be no culture. In his intellectual life man can get to know reality, absorb it intellectually and enrich himself by it. If by nature we understand the surrounding world, then we can distinguish the moment in which, as a consequence of the actualization of cognitive powers, we can “intellectually” accept this world, that is, internalize it. Then this world, in a way, is inside us in the Aristotelian mean-

⁹ See M. A. Krąpiec, *Człowiek i kultura* (Lublin: PTTA, 2008), 19; see Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze*, 147.

¹⁰ On the primacy of reason over will in the order of cognition, see S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, cura et studio P. Caramello, vol. 1 (Torino 1963), I, q. 82, a. 3, resp.

¹¹ Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” 380.

¹² In this sense culture means everything that man as a rational and free being adds to the world of nature. Culture—from the commonsense perspective—is a uniquely human way of existence, definitely different from the entire world of nature.

¹³ See Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” 380.

¹⁴ See Krąpiec, *Człowiek i kultura*, 17.

¹⁵ Id., 20.

ing, i.e., in the act of cognition the soul becomes everything it recognises (*anima est quoddammodo omnia*).¹⁶

The first moment of contact with the world is a moment that belongs to purely theoretical cognition. This stage is of clearly informative (receptive) character since consciousness only informs us about things going on in the world around us.¹⁷ Truth is the criterion for this kind of cognitive agreement with the reality. “At the level of purely theoretical cognition—explains Krąpiec—‘getting to know’ means to agree oneself with encountered reality and the principal goal of theoretical cognition is to inform oneself as accurately as possible about what is.”¹⁸ Theoretical cognition in its essence is a selective, aspectual internalization of the content of an analogical being which has different stages. Already in medieval times (St. Thomas of Aquino) it was emphasized that the beginning of a cognitive movement of man was the ability to “read” (*intus-legere, intelligere*) the first principles of reality (*intellectus primorum principiorum*).¹⁹ Then the next stage includes reasoning based on the acquired cognitive contact with reality in various forms characteristic of different sciences.²⁰ Theoretical cognition is the basis for all further variations of human activity.

In addition to informative cognitive order we can also distinguish the realm of intellectual cognition in which man as a person reacts to the theoretically learned reality and in which man is the author of his acts. If the first stage was of a purely cognitive, informative character, it was about cognitive agreement with reality, the stage in question consists in conscious reactions to cognitively absorbed reality and in consciously and voluntarily releasing from ourselves acts of which we are the authors. In the process of releasing the acts from ourselves an important role is played by the reason which shows us which acts we should produce from ourselves in order to achieve a given goal or get closer to it.²¹ Previously recognized good constitutes the criterion for the order of intellectual-practical

¹⁶ See Aristotle, *Tractatus De anima. Graece et latine*, ed., versione latina auxit, comm., illustr. P. Siwek (Roma 1965), 431b–432a.

¹⁷ See Arystoteles, *O duszy*, trans. P. Siwek, in Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. III (Warszawa: PWN, 1992), 429b–430a.

¹⁸ Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” 381.

¹⁹ See S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In II Sent.*, d. 39, q. 3, a. 1, resp.; see S. Thomae Aquinatis, *De ver.*, q. 16, a. 1, resp.

²⁰ See S. Thomae Aquinatis, *De ver.*, q. 15, a. 1, resp.; see S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In de div. nom.*, c. 7, a. 1, 2.

²¹ See M. A. Krąpiec, “Człowiek twórcą kultury,” in *Wiara i życie*, ed. B. Bejze (Warszawa 1985), 105.

acts.²² In this stage we learn not in order to agree with reality but in order to release from ourselves the acts which enable us to achieve the chosen goal of life. This plane sets the area of morality which in principle falls into appropriateness or inappropriateness of chosen acts-means, which enable us to achieve a chosen goal, the choice of goal and means being dependent on recognizing the objective structure of being (ourselves and surrounding reality).²³

The third order of cognition and human action is the so-called craft or creation of new works in extrapsychic material as a result of poetical cognition. Creation is facilitated by a special construction skill called art (Greek *technē*, Roman *ars*). Creative order is different both from the purely theoretical cognition and the sphere of practical-moral cognition. Its otherness demonstrates itself in the fact that I can behave actively and creatively towards the instilled cognitive images. I can divide them and from their elements construct something that was not there, something completely new. In the order of creative cognition cognitive sensations and images constitute the material from which I can create a new construction existing solely in my thoughts and embody it in extrapsychic material. A significant moment of the work of intellect is the construction itself (creation) of new ideas. The criteria for this construction may be beauty, harmony, strangeness, humour, etc.²⁴ An example of such creative construction is the Sphinx, whose elements were taken from the image of a woman and a lion.²⁵

It ought to be underlined that the orders of cognition specified above do not occur in a pure state, completely isolated. In life these three realms of cognition intertwine and condition each other.²⁶ If we separate them it is only in order to understand what culture is. The starting point is, however, always the theoretical-informative cognition, providing cognitive content which may become a factor controlling our behaviour and customs or a

²² See *id.* For broad analysis on this subject, see Krąpiec, *Człowiek i kultura*, 66–181.

²³ See Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” 381.

²⁴ See M. A. Krąpiec, “Byt i piękno,” *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 6:1 (1963): 15–34; see M. A. Krąpiec, “Kultura i wartość,” in M. A. Krąpiec, *Człowiek, kultura, uniwersytet* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1982), 117–123.

²⁵ See Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” 382.

²⁶ Krąpiec emphasizes: “. . . main realms of human action based on cognition and directly or indirectly resulting from cognition do not constitute separate realms; they complement each other because the very bases for division (human condition) do not allow us to distinguish between the mutually exclusive scopes” (*id.*, 109).

material transformed in the process of creative cognition. These three orders of rational human behaviour are permeated by religion, constituting a bond between the human person and the person of the Absolute, which is the focal point of culture.

Relation constituting religion—explains Krąpiec—is both the beginning and synthesis of personal acts of man (cognition and wanting-love, changing into action), as much as he becomes aware of his and the world's existential contingency, he addresses in his personal acts the Transcendent person as the ultimate reason of his entire being. Hence religion, whose object is a personal God, lifts entire human life to a personal level and not “material.”²⁷

Cultural Creativity

If culture means the way of being characteristic of man, then from the perspective of philosophy it is necessary to find the moment in which this process is initiated. Even though we are used to the fact that culture demonstrates itself in human creations it seems that it has to start earlier than that. Before an artefact is created first there has to be personal life in man, including thought, will, images and feelings, so everything that was “detonated” by an object.²⁸ Liberation of human spirit starts along with cognition of the world. The existence of real beings influencing us and our cognitive apparatus is a “detonator” of cognition while the content of exiting things enters us and remains in us as the content of cognition. And here we should look for the source of culture, which is primarily the internalization of the actually existing world performed in our cognition. We become aware of the external world, which upon entering our cognitive apparatus creates our internal cognitive life. Then—in the act of reflection—we may objectify our cognitive perspectives.²⁹ Then, in the reflected cognition, we create ideas, models, plans, that is, all that Plato once called “ideas” and Aristotle—“the exemplary cause” of our human action.³⁰ However, the condition for the objectifying of learned content and making it a model and

²⁷ Krąpiec, *Człowiek i kultura*, 23.

²⁸ See P. Jaroszyński, “M. A. Krąpiec koncepcja filozofii kultury,” in *Promotor kultury klasycznej. Wykłady otwarte imienia Ojca Profesora Mieczysława A. Krąpiec* (Lublin 2011), 28.

²⁹ See M. A. Krąpiec, “Intencjonalny charakter kultury,” in M. A. Krąpiec, *Odzyskać świat realny* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1999), 398.

³⁰ See Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze*, 152.

plan for our behaviour is the primal cognitive contact with the actually existing world and intentional absorption of its content.

At this point we have to emphasise two things: a) the influence of the existence of being; b) grasping of the actual content of being.

The impact of the existence of being on human cognitive apparatus takes place directly³¹ and is signless.³² Therefore, there is no place for doubt or error. This means that man in his cognition is constantly in direct contact with reality,³³ he may incessantly verify whether the further phase of cognition—the presentation of its content in signs—is real or unreal. Direct and signless contact with the existing being in cognition is a significant matter since it is the epistemic *raison d'être* of the cognition itself; it is a super-intelligible moment of the cognition itself.³⁴ It is the “starting point” and final instance of the truthfulness of our cognition, i.e., compliance of the act of indirect cognition with the existing state of things.³⁵

The grasp of the content of things we are getting to know takes place through a transparent idea or notion. This is important for the understanding of the grounds for cultural creation. Man grasps things incompletely, superficially, selectively through his acts of intellectual cognition on which he in a way “hangs” the content of the thing grasped. Objective content of things is grasped through his cognitive acts solely in some traits (e.g., from the actually existing horse he grasps only that it is a four-legged animal that neighs, an Arab breed and with such characteristics). This content gains in him, in his cognitive acts, a new way of existence. This is the human way of existence. The horse grasped cognitively in its aspects already exists in man according to his way of existence. The created concept of a horse is a transparent sign that enables the cognition of the horse. Normally this transparent sign-notion is not the object of our cognition but only an intermediary (lens) enabling us to learn and understand the content of things.³⁶

³¹ It is about the mediation *ex quo, per quod* and *quod*.

³² See M. A. Krąpiec, *Metafizyka. Zarys teorii bytu* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1995), 136.

³³ See É. Gilson, *Byt i istota*, trans. P. Lubicz, J. Nowak (Warsaw: PWN, 1963), 249–250; see also J. Maritain, “Przedświadczone życie intelektu,” in J. Maritain, *Pisma filozoficzne*, trans. J. Fenrychowa (Kraków 1988), 80; J. Maritain, “Intuicja bytu,” in *Pisma Filozoficzne*, 145–161; M. A. Krąpiec, “Analiza punktu wyjścia,” in M. A. Krąpiec, *Byt i istota. Św. Tomasz “De ente et essentia”. Przekład i komentarz* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1994), 95–102.

³⁴ M. A. Krąpiec, “Doświadczenie i metafizyka,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 24 (1976): 14.

³⁵ See Gilson, *Byt i istota*, 269; see also Krąpiec, “Analiza punktu wyjścia,” 95 ff.

³⁶ See Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze*, 153.

Hence our spontaneous cognition is related to the specific existing reality and notions, propositions and reasoning are a transparent mediation (intermediary) that enables our cognitive contact with the real world. In addition, importantly for understanding the sources of culture, it is possible to cognize our cognitive acts both in theoretical cognition and in all other realms of our rational life. This is clearly seen in the context of poetical (creative) cognition where the fact of objectification of our cognition which takes place in the acts of intentional reflection becomes clearly visible. In the acts of reflexive (act-like) cognition we can clearly take as the object of our cognition—our cognitive acts themselves. So as in the theoretical cognition we reflect and objectify our notions in order to get to know their content better; in poetical, creative cognition one more element is added: an objectified notion becomes at the same time a *specimen* modelling our creative actions. When we want to create a tool we objectify our conceptual cognition but in this process of objectification we additionally “construct” our notions so that they become a “specimen”, a “plan” or organizing our creative actions.³⁷

Significant for the understanding of cultural artefacts is precisely this moment of construction of appropriate ideas as specimens for further human acts. These ideas may later be expressed and “materialized” in anything (e.g., feelings, body, nature, etc.). The process has no deductive character where first occurs the construction of an idea and then its embodiment or execution. This construction of an idea often takes place with effort and depends on specific work in specific material.³⁸ The formal factor, expressed in construction of ideas in our creative cognition is an important moment of cultural creativity. The idea is the primal subject of created work.

Intentional content of the “work of art”—explains Krąpiec—suspended in human thought is in an “exemplary” state in comparison

³⁷ See *id.*, 154.

³⁸ “This does not mean—explains Krąpiec—that first we have a ready idea constructed in the smallest detail in the psychological intentional order and then we ‘transfer’ it into the extra-psychic material. You are not a painter if you paint only in your mind and not on canvas or other material . . . Still there is some kind of priority of subjectification of the creative ‘construction’, there is conscious realization of work, and this precisely points to thought as the first subject in which the created work originally becomes realised even though sometimes incompletely, less perfectly than when ‘transferred onto paper’, completed in the non-mental material. Priority of thought in the realm of creativity is unquestioned since every construct derives from thought, having its source in it” (*id.*, 111).

to its other forms. Thus being the exemplary cause of a work, the intentional content itself subjectified in thought constitutes a significant and self-comprehensible state of a “work,” while its other forms, outside thought, are comprehensible only by reference to the thought.³⁹

Reality in which the idea is embodied becomes the cultural artefact⁴⁰ which embodies the idea and is derivative from the intellect to the extent to which it fulfils it.

General Sense of Culture

As mentioned before, culture means all that is derived from man as his human action or creation.⁴¹ Culture in the basic sense is rationalization (intellectualization) of nature.⁴² According to this understanding all creations of nature (nature, man and his natural activities) to the extent to which they are subject to human understanding are manifestations of culture.⁴³ In this understanding culture includes everything that is found in nature as natural and that has been transformed under the direction of the reason.⁴⁴ Hence manifestations of human spirit (led by the reason) and acts and activities caused by the human reason constitute its realm in the broadest meaning.⁴⁵

In all realms of human life integrating the phenomenon of culture as a significant point to understand culture itself is the cognitive moment, the moment of the activity of the reason.⁴⁶ Specifically, it is about cognitive reception of content that takes place when the notion-sign is being created in our cognitive apparatus.⁴⁷ For that reason culture in its strict sense is of a sign character. Intellectualization of nature expressed in the most primitive notion-sign determines the sign character of culture and additionally enriches man with new contents, thus consequently enabling him to transcend

³⁹ Krąpiec, “Człowiek twórcą kultury,” 111.

⁴⁰ See Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze*, 157–162.

⁴¹ See Krąpiec, “Intencjonalny charakter kultury,” 388.

⁴² “Culture in the basic sense is intellectualization . . . of nature in the scope available to man” (Krąpiec, “Kultura i wartość,” 120).

⁴³ See Krąpiec, “Człowiek twórcą kultury,” 104.

⁴⁴ See id.

⁴⁵ See Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze*, 149–150.

⁴⁶ See Krąpiec, “Kultura i wartość,” 121.

⁴⁷ See Krąpiec, *Człowiek w kulturze*, 156.

himself through his acting and creating. Without this first act, without cognition, no personal “reaction” is possible.

Pointing to certain manifestations of culture we will notice that the above understanding includes the so-called object, function and subject culture, depending on what gives in to the creative or processing power of the human intellect: objects of nature processed by the human mind, or the human subject itself as long as it is able to give in permanently or temporarily to human intellect, or finally human activities, most importantly the activities of the intellect, which may continue to rationally improve themselves in various objective directions. The scope of such broad understanding of culture includes also its natural or supernatural character, depending on the additional factors influencing the reason. Whether only those that the mind can notice and verify itself or also those that it accepts under the influence of will and grace.⁴⁸

We can also differentiate the meanings of the notion “culture” on account of more temporary cognitive needs. There can be many differentiations depending on what forms of culture we will be interested in and what aspects of culture we will analyze. Such a perspective will include, with appropriate justification, the notion of “culture” with various adjectives: individual, social, mass culture; culture of different social classes; culture of various realms of human life; national culture, state culture, philosophical, scientific, religious culture; literary and artistic culture, agricultural and industrial culture, etc. All these individual perspectives, functioning for example within cultural studies, assume however its principal understanding. “In certain portions (proportions) they will be included in the distinguished understanding of the notion of culture—and this principal sense is: rationalization or intellectualization of nature.”⁴⁹

Analyzing the possibilities of the occurrence of culture we should point to appropriate states of being enabling its occurrence. Only the acceptance of the thesis that the being is internally complex and plural (pluralism) ensures the conditions necessary to explain the occurrence and development of culture.⁵⁰ Acceptance of the complexity of being allows us to notice the dynamism of being⁵¹ and the possibility of actualization of various elements of being. Also, man as a person has the possibility to

⁴⁸ See Krąpiec, “Intencjonalny charakter kultury,” 390.

⁴⁹ Id.

⁵⁰ See M. A. Krąpiec, “O filozofię kultury,” 384.

⁵¹ Id., 384–385.

develop internally through “intentional absorption” of the world. Development of man and his creativity is the actualization of potentiality of both man and the reality surrounding him. And culture manifests itself wherever actualization directed by reason takes place.

Against the background of various potentialities of nature and of human person appears the possibility of a variety of cultures because we can actualize potentialities in various ways and with the use of various ideas controlling the culture-forming human activity. The actualization of human potentialities usually takes place along three cognitive paths, however; hence in different times and places cultures with a predominance of science, morality, religion or technology appear. The three orders of intellectual cognition include the possibility of various realizations of culture. This results from the potentiality of human nature and unlimited possibilities of constructing the idea-specimen that materializes in cultural artefacts.⁵²

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SUMMARY

The article underlines the moments that define the metaphysical understanding of culture. According to this conception, culture in its most basic meaning is rationalization (intellectualization) of nature. The article is focused on the following areas: genetic-exemplarist analysis of cultural works and definition of culture from the perspective of realistic philosophy.

KEYWORDS: culture, nature, intellectualization, metaphysics, philosophy, realism.

⁵² *Id.*, 386–387.