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The Disabled Person Suffering – the Attempt to Grasp the Essence Based on the Example of the Paralysed Janusz Świtaj

The philosophy of the disabled person, who sets yourself a goal to explain the problem of the disability in its deepest aspects, bases on the metaphysical analysis of the existence. Its work indicates the fact that there is no philosophical data to determine in this aspect the distinct category of the disabled person. In the face of the elements of the existence, such as the human being, existence and matter, there is no difference between the man able in body and mind and the disabled person. Accordingly, the fortuitousness, as the characteristic feature of the existence, is identical in this aspect and related to the loss, the passing, the deficiency, the defectiveness, and even to their imperfection. These features represent the constant outline of the human experience- able and disabled (Cf W. Chudy 1988, pp.105-109). Among them the most fundamental is existential fortuitousness, which in turn leads the human to suffer.

The suffering is mostly defined *'as a mental condition of the human made by the physical and mental pain, for example caused by the ailing body (illness), the inability to fulfill the aim according to schedule or experiencing the unpleasantness and it is the constant component of the human's life, related to the limitation of the human's structure of its existence'* (the Catholic Encyclopedia 1985, p.476). The suffering accompanies the human for all his life, the expression of the suffering are the sadness, the pain and the tears. The human encounters the failures, the defeat, the unhappiness and the capitulation in his worldly existence.

He suffers, when he is getting old, and the balance of his life has showed the lack of experiences, which have the momentous meaning for the human being. When during his life he has been looking for love, friendship, but he could not find them. When the life has dashed his dreams for his personal career, and because of this he could not multiply his valuable possessions that were on the top of the value hierarchy. Moreover, he suffers when he has lost the primary human values and the series of misadventures has caused the series of the suffering (A.Kozielski 1988, p.241 and next pages)

The human suffers the moment his health begins to fail and his body starts feeling worse and worse, the pain is the most nagging and it usually accompanies the disease. During the disease, the person is miserable, irritated and explosive, and his bad state of health awakes within him anxiety and fear. Even just the doctor's decision to send the ill person to the hospital, and then the hospitalization may be perceived as a very stressful situation and it can cause some negative states, and unpleasant feelings related to suffering. (A. Gretkowski 2003, p.15, 138, and next).

The human, as a reflective subject, suffers after the moment he realizes that from the first moment of the existence, his life is heading for the end unambiguously. It happens particularly when he perceives the death as a dark prophecy that will have something in common in the moment of becoming the reality. But in reality the

death and the suffering are related to life from the beginning and within inside. The fact of the matter that the regular life has been increasing for some time and it has been becoming more vital does not questioned the human's life oriented towards the death and the fact that the death is penetrating it constantly. (G. Simmel 2007, pp. 90-99)

The human suffers when he encounters the close person's death, or he is the fatal car accident's witness. These experiences have been building the deep and strong awareness of existence's fortuitousness, and thereby awake the suffering. This awareness represents one of the realistic aspects of seeing the reality of present man. And fundamentally it constructs the horizon of fortuitousness as an aware human existence which is related to suffering (W. Chudy 1988 p.108)

The disabled person, as everyone, encounters all above mentioned types of suffering. However, in this case they take the new shape. As this person is exposed to suffering in a particular way; he is burdened with his intellectual and physical handicaps that let him know about it in its "in-validas"

The disabled person devotes his life's energy, his thoughts and strength to struggle with his helplessness and in the struggle with his suffering in a much higher extends than the able person. The lack of the reality in the perception, the ability to move or to understand the world, which have resulted from individual type of the disorder or handicap, intensify the perception of the suffering by the disabled person in a exceptional way. It has caused that their suffering comes from two sources. Firstly, it is from the existential fortuitousness that belongs to each human being. Secondly, it comes from being disabled.

This intensified suffering is sometimes so huge that it is the burden which overwhelms the projection abilities of the disabled person. Then he concentrates 'only' on overcoming the matter resistance. His suffering overwhelms the sense of living and it often reduces the personal human actions to self-preservation impulses. (W. Chudy 1988 p.110-112)

For this reason, the media informs us about the pleading requests of the disabled people, who demand euthanasia; they are their response to the unbearable suffering they have experienced. The request for the euthanasia, understood for them as a suicide on their request is a result of overlaying suffering: existential belonging to each personal existence and the one ascribed as the result of disability. The suffering, they struggle with, has caused that they only watch for their "happiness" only in their death.

The example that illustrates such behavior is the life of the paralyzed for a dozen years Janusz Świtaj, who asked the court to disconnect him from the device which has kept him alive, and this signifies the request for euthanasia.

Janusz Świtaj sustained a spine injury during the motorbike accident. He is paralyzed from the neck down, and his breathing is supported by the respirator- there is no chance that the state of his health will improve. The man lives with his parents. They have to shoulder the burden of their paralyzed son. Świtaj is afraid that if one of his parents dies, the second will not be able to cope with all these duties. [...] When he was asked about the pain he said "I am having in myself the pain of impotence, the pain of trouble for the immediate family, the pain of despair and discouragement [...] Maybe in Poland I am the only person in such a position and at the same time having fully intellectual power. I deserve the proper respect and the right to choose" For the first time just after

his motorbike accident the man asked the anesthetist, his parents and everyone who visited him at the hospital for the euthanasia [...]

In 2006 he sent a letter to the Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz, National Health Found (NFZ) and the spokesperson of the patient's rights [...] to the district court in Jastrzębie (www.dziennik.pl)

It is not the only one case, but it is rather the top of the iceberg. There are much more such people who think about the suicidal death, as Janusz Świtaj. On Tuesday September 2nd 2008 (while I was writing this article) the TV news and the papers informed us about another request for the euthanasia. The paralyzed man Hieronim Sadłowski from Kuszew near Wągrowiec said that 'his life is only a horrible nightmare. I do not want to suffer any more in my own bed (www.wiara.pl quoted after: Głos Wielkopolski)

The disabled person gives the reflection of the experience of his suffering as a deep reflection of the sense of his life. The given examples show that the issue about the sense of life crystallizes inevitably while it encounters the phenomenon of the death: *my life has ended, I do not want to live any more, and I suffer so I want to die* (Cf. K. Tarnowski 2007, p.40 and n.) Taking any actions, about these people, will not stop their suffering and it will not stop making them forget about their unhappiness. It is such phenomenon, that it is closely related to their fate and they are not able to break free of it. Certainly, every human being-also the disabled one, should strive for happiness by making some effort to reach it, he is appointed for it by nature. However, the ability to happiness is given to him, contrary to "the ability to ease the suffering, this is the ability which each person has to acquire, he has to learn the suffering (V. Frankl 1970, p.71)

For this reason the disabled people, in this case paralyzed and bedridden, have to learn how to deal with suffering, how to suffer with dignity, and affirm this state to regain at least partially the sense "justifying" their lives. The disabled people ought to be supported in their effort by the people whom their fate is not foreign for, by the people who see not only the disabled body but also their spirituality- unfortunately often underestimated and trivialized.

Supporting the struggles about the spiritual content of life, putting it on the right direction, it lets the disabled suffering person give the meaning of life. When it is impossible to avoid the suffering, the person ought to try to master it, bring it under control, utilize it and thanks to it sanctify his life. (P.Teilhard de Chardin 2001, p. 40,48).

That is why the suffering needs working on their own with its internal self-control, creating yourself to acquire the ability to relieve the suffering. The human's suffering, understood as some kind of achievement, needs directing to an aim. Moreover, only the suffering combined with any intention will stop being the suffering. For this reason, the real suffering means not only to achieve something but also to grow, mature and to grow rich. In suffering the point is not only the bravery, the courage but also about accepting and affirming it. The point is sacrificing the suffering for something or someone. The suffering that makes sense can not be an end in itself. It matters when it makes sense, so nothing else as sanctifying the suffering by the offering. Then the suffering bursts with the "happiness".

(Cf. V. Frankl 1970, p.71, pp. 75-80)

That is why the disabled person should take care of its spirituality in a particular way. Where the life is especially saturated with the values at the high level, it can be said about the spiritual life. Through spirituality,

the person limited by his disability may have an access to 'the real life' comparing to it, the rest is only the preparation or the symbol.

Although, above mentioned deliberations are valid, they may be verified just in practice. In the case of disability, the disabled person experiences the specter of the defeat. It has different faces and different aspects: it is related to tangling of the life's plans, inability of overcoming your own weaknesses and finally to the specter of the death.

In a situation like this, the life gives particular challenges for the freedom of the disabled person existence. It faces the real possibility of the despair that can grow to the total negation, the total "no" that will be ended in physical or spiritual suicide. Also it can look for the real counterbalance to something that will overcome it. At the time the particularly strong challenge appears, to find, as the alternative for the despair 'the right of the life and the hope'.

The affirmation of life is at stake that is understood as a regaining of the sense of its meaning. The situation of losing the meaning of life is the phenomenon very individual and related to the individual matter of its experiences. That is why overcoming of despair is the individual history to muster the energy 'accepting' the more or less tragic facts by finding and giving the sense to facts.

It is not an easy task. It requires from the disabled and suffering person crossing his own horizon of individuality and particularity to what the humanity builds. The individual understanding of the sense of life changes by itself in a "common". Regaining again the sense of life is possible only on the way of transcendence towards its own particularity. "Forgetting" about its own unhappiness and being for the others, it gives them the active help- 'love' by realizing different human positive potencies, even if it needs overcoming existing difficulties. While talking about the disabled person, in the face of his or her suffering, telling not only about bringing up-to-date his or her individual possibilities, but about individual bringing up-to-date the society, about the saving of its society. (Cf. K.Tarnowski 2007, pp 30-42).

Janusz Świtaj has succeeded. His desperate "act of despair has become the turning point in his life. 32 - year-old man in that time became a hero of the media day by day. [...] He has gained many friends, too. Every day he received on his mailbox thousands of emails from people touched by his fate. Anna Dymna has also contacted with him and she has offered him a part time job at her "Despite everything" Foundation. [...] Now, a year later, for some hours a day Janusz searches on the Internet people who need some help. He finds them in the strangest places, the towns at the end of Poland, the places where we could never get there. He is great; we have to pull him away from his work. We have a great hope in him for the following years. His eyes and moreover his voice are very valuable for the foundation"-says Maja Jaworska vice president "Despite everything" Foundation. In her opinion the work has changed Janusz Świtaj a lot. "When I met him, he just wanted to take from the world. He thought that he deserved everything. Now he does not think only about himself, he wants to help the people under his charge. These are his priorities. And he is still telling, that he is lucky and he would like to give this happiness to another people-says Jaworska (www.dziennik.pl)

"The spark of hope has appeared in my life"

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