Artykuły i studia

WOJCIECH PAWLIK

Maria Ossowska's Intellectual Independence in the Context of Independent Ethics

Intellectual independence and ethical independence are highly interconnected attributes. The article analyses the intellectual profile of Maria Ossowska (1896-1974), creator of the scientific discipline of the sociology of morality, in whose personal and academic biography the category of independence (from politics, religion, ideology, and so forth) was one of the central values. This was a result of the cultural and historical determinants shaping the generation of intellectuals moulded in the years between the Wars.

In this article, the author poses a question regarding the possibility of an independent ethics becoming widespread in Polish society today, particularly in the context of the discourse regarding the relations between ethics and religion. The Enlightenment's historical antinomy between the sacred and reason concerned worldview and politics, and for a long time generated tension between the Church as an institution and the secular world. Currently, as a consequence of secularisation processes, the political and social function of the Catholic Church has transformed and been accepted by this institution, but this does not apply to the sphere of moral and axiological changes. The results of interviews conducted with Catholic priests by the article's author and presented here show an interesting process of seeking a balance in the Catholic Church between the conviction of the inseparability of religion and the continuance of culture on the one hand, and on the other hand the assertion that that which is impossible in a systemic dimension ('ethics without God') is possible and frequent when it comes to individual biographies. In general, though, relativism and the proposals of diverse systems of ethics, independent (of religion), which in economically developed societies are the predominant ethical world orientation, are still unacceptable – as sub-categories of a broader worldview – for the Church as an institution.

Keywords: Maria Ossowska, independent ethics, pastoral ethics, the Enlightenment, relativism, post-modernism, the Catholic Church

1. Maria Ossowska: simply an intellectual

I will write here about independence as an intellectual trait in the context of historical experience. Of course, a more or less radical independence has been demanded of science and scholarship in almost every period, but I believe the specificity of Maria Ossowska's historical experience meant that intellectual independence was particularly important for her (Ossowska 1977: 5-20). I will consider three aspects of the historicity of this independence.

The first is the aspect of personality. From the recollections of those who knew Maria Ossowska, as well as from her published correspondence with her husband Stanisław Ossowski, a picture emerges of an exceptional personality, strong and far from ordinary. Practically all of her choices and her entire path through life were characterized by autonomy – and not solely intellectual. While it would be possible to reflect on the exact extent to which she was unique among her contemporaries, we may assume that her personality type was characteristic of the cultural formation in which she lived and worked. At most, it might be added that this was an intellectual formation created mainly by men and for men. In this formation, personal autonomy was an autotelic worth, valued and defended as a virtue in itself and fundamentally defining a person's relations with the outside world. For the present-day generation, that is, for a generation Ossowska called 'people without edges', valuing harmonious relationships with other people, and where fusing with and conforming to one another is frequent, then her type of personality – and perhaps the personality type of that entire generation – now belongs to the past. Nonconformism, or possibly rather the absence of conformism, is not a trait that would best describe the modal personality of our times.

Secondly, intellectual independence as a trait of Maria Ossowska's scholarship is tied to the historicity of the scientific paradigm, or – to use a term coined by Stefan Amsterdamski – a now semi-historical ideal of science. It would be exaggerating to state that the neo-positivistic program of the Lvov-Warsaw School of thought, to which Ossowska was close, lies in ruins today, but it is obvious that this program is no longer so overwhelmingly present in the social sciences. Postmodernist projects, with various types of hermeneutic proposals and 'post-scientific' versions of the humanities and cultural anthropology, are deconstructing the epistemological assumptions that guided Ossowska in the social sciences.

These assumptions are set forth in *The Science of Science*, a keynote article published by Maria Ossowska and Stanisław Ossowski in 1935: 'There is only one scientific culture, absorbing all scientific achievements, wherever and by whomever they are attained. There are no competing scientific cultures; there are no competing sciences as there are competing religions or codes of law. All incongruity between various scientific theories is considered a provisional stage which has to be overcome in this or that direction. Our culture is also becoming universal in the geographic sense; it embraces the globe from pole to pole, penetrates the darkest corners of the jungle on radio waves, reaches the most isolated islands of the Pacific […]. A conflict has arisen on the ground of scientific culture between science and spheres

that have survived in pre-scientific cultures. This conflict is revealed in diverse ways: intellect and the subconscious, rationalism and traditional habits of thought, science and religion. The future shall show whether this conflict is of a transitional character, or whether it is set to constantly characterize our new type of culture'. (Ossowska, Ossowski 1983: 271).

Today, this 'new type of culture' is – some would say unfortunately – now a former type of culture. The assumption that this type of culture is a scientific type in a universal sense is being questioned increasingly often. The phrase 'pre-scientific stage' is more and more often being replaced by the notion of an alter-scientific or post-scientific stage. Scientific programs formulated by postmodernist sociology and anthropology even demand that the notion of 'truth', so valued by both Maria and Stanisław Ossowski, be replaced by the concept of 'narratives', 'interpretations', 'multitude of truths' and 'stories', and so on. The world, including the sphere of cognitive activity, is defined today as 'uncertain', 'fluid' and 'ambiguous'. Contrarily, the epistemological foundation of Ossowska's scholarship involved the solvability of disputes, precision in linguistic definitions, and an aspiration to determine 'unambiguous' truth. This approach gave the persons adopting it a sense that disagreements over the shape of the world could be resolved (with 'non-scientific' issues obviously excluded from these disputes, that is, those of an ethical, religious or worldview nature, etc.). Maria Ossowska wrote much regarding moral relativism, and she wrote about cultural relativism, yet she was a cognitive absolutist. For her, epistemological relativism was a notion characterizing the pre-science or quasi-science phase. Thus it comes as no surprise to us that her belief in the ability to determine what is true or false, not in normative and axiological but in cognitive terms, clearly obliged the scholar to defend 'objective' (and thus legitimate and supra-historical) scientific truth. For Maria Ossowska it was clear: because scientific truth is absolute in character, whoever believes this truth is obliged to defend and convey it. Paradoxically, this manner of reasoning and of understanding the notion of truth – but in a significantly broader sense than the scientific one – is very universal in public life today. I do not want here to multiply examples illustrating what are sometimes very original eruptions of that categorical sense of certainty characterizing many a Polish *homo politicus*. A great deal on this subject may be read in the newspapers, seen on television, and heard in parliamentary debates and the broadcasts of various kinds of investigative committees. This is consonant with – and also a kind of historical paradox – Ossowska's assertion in a radio lecture in 1969 about the 'person we value': 'We need people with strong backbones, an inner fiber that does not sway with every change in the wind. The possession of some kind of hierarchy of

values to which one is attached, and from which one has no intention of easily resigning, determines this inner fiber. Their unyielding defense determines the stance that we call dignity' (Ossowska 1983: 544-545). The axiological appeal of this statement is understandable when the social and historical context in which it was expressed is recalled. And contrarily, it loses its appeal when substituted by other historical experiences and individual cases: the impenitence of the Nazi criminals on trial, former Stalinists entrenched in their views, or Islamic fundamentalists blinded by hatred and fanaticism. They undoubtedly have tough moral backbones, but do we 'value such people'?

Maria Ossowska's scientific and life agenda, based on the virtues of independence and dignity, was elite. It truly is not an agenda for everybody. Furthermore, when taking into account the diversity of historical experiences it would be hard to say that it is universal and defensible in any ideological, worldview, or religious context. The tragedy of twentieth-century historical experience rather requires restricting the universality of this agenda (if only through the cautious yet nevertheless possible and de facto practised introduction of criteria excluding certain content from the axiological spectrum of values and views that are treated on an equal basis in the world of today).

This historical context was something that Maria Ossowska ignored. Her attention was focused mainly on conformism, and she opposed opportunism as a threat. Interestingly, dogmatism, doctrinarianism, and fanaticism were of much less interest to her as stances, perhaps because these unintentional and subconscious forms of 'partiality of thinking' were less connected than intellectual opportunism to the issue of dignity and independence, which was so important to her. It is also possible that the 'sin' of dogmatism and doctrinarianism seemed less important to her because it applies to few, while the 'sin' of conformism tends to apply to most people (which is why intellectuals at least should be free of it).

In a paper dedicated to her tutor, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, she wrote of the scholar's unconditional obligation to defend the truth: 'When faced with the turmoil of history,' she wrote, citing this master, 'you can behave like a barometer's needle, changing as the pressure changes, or you can behave like a magnetic needle, pointing constantly in one direction regardless of the circumstances' (Ossowska 1983: 426). By using this metaphor, Ossowska was criticizing those intellectuals who change their views like flags according to a change in the political circumstances, and – let us add this from ourselves – in intellectual fashions. In actuality, the measure of an intellectual's worth, Ossowska claimed, is whether he or she knows how to defend his

or her views and not yield to 'circumstances'. And once again it has to be said that this statement, though generally valid, has certain limitations. Because what does not yielding to limitations mean? How can succumbing to certain views be separated from the 'valid' adoption of others' truths and the revision – even radical – of one's own views? The example of Polish intellectual life after the war indicates that fortunately not everybody was a 'compass' unwaveringly indicating a constant direction regardless of the circumstances. Fortunately – with the crumbling of the post-war systemic assumptions – many Polish sociologists and philosophers altered their views. In answering Maria Ossowska metaphorically, we could say that after all we do not possess supra-historical knowledge, a meta-tool enabling us to unambiguously differentiate between a compass that indicates a constant direction because it is functioning well and a compass that indicates a constant direction solely because its mechanism has jammed. After all, constant does not mean right. Constancy itself, and likewise the very 'independence' of thinking, does not fully constitute the epistemological value of a judgment. Let us continue with the metaphor Ossowska introduced: if the 'constancy' of the direction indicated is a virtue, then from a cognitive point of view does its change signify an absence of virtue? Apart from the opportunism of the post-war intellectuals (those with the hypersensitivity of a 'barometer'), would it not be possible – at least in certain cases – to speak of their intellectual development, the path they travelled, or their intellectual conversion deserving respect?

To answer such questions would demand a refined analysis of the motives behind their intellectual conduct. Between the 'compass' and the 'barometer', space would certainly be found for more complex and historically complicated trajectories of intellectual biographies.

The third aspect of historicity that I would like to point out is the historicity of the social experience that shaped Maria Ossowska's views. Hers were experiences of ideological pressure, even oppression, linked to the specific type of her religious and political experience.

The historicity of her religious experience applies especially to her pre-war experiences, to life largely dominated by a rigid and dogmatic Church, which still had a few decades to go before its post-conciliar opening, and which explicitly kept moral issues within its domain. Regardless of these specific personal experiences with Polish pre-war parochial Catholicism – experiences we continue to know very little about – Ossowska achieved emancipation from the Church's influence not as from a specific, historical institution, but as an intellectual who liberates herself from the influence of a religious system that she treated just like any other 'external' system, and

thus as a potential threat to her own independence. She did not explicitly assert that religion had to influence a person's intellectual and moral independence but indicated that such influence is possible. 'Faith in the immortality of the soul,' she wrote, quoting Mandeville in her paper on the influence of religion on morality, 'does not influence a person's moral standard any more than the number of the house or street on which one lives' (Ossowska 1983: 449). Although she was free of religious assumptions in terms of her agenda, I do not believe that her specific historical experience of the pre-war Church in Poland was a decisive influence. We might say that it accelerated rather than produced her process of becoming intellectually autonomous. Maria Ossowska was intellectually independent in the fullest sense of this word, and therefore independence from religion was natural for her, just as it was natural for her to take an independent stance in regard to political restrictions, fashions in scholarship, and opinions within her community.

The situation of the social sciences after the war was not conducive to the intellectual and civic independence she advocated. For her, intellectual servility was unacceptable both for reasons of scholarship and in terms of dignity, but in the political context of the People's Republic of Poland the virtue of objectivity required not only intellectual prowess but also civic courage. As Ossowska wrote, the totalitarian system 'is about citizens in constant servility becoming accustomed to lowering the flight of their thoughts […] Being an ordinary, decent person begins to require heroism. And here it's worth quoting Bertolt Brecht, who cursed a world requiring heroes' (Ossowska 2005: 61).

Maria Ossowska realized that independence from religious, worldview, and political assumptions is, on its own, but one of the conditions for fulfilling the calling of a scholar, and in itself does not guarantee achievement of the 'highest flights of one's thoughts'. On the other hand, although she was convinced that such dependence does not automatically restrict a person's intellectual calling, it certainly does when scholarship is party-oriented or religious and subordinate to theses established in advance.

Maria Ossowska lived and worked in a specific period of history, in conditions of powerful moral, religious, and political pressure. In order to be an intellectual, she had to be an extraordinarily independent person – such was the nature of scholarship in Poland at that time. Had she lived her life in today's times, or had she lived in the English society she so loved, then perhaps the motif of independence would not have appeared so strikingly in her biography. She would have been, simply, an intellectual.

2. Independent ethics and the sacred

Maria Ossowska extended her scheme of independence to all areas of life – political, scientific, and intellectual – and to the moral sphere, which was also a focus of her scholarship. She viewed the dependence of morality on religion as being very strong for genetic, psychological, logical, and substantive reasons, and, importantly to her mind, also on account of the fairly widespread conviction in her times that there was a firm connection between a person's religiosity and level of morality (Ossowska 2005: 76-83).

The sociological legitimation of a position is not, however, the same thing as its philosophical legitimation. 'Ought to' does not follow from 'is'.

For several decades in Poland there have been disputes in philosophy and moral theology over independent ethics (Styczeń 1967, 1980; Wojtyła 1967). The essence of these disputes is not whether a descriptive ethics (consisting in the verification and analysis of 'moral facts' as individual experiences or 'social facts') can be independent of philosophical, worldview, or ideological premises, but rather whether ethics, as the system of norms and values that should be binding in social life, can be justified on the basis of immanence. In disagreements over how the concept of independent ethics should be interpreted, it has been understood as an alternative to 'Christian ethics' or as an example of 'secular ethics', situated in opposition to the theoretically broader category of 'religious ethics'.

Independent ethics, as understood by T. Kotarbiński (1957, 1958, 1987) or T. Czeżowski (1949, 1960), means something more, however: autonomy not only in regard to meta-justifications of a religious nature, but also in regard to every meta-premise of a worldview nature (for instance, Marxist ontology). In this sense, the concept – in referring to scientific rationality – was contrasted by its proponents not only to an ethics legitimized by strictly religious metaphysics, but also to those ethical systems that referred to a broad range of justifications of a 'mystical' or 'eschatological' nature, exceeding rational experience although not necessarily operating in religious categories: pre-Marxist, utopian, and revolutionary social movements had such a character, for instance (Świda 1984: 100).

Thus two different questions are discernible in the disagreements of meta-ethicists and theologians of morality in regard to independent ethics. One question is whether it is possible to have an ethics that entirely omits any sort of transcendency and metaphysics (including those of an extra-religious nature), and whose norms and values derive exclusively from social experience, historical processes, and observations of human behaviour, and so forth. The other question is narrower and concerns whether it is possible to have an ethics that is independent from religion, understood as a system of specific practices, rituals, meanings, and symbols.

The cardinal question about whether ethics (or what 'should be') can be grounded in experience, that is, in the epistemology proposed by anthropology, sociology, psychology, and descriptive science, is thus different in nature from the dispute over adopting one or another 'metaphysics of morality'. In the latter the dispute is not over resolving what is moral, but over supplementing it; the disagreement solely concerns – extends to – the various possibilities of justifying what 'should be': whether the basis is to be a revelation of a religious nature, an axiomatic authority of one type or another, or, as Kant preferred, a priori synthetic judgments, derived from reason (Kant 1953, 2007, 2012).

In pragmatic terms, it is difficult to differentiate the various ways of justifying moral norms, because those that are 'religious' and those that are 'transcendental' in the extra-religious sense are not always easy to disentangle (similarly to belief and faith, which in contemporary Catholic theology are not contradictory notions and to which Pope John Paul II devoted the encyclical *Fides et ratio)*.

L. Kołakowski also combines these two questions into one, introducing to an analysis of independent ethics (which he calls 'autonomous ethics') the concept of the sacred, which is broader than the concept of religion and thus of that order that gives sense to human life, confirms and stabilizes the social order and structure, regulates social interactions, and gives everything a supra-natural significance.

Noting with disquiet a 'sacral withering' in the contemporary world, Kołakowski writes that: 'the question […] is whether society can survive and ensure a bearable life for its members if sensitivity to the sacred and the phenomenon of the sacred itself is driven out. Can certain values, whose existence is essential for cultural life itself, survive without roots in the realm of the sacred in the proper sense of the word? […] To such a question there is no answer that can be validated by entirely credible methods. These are rather philosophical speculations' (Kołakowski 1984: 169) .

Rejection of the sacred leads, Kołakowski claims, to the illusion of complete autonomy and to adoption of the Nietzschean chimera that consists in man's conviction that absolute freedom and axiological auto-creation are possible. At the same time, according to Kołakowski, sense can only come from outside – precisely from the sacred – and its negation (as proposed by Sartre, for instance) must lead to existential despair.

The disputes over independent ethics are thus a matter of its various meanings: sometimes over its relation to religion in the narrower sense (the idea of God, the immortality of the soul, salvation and eternal damnation, etc.), at other times about its relation to all justifications that are not subject to Reason.

In mentioning these differences, I am treating them at this point in my article as less important than what is common here: the locating of independent ethics in Weber's logic of the 'disenchantment of the world', and the operation of the category of 'rationality', including in relation to moral phenomena. The opposite of independent ethics in this sense is 'pastoral ethics',[1] which is based on an external authority exercising pastoral control over individuals. Pastoral power, as M. Foucault observed, need not be religious in nature (although it is very strongly connected with Christian tradition); what is most important is that it subjects the individual to close control, entering into that individual's sphere of intimacy and conscience. As a moral being, such an individual becomes entirely dependent on the pastoral authority.

3. Ethics or independent ethics: from the Enlightenment to postmodernism

Historically, independent ethics was the product and heritage of the Enlightenment. From the beginning it was also subject to extreme criticism by the Church and Christian moral theology.

At the time, the Enlightenment's repudiation of the religious universe on which social, political, and moral life rested seemed to be a scandalous negation of those bases of the world order that were known and recognized to be natural and proper.

Echoes of this hostility, or at least scepticism, are perceptible in many contemporary theological texts: "How, in a world of despair, absurdity, and fiction, can the truth be announced and sense be sought?' asks Bishop J. Życiński in a commentary to the encyclical *Fides et ratio*. 'The declarations of the great authorities of the past, inspired by faith in reason and the unprecedented achievements of science, are in exceptional contrast with our experience of a landscape of lived tragedy, with the barracks of Auschwitz and Kolyma, and the genocides of Kampuchea and Rwanda' (Życiński 1998: 9).

Criticism of Enlightenment reason is basically criticism of reasoning that does not refer to God. There would not have been that Evil symbolized by Auschwitz and Kolyma if reason had not usurped for itself the right to 'moral self-determination'. Such criticism, however, does not ask the question that could legitimately be asked: whether the crime of genocide and the tragedies of the twentieth century could not be, and are not, condemned not only from the viewpoint of religiously grounded ethics but also by various kinds of independent ethics. Moreover, if those crimes contrast with the declarations of the Enlightenment authorities of the past, they also contrast

[1] This concept is connected with the formulation 'pastoral power' introduced and characterized by M. Foucault (2000). The author himself did not use the concept.

with the declarations of religious authorities. And if they were committed within the framework of atheist systems and were committed in the 'name of Reason' (although perhaps a more apt description would be 'in the name of Ideology'), it would be impossible not to notice those committed in the past – and at present – within the framework of religious systems in the name of fundamentalist religious premises. The arguments of both sides could be multiplied and mutually opposed, and if any asymmetry appeared, it would mainly be statistical, leading to the assertion that not as many crimes were committed in the twentieth century 'in the name of God' as in the name of ideology.

Perhaps thus the arguments used against 'independent ethics' should rather be directed at various types of areligious 'dependent ethics', based in the non-humanitarian ideologies of communism or Nazism, and so on.

Identifying independent ethics with all other ethical systems of an areligious nature is understandable in eristic categories and for persuasion, but methodologically it has the same sense as identifying religious fanaticism with religiosity. Both procedures can be explained as classes and subclasses of certain phenomena, but not as being identical.

It is worth making these differentiations, not in order to defend religion (this is after all a task for theologians, not sociologists) but to defend Reason – that epistemological and pragmatic category on which European civilization is based, or at least was based until recently.

Two important convictions are increasingly commonly accepted in the contemporary teaching of the Church: 1) Reason and rationality need not be treated in categories of moral and civilizational threat and the etiology of systemic Evil should not be linked with them, and 2) they need not be treated as destructive factors for religious life. Thus although, for example, in the above-mentioned fragment of a commentary to the *Fides et ratio* encyclical, Bishop Życiński criticizes certain drastic consequences of the Enlightenment as a system of thought omitting God, he also writes that 'the Church today must defend rational reflection and many other values that are traditionally counted as belonging to the Enlightenment […] Faith in rationality and a world order was an important contributing factor to the Enlightenment tradition. […] To the leading minds of the Enlightenment era, the world appeared ordered, rational, and internally cohesive. Evidence of this same order was also sought in science, which was to provide truths soothing the rational ambitions of man. "Ethics and geometry are one", was repeated in the books of the French *Encyclopédistes*' (Życiński 1998: 13).

Therefore from whom and what should the tradition of the Enlightenment be protected? From its former opponent and present ally, religion and the Church? The most laconic answer is: from postmodernism.

The historical, Enlightenment antinomy of religion and reason was ideological and political in nature and for a long time generated tension between the Church and secular structures. Presently, as a result of secularization, the political and social function of the Church has changed; however, this process does not involve the sphere of moral-axiological transformations. Relativism, which in economically developed societies is the predominant ethical orientation in regards to the world, is unacceptable to Church institutions as a subcategory of the religious worldview.

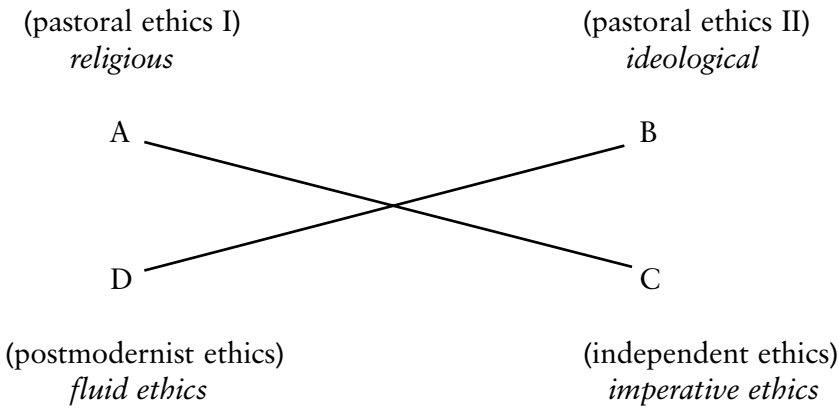
The epistemological pessimism of postmodernism, which questions the existence of inviolable foundations of truth, is therefore in opposition not only to the Church, which stands on grounds of moral absolutism, but also – though with different justifications – to the post-Enlightenment tradition. The Catholic Church invalidates the faith-reason antinomy, treating it as two different but equal 'technologies' of knowing (moral and theological truths), while the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment tradition recognizes the superiority of reasoning as a method of knowing. However, both the Catholic Church and the Enlightenment tradition have the same premise: that 'objective truth' exists.

In the fields of science, religion and morality, the cognitive negationism of postmodernism has led to the destruction of the concept of truth, replacing it with the idea of narration, text, the pluralism of truths and viewpoints, and so forth, and thereby to ethical and epistemological relativism, that is, a picture of the world that conflicts both with the rational and the fideistic 'technology of cognition'.

The independent ethics with which we are dealing in postmodern societies is qualitatively an entirely different phenomenon from the version of independent ethics that emerged as a result of the historical processes of 'disenchanting the world'.

In the post-Enlightenment tradition, ethics became autonomous from the Church and religion but retained the traditional nature of an 'ethical system', which is far removed from contemporary relativism. Postmodern ethics, although independent from religion, does not have an absolutist nature and does not even attempt to be an 'ethical system'; it is situational, based on belief in the situational and relative nature of normative regulations.

The following diagram presents the development of ways of thinking about ethics:



Vertex C of our diagram refers to independent ethics in the sense closest to that adopted in the present text. This is a system of more or less categorical and codified moral values and norms which define the moral sphere of a human being by reference to a rational conscience and which do not refer to religious premises for justification.

Vertex D can be described in categories of normative fluidity, situationism and relativism, and so on, and thus within those parameters of contemporary people's ethicality that are connected with postmodernist culture and modalities. This type of ethicality can also be called independent ethics because, like post-Enlightenment ethics, it does not require adoption of religious premises. However, in opposition to post-Enlightenment ethics, it is by nature so particularized and dynamic that it is qualitatively an entirely different type of moral experience.

Vertex A indicates the position of pastoral ethics in its most traditional sense. This concept encompasses various types of religious ethics (chiefly Christianity in our cultural sphere), in which moral beings, that is, the faithful, are (as M. Foucault put it) 'sheep' led by 'pastors', that is, religiously and ethically competent guides or leaders.

In the broader sense, which Foucault also examines in his texts, the concept of pastoral power signifies every form of intensive ideological or worldview control interfering in individuals' subjectivity and sphere of conscience – including such control by a 'pastor' that is the state. If such an interpretation is adopted, ethical systems based on ideology or worldview, and drawing substance and legitimacy from them, are also systems of 'pastoral ethics', although obviously only in the formal meta-ethical sense, and not in the

sense of the identicalness of the transmitted ethical content. Such a situation is presented in our diagram as vertex B.

Independent ethics can thus be autonomous in regard to pastoral ethics understood both in the narrower sense (religious ethics) and in regard to ideologically grounded ethics. Furthermore, if we ascribe to it such immanent attributes as systemicity and imperativeness, it should also be recognized as a different moral position from the third of the ethical modalities distinguished, that is, from the asystemic, fluid ethics of postmodernity.

The situation is similar with pastoral ethics: if understood in the narrower sense, that is, the religious one, it is located in opposition both to independent ethics in the post-Enlightenment sense and to relativist postmodern ethics. Religious pastoral ethics also remains, obviously, in opposition to various versions of ideological ethics (collectively called here 'pastoral ethics II').

However, it is questionable whether using the term 'pastoral ethics' is justifiable for the latter. It is as justified as forcing ideological systems into the designate of 'independent ethics', if only in terms of assigning definitions *ŕ rebours*. The crimes committed in the name of ideology are a historical, unwanted heritage, which in discourse on the subject of pastoral ethics and independent ethics are treated as ethically problematic – thus in the meta-ethical discourse the various sides ascribe this heritage to one another by means of definitions.

The conceptual distinctions analysed here are thus important not only for theory but equally in the pragmatics of public life. In discussions and critiques, the term 'independent ethics' is used in various contexts and with various meanings.

4. Independent ethics in the eyes of society and Catholic priests

In her well-known text about the dependence of morality on religion, M. Ossowska raised the interesting question of the connection between religiosity and an individual's moral level (Ossowska 1983, 2005). Her question was important enough that Polish sociologists have been verifying her empirical hypotheses for many years.

The findings of contemporary empirical research have provided a sociological answer to some of the questions asked by Ossowska, particularly those concerning the structures for justifying morality. For example, when asked by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in 2014 about justifying morality by religion, scarcely 16% of the respondents answered that only religion can provide grounds for proper moral imperatives (in 2005 the percentage was 24%). The remainder of the respondents declared that they did

not feel the need to ground their morality in religion – their own conscience was sufficient (41%) – or they chose the answer that religion provided grounds for their own moral rules, but that these could be justified without it – 33%. (CBOS 2014: 7).

Empirical research shows that in Polish society belief in the need to ground morality in the sacred (God is the creator of moral law) and in the inseparability of morality and religion is systematically decreasing from year to year. In November 2016, 15% of respondents agreed with the view that 'what is good and what is evil should be determined primarily by God's law' (in 2005, 25%). In 2016, 69% agreed with the opinion that 'what is good and what is evil should primarily be an internal matter for each individual', (46% in 2015), while 11% thought that society should make the determination – 22% in 2005. (CBOS 2017: 3)

The Church is no longer perceived as the sole and legitimate guardian of values. Nevertheless, the fact should be emphasized that even though the Church's actions are criticized, as an institution it is unchangeably gifted with public trust and is referenced by Poles as part of their national and individual identity.

This does not mean, however, that specific moral choices are today somehow unusually diverse and individualized. The change has occurred chiefly in language, in culture, and in the manner of justifying moral choices. Even if the choices are the same, they are perceived as an individual's 'own' decisions, freely and independently taken. Moral subjectivity, which is so important in theology, philosophy, anthropology, normative discourse and social life, is expressed in social practice not so much by a reflective process of normative and axiological innovativeness but more in connection with the socially dominant conviction that people are, and should be, fully autonomous authors of their own choices. This conviction informs individuals' self-perception not only in moral categories, but also as free 'subjects' of consumer behaviours, aesthetic tastes and political opinions, and so on. All these choices are 'free' in the conviction of consumers, audiences and voters, because that is the language in which we present ourselves and our decisions in contemporary times. The idea of our own, free, individual conscience is the idea that became the departure point for Christian personalism, existentialism, the ethics of authenticity, humanist psychology, and many other streams of contemporary thinking about man, but in the practicalities of life the populist reverse of the idea could be that subjectivity becomes banal and is reduced to the simple, subjective feeling of not being subject to external limitations. The surveys conducted by sociologists have unfortunately not provided us with information as to whether the subjective conscience of which the respondents speak should be understood in the religious-personalist

sense, or as the expression of their deep, reflective openness in the spirit of 'aristocratic liberalism' (Król 2005: 62) or rather as a well-assimilated linguistic-cultural pattern by which they describe themselves in surveys. The very fact that they make such a choice at the level of language and self-description is significant, though. In the last twenty years, around 60-70% of respondents have been pointing to their own consciences as the source of direction in resolving their moral problems, and 10% to the teachings of the Catholic Church (Mariański 2014: 153-155). The number of respondents pointing to their own moral autonomy has increased systematically in recent years, while the number of persons referring to the primacy of God's law is decreasing.

The significant importance of individualized conscience as the fundamental authority for making choices and moral behaviours is a strong sign of secularization, individualization, privatization, and the deinstitutionalization of religion. In contemporary society, the individual conscience is becoming an increasingly autonomous authority in the moral sphere; this development reflects individuals' lack of confidence in institutions and emancipation from axio-normative control and institutional paternalism, including of the Church (Kiciński 2010: 173).

Moral independence in regard to religion today in Poland (and Europe) is one of the values that has acquired strong sociological legitimacy in the post-authoritative world (Kiciński 2005, 2008; Halman, Pettersson 1996; Halman 2015). Moreover, although religion is still in fact perceived as a facilitating factor, furthering moral development and the preservation of a high level of moral standards, for a long time now it has not been perceived as a necessary condition.

Godlessness, either open or in practice (by 'neglect') is no longer considered by society to be a synonym of amorality, and vice versa, piety is no longer socially defined as an attribute of people with high moral standards. In the social consciousness, God and sin have been separated from morality, and moral worth from religious virtue.

Unfortunately, Polish sociology does not have information on how these processes are appraised by clerical circles and there is a lack of up-to-date comparative data. The only data comes from 1993-1994, when I asked 28 Catholic priests these questions during interviews about the possible effects of the systemic transformation on the piety of Polish society.

The answers I received give a fairly cohesive picture of how the connection between religion and morality is perceived by priests.

Here are examples of responses:

There are ethics that try to be independent from religion. The basic question arises of what will be its foundation and conditions. From the philosophical viewpoint, the existence of a lasting ethical system without

a transcendental foundation is not possible. On the other hand, in practice we are dealing with so-called secular ethics, to which Adam Mickiewicz gave an answer long ago. I love to read that sentence because it contains a criticism of that attitude of secular humanism that aims to declare values that are basically Christian values, but shorn of God. Namely, 'The fool said: let the sources dry up in the mountains, so long as water runs in my pipes' […] Generally, doubtless in social life rejecting the supernatural foundation will ultimately mean the disintegration of society (priest, age 39).

It is said that a system of independent ethics could be built, but I generally consider that there have to be certain norms based on religious norms [...] We have many experiences in history where people turned away from God, where man set himself in the place of God and at that moment a terrible human degeneration occurred (priest, age 35).

I am an opponent of independent ethics – this formulation and definition. That is an incorrect term. It will be dependent: socialist ethics, secular ethics, now it's called 'independent'. Today Mr. Humer is being tried in court – a person who had been so inculcated with ethical norms that he was ready to do anything for the socialist state. You kill, you torture – a person won't have any value for you, because the person is an enemy of the state. He did that – he lived and behaved – in accordance with that ethic. There won't be a secular ethics. There will be only one ethics – the one related to God (priest, age 32).

The opinion of Catholic priests on the possibility of forming an ethical system without meta-justification in religious categories is unusually unanimous – not only are the priests unable to imagine themselves functioning in such a system, they also have decided views on the destructive and pathological nature of the functioning of such systems. When an interpretive key drawing on Ossowska's above-mentioned text is applied to the priests' answers, it emerges that the respondents have very strong convictions on the subject of the genetic dependence between morality and religion. God is the codifier and law-giver (source) of morality, thus a culture that cuts itself off from God cuts itself off from the possibility of justifying (legitimizing) itself.

There is also belief in a strong substantive dependence: the priests interviewed are strongly convinced that the normativity of societies and cultures that disregard religious premises is different in content from the norms and values of a society that refers to religious ideas. The word 'different' some-

times means 'other' but in the context of the examples given by nearly all the priests it means a worse, degenerate normativity, directed against other human beings or social groups. Nevertheless, like official pronouncements of the Church hierarchy, the priests' responses are based on a significant differentiation that has become clear in the Church's moral discourse, particularly after the Second Vatican Council. This differentiation consists in principlism: in negating 'culture without God' while being tolerant and open to persons who are not believers or who in one way or another demonstrate their religious nonconformity.

Furthermore, this dualism of appraisal appears not as a differentiation in the answers of the various priests but as a duality in the answers of one and the same person.

> *Ethics, the study of human behaviour, of the principles that govern that behaviour, is based on some system of values. Ordinarily it is religion that ensures the criteria that determine this system of values […] In regards to the social system, we have a recent experience of that in connection with communism, which was an attempt to build a world without God. There is no doubt that that attempt ended in fiasco on a global scale, bringing suffering to many people, to entire nations. On the other hand, in the case of the individual, these are difficult matters. That negation of God could vary. It could be a manifestation of some suffering the person is experiencing, of rebellion, but God is patient and waits until the person returns to Him and acknowledges Him as his creator, as the Lord of his life* (priest, age 37).

> *If someone has such an ethics, and does not necessarily have faith in God, that does not at all lead to a moral decline – we have proofs of that in history. Not infrequently nonbelievers are more moral and righteous than so-called believers. On the other hand, in regard to the history of societies that have rejected God, then, as history shows, rather yes.* […] *Without some authority above, sooner or later they become demoralized. This is my intuition. I have the feeling that it will be harder, morally, for a society than for an individual to behave properly without God* (priest, age 32).

In emphasizing this difference, the priests sometimes create interesting 'theories' on the subject of the motivating connections between religion and morality. M. Ossowska, in analysing the relations between these factors, wrote about a psychological dependence, that is, of the emergence of such connections between religious and moral convictions that the presence of the first

strengthens the motivation of the latter, while removal of the first leads to the latter's motivational weakening.

Some of the priests consider that independent ethics is always possible as an individual choice and as a person's own normative habitus, but it is an uneconomical motivational strategy as there is no accompanying support from other norms, justifications, and values, which in implication are more effective.

> *Nonreligious people can be moral in the sense that ethics, as we know, points out good aims to us. Ethics is within us. We have a natural moral law, which is given to every human being: do good, shun evil. For such a person, the law will be a little harder to find; he won't have the authority of God speaking to him. For the believing person, it is easier; there is a God, who speaks to me. But I absolutely believe that a nonreligious person can be a very moral person* (priest, age 33).

> *A human being desires good, but is limited in knowledge. And to a certain degree what appears to us to be the real good may be an illusion of good. A human being needs the help of God, the grace of God, in spite of everything, to reject the illusion of good, to reject the evil. An ethics that is concentrated in specific rules, which say, for example, 'that's bad because it degrades human dignity', is too weak; its arguments are too weak* (priest, age 30).

The interviews show the interesting process of the Catholic Church's search for a balance between its belief in the inseparability of religion and the preservation of culture and assertions that what is systemically impossible ('ethics without God') is possible and frequent at the individual level.

The responses of the priests on the subject of independent ethics are fairly consistent in regard to other ethical questions: for instance, in principle they condemn phenomena and behaviours that are defined in the language of moral theology as sin, but at the same time they show considerable understanding and sympathy for the sinners in the confessional – the evildoers who have come there to confess. In its moral teachings, the Church carefully divides its direct appraisal of individuals from the 'abstract-theoretical' discourse: that is, responses about independent ethics; axio-normative propositions that are different from its own 'metaphysical morality'; phenomena and 'structures of sin'; legal conditions; the culture of relativism; and other 'systemic' phenomena.

In accepting independent ethics as a moral practice that 'from time to time' is viable in individual biographies, the Catholic Church has made a considerable break with the doctrine that prevailed in that institution for many centuries. Importantly, in view of the rapid civilizational changes and the pressures of postmodern culture, this step, which would doubtless once have been considered revolutionary, is today perceived as the Church's adaptation to the changed sociological context in which it is performing its religious mission.

References

CBOS (2014), *Religijność a zasady moralne. Komunikat z badań (Religiosity and Moral Principles. Research Report)*, No. 5/2014/.

CBOS (2017), *Zasady moralne a religia. Komunikat z badań (Moral Principles and Religion. Research Report)*, No. 4/2017.

Czeżowski T. (1949), *Etyka jako nauka empiryczna (Ethics as an Empirical Science)*, "Kwartalnik Filozoficzny", No 18.

Czeżowski T. (1960), *Uwagi o etyce jako nauce empirycznej (Notes on Ethics as an Empirical Science)*, "Studia Filozoficzne", No 5.

Czeżowski T. (1966), *Dwojakie normy (Twofold Norms)*, "Etyka", No 1.

Foucault M. (2000), *„Omnes et Singulatim": Toward a Critique of Political Reason,* in: *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 3*, New York: The New Press, pp. 298-325.

Halman L., Pettersson T. (1996), *Religion and Morality: A Weakened Relationship?*, "Journal of Empirical Theology", Vol. 9, No 2.

Halman L. (2015), *Secularization and changing moral views: European trends in church attendance and views on homosexuality, divorce, abortion, and euthanasia*, "European Sociological Review", Vol. 31, No 5.

Jan Paweł II (1999), *Fides et ratio. Encyklika,* Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy "Znak".

Kant I. (2012), *Krytyka praktycznego rozumu (Kritik der praktischen Vernunft),* trans. J. Gałecki, Warszawa: PWN.

Kant I. (2007), *Metafizyka moralności (Die Metaphysik der Sitten),* trans. E. Nowak, Warszawa: PWN.

Kant I. (1953), *Uzasadnienie metafizyki moralności* (*Grundlage Zur Metaphysik der Sitten),* trans. W. Wartenberg, Warszawa: PWN.

Kiciński K. (2008), *Autonomia moralna – wartość epoki postautorytarnej [w świetle rozważań Stanisława Ossowskiego] (Moral Autonomy – the Value of the Post-Authoritarian Era [in the Light of the Considerations of Stanisław*

Ossowski]), in: *Wartości, postawy i więzi moralne w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie (Values, Attitudes and Moral Bonds in a Changing Society)*, J. Mariański, L. Smyczek (eds.), Kraków: WAM, pp. 377-411.

Kiciński K. (2005), *Świadomość moralna Polaków – główne tendencje* (*Moral Awareness of Poles – Main Trends)*, in: *Kręgi integracji i rodzaje tożsamości: Polska, Europa, świat (Circles of Integration and Types of Identity: Poland, Europe, the World)*, W. Wesołowski, J. Włodarek (eds.), Warszawa: Scholar, pp. 341-358.

Kiciński K. (2010), *Sumienie jako instancja moralna w świetle teorii i badań (Conscience as a Moral Instance in the Light of Theory and Research),* in: *W poszukiwaniu sensu. O religii, moralności i społeczeństwie (In Search of Meaning. On Religion, Morality and Society)*, J. Baniak (ed.), Kraków: ZW Nomos, pp. 165-189.

Kołakowski L. (1984), *Odwet sacrum na kulturze świeckiej (The Revenge of the Sacred on the Secular Culture),* in: *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań (Can the Devil be Saved and 27 Other Sermons)*, London: Aneks.

Kotarbiński T. (1957 [1948]), *O istocie oceny etycznej (On the Essence of Moral Evaluation),* in: *Wybór pism (Selected Papers),* Vol. 1, Warszawa: PWN.

Kotarbiński T. (1987 [1956]), *Zagadnienia etyki niezależnej (Issues of Independent Ethics),* in: *Pisma etyczne (Ethical Works),* Wrocław: Ossolineum, pp. 140-149.

Kotarbiński T. (1958), *Zasady etyki niezależnej (Principles of Independent Ethics),* "Studia Filozoficzne", No 1.

Król M. (2005), *Bezradność liberałów. Myśl liberalna wobec konfliktu i wojny (Helplessness of Liberals. The Liberal Thought on Conflict and War)*, Warszawa: Pruszyński i S-ka.

Mariański J. (2014), *Kontrowersje wokół relacji religii i moralności. Tożsamość czy rozbieżności. Studium socjologiczne* (*Controversies Around the Relationship of Religion and Morality. Identity or Discrepancy. Sociological Study*), Toruń: Adam Marszałek.

Ossowska M. (1983 [1969]), *Człowiek, którego cenimy (The Person We Value)*, in: *O człowieku, moralności i nauce. Miscellanea (On Man, Morality and Science. Miscellanea)* M. Ofierska, M. Smoła (eds.), Warszawa: PWN, pp. 543-546.

Ossowska M. *(1983 [1958]), Czy moralność zależy od religii (Does Morality Depend on Religion),* in: *O człowieku, moralności i nauce. Miscellanea (On Man, Morality and Science. Miscellanea)*, M. Ofierska, M. Smoła (eds.), Warszawa: PWN: pp. 445-452.

Ossowska M. (1977), *Moral Norms in Defence of Independence,* "The Polish Sociological Bulletin", No 3-4, (first published in Polish: Ossowska

M. [1970], *Normy moralne (Moral Norms),* Warszawa: PWN, chapt. IV. *Normy moralne w obronie niezależności,* pp. 76-99).

Ossowska M., Ossowski S. (1983 [1935]), *Nauka o nauce (Science on Science),* in: *O człowieku, moralności i nauce. Miscellanea (On Man, Morality and Science. Miscellanea),* M. Ofierska, M. Smoła (eds.), Warszawa: PWN, pp. 265-272.

Ossowska M. (2005 [1963]), *Socjologia moralności (Sociology of Morality),* Warszawa: Wyd. Naukowe PWN.

Ossowska M. (1983 [1956]), *Tadeusz Kotarbiński*, in: *O człowieku, moralności i nauce. Miscellanea (On Man, Morality and Science. Miscellanea),* M. Ofierska, M. Smoła (eds.), Warszawa: PWN, pp. 423-426.

Styczeń T. (1967), *Etyka czy teologia moralna (Ethics or Moral Theology)*, "Znak", No 159.

Styczeń T. (1980), *Etyka niezależna? (IndependentEthics?),* Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.

Wojtyła K. (1967), *Etyka a teologia moralna (Ethics and Moral Theology),* "Znak", No 159.

Świda H. (1984), *George'a Gurvitcha koncepcja socjologii moralności (George Gurvitch's Idea of Sociology of Morality)*, in: *Socjologia moralności (Sociology of Morality),* K. Kiciński (ed.), Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Życiński J. (1998), *XX lat pontyfikatu – nowa encyklika "Fides et ratio"* (*20 Years of the Pontificate – the New Encyclical „Fides et ratio"*), "Znak", No 521 (10).