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Józef Tischner's early thought as phenomenological axiology

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Abstract
Józef Tischner, a Polish twentieth century priest and philosopher, is mostly known for his ideas relating to the theme of solidarity, as well as for his original 'philosophy of drama'. This article examines selected aspects of his early philosophy, without which those two major contributions cannot be properly understood. I begin by a brief synopsis of three thinkers which have exerted major influence on Tischner – Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and Roman Ingarden. I then proceed to recount Tischner's own early philosophy as an investigation of human self-awareness, showing how several ideas (such as 'solidarization') contribute to Tischner's later thought. Finally, I offer a brief critical remark to Tischner's work – namely, whether it is possible to argue for an ultimately axiological constitution of self-awareness, without taking a stance on the question related to the nature and existence of values.

Keywords Józef Tischner · Edmund Husserl · Roman Ingarden · Axiology · Consciousness · 'Axiological I'

Introduction

Józef Tischner (born in 1931, died in 2000), a priest, philosopher and theologian, was one of the most prolific and influential Polish political and religious thinkers of the twentieth century. Both in his homeland and abroad, Tischner is most recognized as a political theorist and activist (Wieczorek 2019). His role as the unofficial 'chaplain' of the 'Solidarity' movement (*Solidarność*), made him into a true public intellectual in the 1980's and 1990's. As a thinker, Tischner was especially committed to a critique of Marxism-Leninism - the state-sanctioned philosophy of the Polish communist regime; and Thomism - still prevalent in most Polish religious thought and education of his age (Tischner 1970, pp. 1–20; Tischner 2011, pp. 223–267). As an alternative, he proposed a social order based on human solidarity, inspired largely by

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modern Roman Catholic social teaching, twentieth century phenomenological 'ethics of values', and dialogical philosophy. His philosophical and religious thought, moreover, centred on the category of 'drama' as encompassing human existence in relations with other humans and with God.

My intention in this article is to focus on Tischner's early thought, particularly on his doctoral dissertation, his 'habilitation' work, and one of his famous early essays – the 'Axiological Pieces' (*Impresje aksjologiczne*). Unimpressed by the ossified neo-Scholastic paradigm of teaching philosophy and theology in the Krakow seminary, Tischner embarked with much more curiosity onto studying existentialism, phenomenology, and the novel movement of 'transcendental Thomism'. Between 1956 and 1963, he studied at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, where he successfully defended a doctoral thesis titled *The Transcendental 'I' in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, under the supervision of renowned Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden. At roughly the same time, Tischner began to publish articles in important journals directed to 'Catholic intelligentsia', such as *Znak*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and *Więź*. In the late 1960's, Tischner was allowed to travel to Leuven, Belgium, to conduct further research at the Husserl archives. Confrontations with the thought of Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Emmanuel Levinas which were enabled in Leuven bore fruit till the end of Tischner's life. In 1972, Tischner successfully obtained a 'habilitation' (a principal postdoctoral degree in Poland) on the basis of a study called *Phenomenology of Egotic Consciousness* (Jagiełło 2020, pp. 15–19). Since in both works Tischner did not make any reference to Marxism, which was a requirement for most advanced academic dissertations in the humanities, he had to earn the habilitation in the Academy of Catholic Theology instead of the Jagiellonian, and struggled with its publication. In the end, both works were only made available in full to a broader readership in 2006 (Tischner 2006b, pp. VII–IX).

There are several important reasons why Tischner's early philosophy should not be treated as another obscure and unimportant prelude to a thinker's mature insights. First are the historical – it is in those works that Tischner develops notions such as 'egotic solidarization', or 'axiological I', which are indispensable for a genealogy of his later philosophy of drama and inquiries into the meaning of solidarity. Tischner's social thought has recently again come to attention of Anglophone scholarship (see for example Williams 2024), and his seminal philosophical contribution, *The Philosophy of Drama*, has been published in an English translation in 2024 (Tischner 2024). Hence, this paper aims at introducing in the English language those early, more academic of Tischner's works, without which it is impossible to properly understand his later thought (Wesołowska 2012b, pp. 9–26). Furthermore, in Poland itself, Tischner is counted among the most prominent representatives of the Polish school of phenomenology, comprising, among others, of Ingarden, and Karol Wojtyła, the later pope John Paul II.[1] Tischner, however, is certainly the most understudied of the three, especially with respect to the details of his axiological articulation of subjectivity. Secondly, *Phenomenology of Egotic Consciousness* and *Axiological Impressions* in

[1]The choice of the three figures is of course to some degree arbitrary – for example, Husserl's thought has been critically approached in the early twentieth century by prominent representatives of the Polish Lvov-Warsaw school of philosophy, such as Jan Łukasiewicz. See Sadzik in Mrugalski et al. 2023, pp. 340–356; Eldridge and Płotka 2020.

particular merit interest on their own terms because of their philosophical import to debates about phenomenology. Although not as highly original with respect to his main philosophical inspirations as some Polish commentators sometimes presume (see Wesołowska 2012a), Tischner's ideas about the 'Axiological I' are an important contribution in a broader movement within the phenomenological tradition to conceive of a value-centred and value-oriented anthropology.

In this article, therefore, I aim to lay out the context in which Tischner's early philosophy operates, trace his argument for a necessary 'axiological I', and offer a critical remark as to the philosophical side of this argument. In part I, I describe the relations between Tischner and three thinkers who have inspired his early thought most – Husserl, Ingarden, and Max Scheler. I am not concerned with determining the precise originality of Tischner's ideas, but rather in drawing attention to how several of them have important precedence in the way in which those three thinkers conceive of subjectivity and value. In part II, I proceed to examine Tischner's initial critique of Husserl, which claims that Husserl does not give enough appreciation to the significance of the possessive reflexivity of the subject. Tischner's argument, therefore, is that there is a possibility of investigating a new 'regional ontology' of how does the subject's 'ownness' manifest itself to that very subject. I shall subsequently give a brief taxonomy of the various types of the 'I' Tischner later develops (somatic 'I', gnoseological 'I', personal 'I'), and how within all those determinations of subjectivity there is an underlying functionality of the axiological 'I'. In part III, I will attempt to tackle Tischner on his own terms, and point to the inherent vagueness with which he treats the problem of the nature of value, and how a comprehensive picture of an axiological subject has to, like in Scheler and some other axiologists, include an account of *inter*subjectivity.

Part I – Elements of Tischner's intellectual context

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938)

Tischner's early thought is of course deeply indebted to the founder of phenomenology. Although Tischner was able to acquaint himself both with Husserl's published works and his unpublished manuscripts in Leuven, the scope of Husserl's thought which he appropriates seems to be only partial. In Tischner's early studies on consciousness, he claims that phenomenology is the best method to achieve his results mostly because of Husserl's critical stance towards psychology (Tischner 2006b, p. 137). A significant part of Husserl's earlier project was to argue that phenomenology, as a study of how phenomena are constituted in, and conditioned by consciousness, should be starkly distinguished from psychology. The latter science has merit in and of itself, but only works on the basis of a more original condition, namely that there is a directedness within consciousness towards its objects. Consciousness therefore is a *potential* towards appropriating phenomena temporally, but simultaneously is also the *activity* of an intentional directedness. It is a supreme unifier of all thoughts which pass through it in the temporal stream. As is well known, there is no consciousness for Husserl without continuously being actually directed onto an object, of being a

consciousness *of* something. This directedness (intentionality) cannot be reduced to a psychological explanation of conscious acts, because psychology cannot describe the very original relation which exists between intending consciousness and its object. 'The treatment of consciousness as intentional', writes Klaus Held, 'no longer permits the objectivity subsisting in its own right and standing over against the activities of consciousness to be dissolved psychologically into these activities because the character of the act is determined precisely by this standing-over-against' (2003, p. 14). This conclusion is important for Tischner in demarcating his study of human self-awareness from simply searching for neuro-psychological laws which determine behaviours and thoughts.

A second important theme in Husserl which Tischner picked up was the former's broad philosophy of conscious subjectivity (I should note, however, that Tischner seemed to focus mostly only on a restricted view of Husserl's *ego*, chiefly from *Ideas I*). The subject for Husserl (as Tischner interprets him) is associated with a consciousness through which a stream of experiences passes in time (Husserl 1983, pp. 51–52; Husserl 1991, Sect. 38). One important result of this approach is that the transcendental *ego* gains the status of certainty as to its existence – it is 'apodictic'. This means that it is 'unimaginable that it could be otherwise' than that the *ego* is existing and present (Husserl 1999, Sect. 6 and 8; Husserl 1965, p. 90). Unlike every other object of experience, Tischner assumes that the *ego*-consciousness cannot be bracketed out through a phenomenological suspension (*epoché*), because it is always present in the very activity of bracketing out, and accompanies all possible intentions (Husserl 1983, Sect. 56, 80). We cannot bracket out the question of the structure of *ego*-consciousness, because that would leave unexplained the necessary presence of the unified subject in any possible intentionality. We can come to know of this apodicticity of the *ego* primarily through a reflective mode of inquiry – that is, what Husserl calls an 'immanent perception' (Husserl 1983, Sect. 38–46, Ströcker 1993, pp. 84–89). In other words, the outcome of the act of self-reflection has to be trusted because criticizing the veritability of reflection is reflection itself – so denying the validity of reflection of the subject on themselves is denying the validity of the premises of the critique. As Tischner notes: 'If one states that they doubt the epistemological value of reflection, than they get to know about their doubt precisely thanks to reflection' (Tischner 2006b, p. 48).[2]

These are all, of course, very cursory readings of Husserl which leave unattended the pluriform conception he had of transcendental subjectivity. Tischner, however, required those basic assumptions of phenomenological inquiry to establish his own project as an examination of how the necessarily existing ego *manifests itself to itself in an original manner*. For such an endeavour, he was also inspired by one last element of Husserl's published project – that is, the capacity to determine phenomenological essence. He argues that skepticism, which denies philosophers the capacity to know essences of things, artificially presupposes the absoluteness of the world as its very starting point for doubt (i.e., that the existence of something must be presupposed in order to be doubted, see Bernet et al. 1993, p. 75). Husserl, on the other hand,

[2] All translations from Tischner's works are mine, unless stated otherwise, or when reference is made to an existing translation of Tischner.

suspends judgement on the very idea of whether the world exists or not, and whether there is in it some ultimate ground or truth, taken in the sense of classical metaphysics. The phenomenological outlook allows, at least in theory, to approach the givenness of phenomena to consciousness in a radically unbiased way. By examining how *particular* phenomena give themselves, the phenomenologist can then determine the *universal* conditions of possibility for their appearance (in construing that process of abstraction, Husserl was certainly inspired by his education as a mathematician, see Bernet et al. 1993, pp. 79–80). A derivation of those conditions, however, is far from a reductionist exercise in empirical science (chiefly psychology). Natural science can give us explanations and ultimate conditions with respect to how the world manifests itself factually, and Husserl never denies this capacity (see Husserl 1980). But transcendental phenomenology deals with something qualitatively different – namely 'the nature of and the essential correlations among conscious experiences, their contents, and their objects' (Hopp 2020, p. 246). This capacity of phenomenology is important for Tischner, because it allows for an *essential* determination of various aspects of the 'I', i.e. various modes in which we are self-conscious (Tischner 2006b, pp. 143–145). Even more importantly, it also enables Tischner's contestable move aimed to single out the *axiological* aspect of 'I-ness' which underlies and conditions all others.

Max Scheler (1874–1928)

Husserl himself, mostly in his unpublished manuscripts, wrote extensively on how phenomenological analysis can relate to axiology, and even at times more explicitly on how intentionality is connected with valuation (see Husserl 2020, 1988; also Hobbs 2022, pp. 71–81). Tischner, however, seems to be largely ignorant of those writings (or at least does not use them much in his early work), and instead turns to Scheler as his main inspiration for axiological direction in phenomenology. This is understandable given the popularity of ethical personalism generally in Polish Catholic circles at that time, finding its utmost manifestation in Wojtyła's habilitation thesis on Scheler called *Osoba i czyn* (Wojtyła 1969; trans. as *Acting Person*, 1979). Scheler, in his magisterial *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* (1973), pushed phenomenology into the direction of an elaborate interaction with ethics. Scheler's main interlocutor is Immanuel Kant, who has, according to him, constructed merely a 'formal' ethical system. In short, Kant's ethics prescribed duty on the subject based on *how* the moral law emerged as normative, but did not take into account at all *what* happens in the very act of ethical judgement which may give a ground for its normativity. The consequence is that 'Kant's procedures in ethics acquire a purely constructivistic character' (ibid., p. 47) – he considers his moral law to be *a priori* binding for 'autonomous reason', but that stands in contradiction with the fact that it is this reason which derives and creates moral law. Humans are therefore both lawmakers and bound by law *a priori*.

Scheler's project, on the other hand, aims at such an account of ethics which redefines apriorism precisely to its phenomenological sense – as an essence of value in how it is embraced *materially* by the ethical subject. Of particular importance to Tischner is Scheler's idea that this new *a priori* 'is the characteristic of units of essences (*Wesenheiten*) that are the given in direct intuitions of the intentional correlates of feelings' (Gasché 2010, p. 117). Put differently, the ultimate basis of ethics

is not a prescriptive formal system, but rather regularities and conditions for how human subjects directly intuit values in their immediate feeling, even *before* the thematized moment of rational deliberation steps in. This arrangement also plays an important critical role, as 'an ethics based in part on the experience of specific contents of values, that is, on "value-phenomena" indissolubly knotted in acts of feeling, must question moral imperatives and definitions of the good as they have appeared in the history of ethics' (Frings 1997, p. 22). This foundation of ethics in the emotive and pre-conscious operation of 'preference' (Scheler 1973, pp. 25–26, 43, 88–89) for higher values over lower ones is a crucial inspiration for Tischner insofar as he conceives of the 'axiological I' as pre-consciously engaged in value-preferences and, more importantly, in conceiving of itself as a value to itself.

Apart from his non-formal axiology, Scheler is also significant to Tischner with respect to his idea of personhood and intersubjectivity. Again *contra* Kant, Scheler did not conceive of subjectivity predominantly through the lens of a transcendental *ego*, but rather through the language of personhood as constituted *through* and *in* its acts (1973, p. 383). Our personhood is not a transcendental structure which would be a 'thought thing behind and outside of what is immediately experienced' (ibid., p. 371). Persons exist, rather, as 'the immediately experienced *unity* of *experiencing*' (ibid.). In that sense, to be a person means not to be a unitive receptacle for experiences, nor merely an ego-consciousness which is reduced to a temporal stream, but a unity of acts constituting intentionality itself. A person is never an abstraction, but rather, as Manfred Frings writes, a concrete instance in which 'the person suffuses every act with its uniquely individual traits and, reciprocally, every act is suffused by the individual person' (1997, p. 43). Moreover, although persons for Scheler exist as particular instances which are irreducible to a totality, they cannot be conceived otherwise than as implicitly referred to a communal aspect of their existence. Even the sheer experience of alienation, for Scheler, requires a prior self-understanding as an individual within a web of interconnectedness, an '*intuited a priori of communality*' (ibid., p. 83). In that way, Scheler attempts to tackle the problem, with which Husserl himself struggled greatly, of the manner in which it is possible for a single centre of consciousness to reach the certainty that other 'egos' really exist. Rather than begin with the singular ego and trace a direction towards establishing intersubjectivity, Scheler commits to a reversal of order. For him, the assumption should not be that of an original nature of thinking ego, but rather of a collective from which this ego, as person, differentiates (or individualizes) themselves. If we conceive of persons as unities of acts which become themselves *in* the execution of those acts, then we have to presuppose an environment, an intersubjectivity within which those acts can be executed. The person is first as a general unity of acts, and only subsequently can this unity be divided into 'collective' and 'individual' person (1973, p. 522; see Leonardy 1976, pp. 236–237). We only single ourselves out, so to say, from a 'total effective activity of the [intersubjective] sphere' (1973, p. 519), when we start thinking about ourselves as sovereign poles of experience (which for Scheler actually occurs at a certain stage in human psychological development).

It is in this context of a primordial 'collective person' that we can understand Scheler's idea of 'solidarity' – a further inspiration for much of Tischner's early and later work in philosophy and political theory. For Scheler, one of the chief characteristics of the 'collective person' is what he calls '*unrepresentable solidarity*' (1973,

p. 534) – such an arrangement of the group in which humans do not feel responsibility for the well-being of others by virtue of their particular social function, but rather purely owing to their nature as conscience-bearing individual persons. It is in the whole of the mutually supportive group that every individual member recognizes themselves, but it is also that individual person which is conscious of their responsibility for the well-being of *all* other members for no other reason than their irreducible and particular personal dignity. Heinz Leonardy has argued that solidarity is the very 'crowning' (*Bekrönung*) of Scheler's entire personalistic philosophy (Leonardy 1976, p. 233). As I will show, in his early work Tischner does not yet appropriate fully all the resonances of Scheler's social theory, nevertheless those doctrines are vital to understand the sources of Tischner's subsequent preoccupation with both solidarity *and* 'Solidarity' as theoretical and practical notions, respectively.

Roman Ingarden (1893–1970)

Ingarden, the foremost of Polish phenomenologists, has exerted a decisive influence on Tischner, in particular on the shape of his early philosophy. As has been mentioned, Ingarden was Tischner's doctoral supervisor. Tischner was acquainted with most of his works, and attended his significant lectures on ethics and aesthetics throughout the 1960's. There are, in my view, two main inspirations that Tischner owes to his 'Master' (as he would call him) which merit elucidation.

The first was what arguably constituted the single most vital interest of Ingarden throughout the entirety of his career – that is, the defence of realism in the face of what he saw as an unjustified idealist orientation inherent in Husserl's construal of the phenomenological project. Since the commencement of Husserl's idealist turn in *Ideas I*, he has, in Ingarden's estimation, gradually advanced further and further into a certain form of 'a radical, all-encompassing transcendental idealism' symptomatic of his later works in the 1930's (Ingarden 2013, p. 21, original 1987). But it cannot be the case, argues Ingarden, that the true nature of reality is encapsulated in a knowing consciousness and achievable through specifically approaching the contents of this consciousness. Rather, an examination of this 'constitutive activity of consciousness' can only be undertaken subsequently to 'the completion of a preliminary ontological examination of the object whose constitution is to be analysed' (Mitsecherling 1997, p. 83). In other words, Ingarden's aim is to prove that a conscious subject always exists in a certain relation with an object of knowledge *before* that subject even starts analysing the contents of consciousness in the first place. We exist in a particular mode of ontological relation with the world *as a condition* of being able to perform the phenomenological reduction itself. A useful example of Ingarden's thinking concerning realism is contained in his arguably most well-known work called *The Literary Work of Art* (1979). He demonstrates the insufficiency of a purely idealist position through a detailed examination of what it means for a work of art to exist at all. Ingarden sought to demonstrate the difference between intentionality and objectivity through demarcating fictional works as 'examples of purely intentional objects', and non-fictional works as 'instances of real entities' (Ingarden 2013, pp. 20–21). Husserlian absolute ontological primacy of consciousness cannot account fully for that difference, since on the conditions of this idealism we cannot

certainly and qualitatively distinguish between fiction and reality 'out there'. Yet at the very basis of our artistic creativity there is a capacity to refer to an ultimate and external criterion as to what is counted as factual, and what is counted as fictional – precisely a really existing external world independent of intentional consciousness.

As one of the most well-known and prominent students of Ingarden, Tischner did not only strive to preserve his legacy, but to critically approach it. In Tischner's view, Ingarden's ingenious argument about the necessary correlation between subject and object is at times a correct critique of Husserl's undue absolutization of pure consciousness. It is not always *necessary*, however, that the subject-object relation exists for the phenomenologist. Ingarden's excessive focus on a passive reception by the subject of the object's impressions obscured, for Tischner, phenomenology's fundamental conviction regarding how our consciousness has a capacity to constitute meaning within itself. It is not the case that we simply receive the *datum* of the object, but rather that our consciousness is actively directed to it in order for the object itself *and* its meaning *and* its condition of possibility to transpire. 'Accepting the transcendental method', therefore, 'is not in any way connected with accepting transcendental idealism' (Tischner 1971, p. 48). What Tischner means by this critique is that one can perfectly well accept the phenomenological method, but perform it without committing oneself metaphysically either to realism or to idealism with respect to the question of the world's external existence (Serafin 2011b, pp. 202–205). Such a claim has an important consequence for Tischner, since it allows him to leave Ingarden's meticulous analysis of ontological objectivity, and focus instead on a phenomenology of internal modes of self-awareness themselves (see Serafin 2011a, pp. 200–208).

The other predominant influence which Ingarden exerted on Tischner's early philosophy were his axiological considerations. In texts which have been collected under the English translation *Man and Value* (1983), Ingarden concerns himself with applying his general defence of realism to the problem of values and their existence. As part of the essay *On Responsibility. Its Ontic Foundations*, Ingarden sets off to argue that values have to have some sort of real existence given the factual reality of responsibility. Taking the phenomenological standpoint, it is to a large degree obvious that responsibility exists and is exercised in one way or the other. Therefore, in examining the conditions of possibility for 'responsibility' to exist in general, we have to assert that 'various positive and negative values are bound up essentially with responsibility and with the demands of reparation and deliverance from responsibility which derive from it' (Ibid., p. 69). Put differently, any moral theory which strives to hold the agent responsible for particular actions must, in its very ontic foundation (i.e., not as a mere add-on which motivates good behaviour) presuppose the valid existence of positive or negative values (Swiderski 2005, pp. 162–165; Półtawski 2005, p. 204). It is another reproach Ingarden makes to idealism – this time by asserting the necessary external existence of responsibility and values, one which has an essential dimension outside of intentionality. Worth mentioning here is that Ingarden investigates responsibility in such a way not as part of a moral theory, but rather an ontology. Such a rendering of the axiological problem has probably been a significant inspiration for Tischner's focus on values as foundations for the very pre-conscious human awareness. A characteristic feature of Ingarden's writing on values, however, is that he has

considerable difficulty in assigning to them any particular systematized mode of existence and relation to objects. In another influential short piece, *What We Do Not Know About Values*, he writes that although values must necessarily exist, 'it seems that no form or variant mode of being that is familiar to us [...] is fit to be ascribed to the way in which at least some values exist [...], given that the conditions for their 'realization' obtain' (1983, p. 149). Ingarden leaves us, therefore, with a fundamental ambiguity regarding his axiology – one between a clear argument for the necessary reality of values, but indecision with respect to the question of the way in which they actually exist. This conundrum is one of the motivating forces behinds the fact that Tischner in his doctorate and habilitation does not take a clear and original stance on the existence of values either.

Part II – Tischner's early philosophy. The 'Axiological I'

By taking such a cursory glance at the three main philosophers who directly influenced most of Tischner's early thinking, I meant to establish the properly intelligible context of mainstream phenomenology within which he was operating. Tischner's relation to Husserl, therefore, does not exist in a philosophical vacuum, but follows the traces of Scheler and Ingarden insofar as it can be counted as a 'material' focus on the constitutive role of axiology for consciousness. Its original insight, however, is to claim that a certain axiological mode of thinking is the very basis not only of externally-oriented human intentional activity, but also the very pre-conscious human awareness.

Self-possession

In order to elucidate on Tischner's views on particular variants of the human 'I', I first have to attend to the way he claims he distinguishes his position from Husserl's. Tischner's basic argument is that Husserl did not take into account the specific requirements of a singularly personal nature of consciousness (see Tischner 2006b, p. 52). Tischner underlines here that any theory of subjectivity has to take notice not only of the continuity of a synthesizing consciousness in time, but also a temporal unity of a possessive *ego*, which can recognize its own action in the past and the future (Husserlian 'retention' and 'protention'). The very starting point for any 'I'-oriented phenomenology, like the one involved in Tischner's project, is a recognition that there is more to any *ego* than just consciousness – that is, that the 'I' has a value on its own. The 'subject of consciousness' and the 'transcendental *ego*' are separate realities. The subject of consciousness is necessary as the reference point for all acts of consciousness. But it is different from the 'I', since it is not *necessary* to think of a particular stream of consciousness as correlated with an 'I'.

> in penetrating the content of conscious possessive moments in themselves, I cannot ignore a correlated structure of the 'I', to which they refer and without which they would not happen at all. While doing this I do not have to, however, think about a pure subject of consciousness as standing in a necessary relation with them. (Tischner 2006b, pp. 92–93; see also Wesołowska 2012a, p. 331ff.)

In that way, Tischner claims to have opened a new kind of analysis of subjectivity, in its very pre-conscious state, which does not only reduce it to an impersonal consciousness, but takes into account that this consciousness (usually pre-consciously) identifies itself *as* a concrete person with concrete qualities and a range of interests and possessions. Although a derivation of generic essences within the realm of a single 'I' is possible to the extent that there are structures inherent in all existing 'I's, yet every particular 'I', 'as a most basic form of a quality [is] *unique* and [. . .] is not constituted by more primary elements' (Tischner 2006b, p. 117). The 'I' appears, as any other phenomenon, in various and detailed modes of its givenness, which are available to study through a reduction. Tischner claims that by this move he has opened a distinctly novel field of inquiry (2006b, p. 122). It would still be a phenomenology, but not of objects *as* they are constituted in the *ego*, but the *ego* itself as an object, furthermore, as 'myself' (see Tischner 1966, p. 227). Such an 'I', which is an object to itself through an indubitable mode of self-reflection, can be further divided into various ways of appearing, each distinguished by its constitutive characteristics.

Dependence on Husserl, Scheler and Ingarden is in this case evident, and any extent of originality unclear. Tischner's argument concerning the 'ownness' distinguishing the single 'I' from a generic form of phenomenological consciousness has much precedence. Husserl's views on subjectivity have undergone significant development throughout his career, and it is quite early on that he moved away from identifying it mostly just with consciousness. So, although in the earliest of his works concerned with phenomenology, Husserl discards the existence of the 'I' in relation to pure immanent perception, it is already at the stage of *Ideas I* and particularly *Ideas II* that he 'considered the 'I' as the principle of unity delimiting one stream of consciousness over against another stream of consciousness' (Bernet et al. 1993, p. 206). In *Ideas II* as well as in later work such as the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl is already inclined to see the human 'I' through the lens of a distinctive pole of self-identification in contrast to other subjects, and, moreover, in the mode of *personal* identity (see 1999, par. 46, 102; Zahavi 2022). Similarly, as for Tischner, it is possible in Husserl's view to extract universal essences of what a person is from an examination of self-awareness, while simultaneously not compromising on the particularity of this person. Resonances with Scheler's theory are also clearly present. Scheler, as I have written above, did not accept the theory of transcendental subjectivity, but rather claimed that the fundamental determination of the ego is its personhood realized in and through acts. Tischner's personalism, which in his later thought matures into a dialogical 'philosophy of drama' (2006a, 2024), and is vital for his political theory, finds its roots precisely in those early inspirations. It is clear from an examination particularly of Husserl that Tischner's methodological foundation for a philosophy of pre-conscious awareness is not original but has its significant precedence in earlier conceptions of the phenomenological ego. The detailed fourfold typology of the 'I"s self-manifestations, however, might be a more novel elucidation on this given philosophical bedrock.

Variations of pre-reflective self-awareness

According to Tischner, it is possible to use the phenomenological method to investigate the way in which 'mineness' of the singular ego gives itself in intuition to that

very ego. Furthermore, such a primary appearance is the specific eidetic region of pre-reflective self-consciousness which accompanies all conscious intentional directedness (2006b, p. 144). Tischner, as I have written above, is not concerned with a description of our psychological makeup, but rather in an investigation of what is the foundational essence of our self-understanding as it appears, not as it is explained by recourse to psycho-somatic or even neurological relations. His project is to uncover essentially the pre-reflective modes of the ego's being, since in usual life they are obscured by reflective intentionality (Ibid., p. 183). Additionally, he ventured to determine a hierarchy of transcendental primacy between those essential manifestations, in order to reach the most foundational dimension of our own pre-reflective being.

For Tischner, there are four main modes in which the pre-reflective consciousness can manifest itself when subjected to basic inquiry: the 'somatic I', the 'I' as a subject of knowledge, the 'personal I' and finally the most basic 'axiological I'.[3] The main thesis of his entire investigation is that the 'axiological I' is eidetically the condition of possibility for experiencing all others (Tischner 2006b, pp. 411–412). By this Tischner means that the 'I"s relationship with itself as a value, as well as with external values, is accompanying as a necessary condition all the other three manifestations of the ego (see Serafin 2008). Therefore, whereas it is possible to imagine an instance (temporally restricted) in which human pre-conscious awareness is focused just on fulfilling the role of a person, or on the spatial distribution of a body, it is not possible to conceive of such an instance in which the relation of the ego with values would not have existed. All variations of self-awareness have an axiological aspect and, what is more, an axiological foundation. Indeed, Tischner devotes much space in his analyses to argue for the necessary relations of the somatic, gnoseological, and personal aspects of our being with the act of self-valuation specifically and values generally. Those divisions, I should add, do not make the 'I' split into various particular consciousnesses, but rather refer to a description of those aspects of our pre-reflective awareness which have particular intensity at a given moment; different spheres of such 'focus' (2006b, p. 401).

First, let me analyse the 'somatic I'. Tischner claims that 'among many various experiences of the I there exists also an experience of an I as a "psycho-physical spatial whole", restricted by data of memory, perspectival imagination and a consciousness of corporeality' (2006b, p. 181). Our corporeal self-awareness is such that we know of ourselves, pre-reflectively, as occupying a certain spatio-temporal frame, and by virtue of our *living* itself. The primary level of the 'somatic I' is what Tischner calls a 'pure somatic experience'. It is, so to say, a background for our consciousness of the body, the unspecified awareness that there is a body at all. Any particular bodily experience, which Tischner calls 'qualitative', has to emerge from such 'background', regardless if it is constituted through data of sense (sight, smell, etc.), or a sensation which might be at times more elaborate (pleasure, hunger, etc.) (Ibid., p. 207). However, the most basic aspect of our somatic existence is the axiological, i.e. connected with 'vital' values (Tischner takes this designation from Scheler, see Frings 1997, p. 27). The life of our body, whether

[3] A useful analysis of the all these is provided in Wesołowska 2012a, pp. 175–212.

we reflect on this consciously or not, relates to itself as a value, and relates to 'axiological proposals' (Tischner's phrase) which come to it from the outside. Each and every function of our body, each and every particular movement is motivated by an axiological interaction with the environment. The 'I' understands the governance of its own body not just out of itself, but primarily in an axiological context – movements are undertaken because values are to be espoused. We move a hand because a pen which we want to take hold of is important for us to write, we open our mouth because we recognize that the food we are about to swallow is nutritious for us. A focus on a material rather than formal understanding of values (Scheler), enables Tischner to underline the axiological aspect of our corporeal awareness.

The case is analogous with respect to the I as a subject of knowledge. I should note that the problem here is not the subject's relation to knowledge as a static set of known propositions, but rather the 'epistemic' dimension of knowledge as the *activity* of 'coming to know' (German *erkennen* rather than *wissen*, Polish *poznanie* rather than *wiedza*). A subject of knowledge, Tischner writes in another essay devoted to the topic, is a 'self-confirming' consciousness. Before the emergence of any external objectivity, the primary layer of the 'I', as in any other type, is pre-reflective awareness (1969, p. 17). On top of that, Tischner emphasizes the role of truth as the main epistemological motivation, and the ultimately axiological nature of any inquiry. Recall from above that our bodily existence is not there for itself, but rather is directed in its movements towards values which transcend its immediate realm. Similarly, with respect to the 'I' as a subject of knowledge

> The intentions of an epistemic act which are directed straight and immediately onto knowing the object given here and now, are enlivened by a more basic intention, which determines the *mode* of their functioning. When the direct intentions of the act are fixed on the object given to be known, the basic intention goes further, directing itself towards the value which knowledge must serve out of its very essence. [...] It is, as I have noted, *truth*. Feeling truth as a value marks the general mode of treating the objects of possible knowledge.' (Tischner 2006b, p. 263)

Hence, whereas the guiding principle of somatic activity is value as a motivation for movement, for knowledge the main value is truth. Truth, for Tischner, is a significant instance of a 'horizontal' value – it forms a background of particular objects which we seek to know *as* true, but itself is not an object we get to know of (Ibid., p. 268). A recognition of a certain truth as a value for us is the essential condition of possibility for any particular moment of 'I know'. In contrast to the inward direction which characterized somatic consciousness, the 'I' as a subject of knowing exists as such only through the act of its own 'de-concretization' (Ibid., p. 335). There is a particular tension involved between the 'I''s identity and the outward directedness (i.e., renouncing its own solipsistic concreteness) which it has to assume in order to get to know anything. This tension is essential in the fact that the 'I' itself is a subject of knowledge (as a definite quality) in and through, paradoxically, reaching outwards from itself into exteriority. 'I become my own subject of knowing', writes Tischner, 'when I become aware that the vantage point of the subject, which might at first be

foreign to me, is the only one which yields me true knowledge of the object' (Ibid., p. 324).

The third main determination of the subject is the 'personal I'. In this case Tischner is evidently inspired by Scheler's conception of a person as a unity of acts (see above), and Ingarden's usage of the term in his writings on ethics, particularly with reference to the necessarily personal nature of the responsible agent (see Ingarden 1983, pp. 63, 81). The main point at which Tischner moves away from Scheler, however, is that he considers personhood to be merely a part of a more wide-ranging picture of the I's nature, rather than its primary constitutive determination. Personhood for Tischner is realized only on the basis of an axiological orientation. But this does not mean that, as in Scheler, a relation to values *belongs* essentially to what it means to be a person, but rather that personhood itself is at its basis axiological. The 'personal I' maintains an identity through space and time not in a corporeal sense, but in various realizations of self-identity (occupation, social roles, role in family life, etc.). Like the 'somatic I', it 'constitutes itself as a response for axiological proposals from the world which surrounds the person' (Tischner 2006b, p. 377). But this time, the basis for the sense of 'I-ness' does not lie in the bodily dimension, but rather reveals itself in taking up various *activities* (*czynności* – resonances with Scheler are clear here). The 'personal I' is the absolute *possibility* of engagement in activities, and the choice (i.e. actualization of this possibility), is again, at its heart, an axiological one. The 'I' chooses activities, occupations, which it thinks are good. It struggles with axiological conflicts which are given to it when a difficult choice must be made as to what value-determined pathways of behaviour are to be chosen. It strives to be an authentic person and human being not merely, as in Martin Heidegger's existential theory, by virtue of espousing genuine and individually crafted existential possibilities, but rather also and predominantly through directing itself to authentically chosen values (Ibid., pp. 375–376).

Solidarization

Tischner is mostly recognized in Anglophone scholarship for his political theory centred on the idea of 'solidarity' (see Tischner 2000; also Wieczorek 2019; Królikowska 2019; Taylor 2008). It seems necessary, however, to underline the genesis of Tischner's concern with this concept in his early work's focus on 'solidarization'. Whereas 'solidarity' in political terms designates a particular mode of human intersubjectivity, 'solidarization' in Tischner refers to a foundational activity within the pre-reflective disposition of the singular 'I'.[4] In his early work, which is the topic of my reflection here, Tischner largely bracketed out the problem of intersubjective constitution from his considerations. Therefore, he did not yet venture into a description of human communal existence in relation to singular existence (as in the case of Scheler's privileging of intersubjectivity before a 'distilled' particular consciousness – see above). 'Egotic solidarization' permeates and founds all the three modes of human awareness described above. It is an activity of, in Tischner's words, 'finding oneself in something else' (2006b, p. 325; 1978, p. 97; see Wesołowska 2015, pp.

[4] See Płotka (2018) for a more extensive analysis of this distinction.

116–118). The 'I', in its somatic, gnoseological and personal aspects, constantly and pre-reflectively acts towards a 'broadening' and a 'narrowing down' of its own field of axiological interest. With respect to its bodily existence, the I 'solidarizes' itself with a particular part of its body in a temporally restricted privileging. Tischner writes that an example of such a process might be when I am so occupied with searching for a particular product I want to buy in a shop that 'I become a unity with my vision' (2006b, p. 222). Conversely, a process of 'desolidarization' might occur, wherein I need to renounce a part of my body from the orbit of my axiological acknowledgement: for example in an extreme case of amputation.

'Solidarization' and its antithesis also take place foundationally in the other two aspects of the 'I' described above. In case of the 'I' as a subject of knowledge, for instance, solidarization is correlated with the recognition of ourselves as a valid source of a particular epistemic act. From the perspective of the self-identifying 'I', an assumption of new knowledge takes place through recognizing that it is in this particular 'I' as a subject of this knowledge that the 'I' can be itself. In other words, in accepting certain knowledge as true (therefore, in accepting some new content in the axiological horizon of truth), the 'I' identifies for a certain moment in particular with a subject of knowledge. This movement is not axiologically neutral, but rather it is 'a synthesis of a consciousness which has up till then been fissured by axiological oppositions' (2006b, p. 331; 1978, p. 100). Phenomenally, knowledge in pre-reflective dimension of awareness appears as a temporary espousal of *this* particular version of 'myself' connected with a belief in this particular knowledge. All of those self-determinations are predicated on a value of truth which is believed to delimit the right type of 'myself' that I choose. When faced with an epistemic conundrum (i.e., a choice concerning which knowledge to accept as true), pre-reflective awareness chooses among the possible subjectivities which relate to this or another belief. The 'I' is more than just metaphorically 'torn within itself'. In the end, every solidarization of the 'I' with a particular subject of knowledge is to a larger or smaller degree provisional. But despite this instability, some decision as to what is true and what is right has to be made.

Tischner's early work on 'solidarization', therefore, forms the main genealogy of his later work on 'solidarity'. Solidarization does not denote a process in which we relate to values inhering externally in objects, but rather a deep-seated mechanism of internal self-identification with that version of ourselves which, somatically, gnoseologically, and personally, appears at this moment to be the most authentic. A state of being in solidarity with others, as the basis of a value-based political community, stems from the idea that we are in solidarity with *ourselves* in the first place. We seek to recognize ourselves for ourselves in an axiological 'field' of the most valuable versions of our own ego we can espouse. The axiological problematic, therefore, surfaces here not with respect to a relation towards an object outside of the sphere of immediate *self*-identification, but rather relative to the very core of who the 'I' thinks it is. It seems natural, therefore, that Tischner will refer to solidarity in his later work as a principle which rests on a tension between the individual and collective dimension of humanity. On the one hand, solidarity is an idea involving dialogue and mutual engagement. Yet on the other, it is also a disposition of the 'I' towards freely recognizing itself as capable of solidarity. Hence Tischner's idea of a 'solidarity of conscience' – a term holding in relation those individual and collective aspects

(2007, original in 2000). It is impossible for humans to form a lasting bond of solidarity if they do not 'solidarize' themselves, in their conscience, with the most authentic version of themselves. Solidarity implies solidarization.

The axiological 'I'

I have already shown above how in Tischner's thought a presupposition and a condition for the possibility of each and every variation of the 'I', is that it operates with reference to an axiological self-determination. This leads him to claim that the final transcendental layer of the experience of selfhood is the 'axiological I'. He calls it the 'primary I' (2006b, p. 400). Therefore, a foundational characteristic of the 'I's self-identification is that it takes itself to be a value for itself, and also constituted as a creative response to values which are proposed to it from the external environment. Any objective or intentional account of value for Tischner already presupposes a subject of value which apprehends themselves as a value (Tischner 2011, p. 528; Jagiełło 2020, p. 45). Hence, the primordial 'I' fundamentally is an 'axiological I' (Wesołowska 2012a, pp. 340–341; Jagiełło 2020, p. 48). As Królikowska writes: 'awareness of values is the main human attribute, and the axiological ego, as the venue of their concatenation, is a core of human consciousness' (2019, p. 316). Whether the 'I' at a single moment 'solidarizes' itself with its corporeal-spatial dimension, its capacity to know, or its personhood, it always does this with the presupposition of an even more primary self-valuation. It is this axiological movement which enables all other pre-reflective awareness and therefore all identity. As Tischner writes in his influential essay *Axiological Pieces*:

> 'I can only experience the unity of myself with something which has been primordially mine and make the value of "mine" part of myself, because I experience myself as a particular value (*axios*). The sensing of my own I as a value is the condition for the possible emergence of a solidarization bond with such or other elements of "mine." Something is dear *to me* because I am, in some way, dear to myself'. (Tischner 2008, p. 37, original 2014)

The 'I' exists as a self-relation alongside and before all external intentional directedness. We are directed to externality by virtue of the fact that we are directed to ourselves in the first place (Serafin 2011b, p. 206). This very inwardness is the background for all reflective action. Yet for Tischner this space is ultimately axiological because of the value which the 'I' presents to itself. 'A feeling of values existing in the world' always 'evokes the co-feeling of the value of oneself' (2008, p. 40).[5]

Tischner enumerates four necessary characteristics of the 'axiological I'. First of all, it is a 'positive value in the absolute sense of the word' (Ibid., p. 41). Prior to any experience of values as correlated with objects (for example, as their qualities), there is an experience of the 'I' as an absolutely positive value. In other words, the 'I' confirms and asserts itself as a vital source of its own being, and therefore of the

[5] I should also mention here that this methodological focus on the sphere of the 'I's self-awareness should be acknowledged by all those scholars who juxtapose Tischner's early (axiological) and late (agathological) philosophy. I am not fully convinced that some of those analyses encountered in the course of my research (for example Gielarowski 2015) satisfy this demand.

feeling of any external values. Ingarden's complex discussion concerning axiological relativity (1983, pp. 119–124) is simply not necessary with respect to the 'I', as it does not depend on any prior or posterior value. Rather, all interactions with the environment confirm the existence of the I and its irreducible positivity, taken here to mean simply affirmative existence. Secondly, the 'axiological I' is 'privative'. 'Privativeness', in turn, qualifies the meaning of the 'I's positivity. We as subjects exist inwardly in the mode of auto-confirmation, yet also outwardly in and through a continuous need for object-correlated values. Tischner calls this specific tendency 'axiological hunger' (2008, p. 42). Thus, the 'I' is positive in terms of an ever-present, continuous self-esteem, but it is also negative as a potential to assume values which exceed the realm of its immediate identity. In trying to follow objective values, we 'forget ourselves' in them, though we can never fully renounce the hinterland of a pre-reflective axiological awareness. This 'conscientivity' is fed by ever new realizations, and never (at least in mundane existence) achieves a point of satiation. 'Man is a prayer', writes Tischner, 'that, in spite of himself is unable to fulfil himself' (Ibid., p. 46). The 'axiological I' is, thirdly, 'irreal' (Ibid., p. 43) – it does not exist in the temporal synthesis of experience in the meaning given to it by Immanuel Kant. As basis of our self-awareness, the axiological sphere relates with our space and time in constant engagement of solidarization or de-solidarization. Yet in itself, the 'axiological I' transcends finite temporality as the unchangeable identity of the self. Finally, the 'axiological I' is individual. This means that although it yields itself to universal eidetic description, it cannot be treated as a generic idea with particular instantiations. Rather, every axiological I is unique in and of itself. This infinite singularity makes the 'I"s relation with the Other possible. Although Tischner describes his dialogical theory of intersubjectivity rather throughout his later works (see 2006a, 1998), here they are effectively foreshadowed.

According to Tischner's argument, if one is to claim that human relations are inherently and materially guided by axiological concerns, one has to simultaneously acknowledge the individual nature of every person. In tacit disagreement with Scheler's theory of intersubjectivity, Tischner claims that individual awareness grounded in self-valuation is the necessary condition for dialogical interaction in bonds of community and solidarity. This movement is therefore analogously related to the solidarization-solidarity pair described above. Relations of love are a paradigm instance: 'Love between people commences from the discovery of the axiological I – Individuality of another I. Love at that stage revels in a fundamental discovery: you are different and precious in your otherness' (2008, p. 44). Tischner is often acknowledged as Poland's foremost philosopher of dialogue, yet the entirety of his early career as a thinker has been devoted to exploring the foundation of human propensity to relation within the substrate of pre-reflective individual awareness. It can be seen that at least a cursory glance at these important elements of Tischner's initial work on subjectivity is an indispensable contextual element for any examination of his later theological-political writings, or 'philosophy of drama'.

Part III – Conclusions and a critical remark

In all the above reflections, I have briefly traced a vast terrain related to Tischner's immediate philosophical context and his derivation of axiological primacy for self-awareness. In place of a conventional conclusion, I would like to offer one brief critical remark on Tischner's project as, I hope, a stimulus for further discussion.

An immediate concern I want to flag is whether it is possible to marry, on the one hand, a supposition concerning a transcendental foundation of subjectivity in the axiological sphere, and on the other hand a completely undetermined theory of value itself. Tischner, similarly as Ingarden, leaves the question concerning the nature and possible existential mode of values unanswered. Yet in contrast to his 'Master', Tischner does not even attempt to tackle this issue head-on, but rather methodologically excludes it from the realm of investigation. 'This work', he writes about his 'habilitation',

> does not propose any 'definition' of value, does not resolve any basic problems concerning ontology or metaphysics of value. Its starting point is the simple fact of an *experience* of value. [...] First, there is an experience of 'something', an experience of some 'given' content, an experience of an 'object' in the broadest sense of the term. Subsequently, this experience places the given content in the context of some other content, a related one. This other content is either its antithesis (a negative value), or something which stands 'higher' or 'lower' in relation to it'. (2006b, p. 136)

Tischner does not actually write much more of his original contribution regarding a theory of value *per se*. In some other essays from his early period, he basically repeats Scheler's theory of a hierarchical ordering of values (see 1972, 2001). Even in those, he does not unequivocally argue for a single theory of value. Furthermore, he does not talk about this problem at all whenever he pursues his own investigations regarding the nature of human self-awareness. Is it tenable, we can therefore ask, to give such a scant description of what one means 'value' to be, and then proceed to argue that the 'axiological I' stands as the most basic transcendental of human subjectivity? Certainly, if Tischner seemingly takes the 'material' meaning of 'value' to its extreme – to denote all possible ends of all possible intentionality and experience – then it follows by virtue of this presupposition that 'value' always comes before any formal or even ontic description of the 'I"s awareness. In other words, if one demarcates without much further elaboration which behaviours given in phenomenal appearance count as 'ethical' or 'related to values', then one can easily claim that those axiological experiences have a transcendental role. But such a presumption should not be so readily entertained without much serious justification at the beginning of a philosophical project so wide-ranging as Tischner's. In the task of determining the phenomenological essence and condition of the main object of study (human self-awareness), a consideration of vital auxiliary essences (such as those of 'value') cannot be arbitrarily left out.

All in all, Tischner's early philosophy remains a curious and novel phenomenology, both in historical and philosophical terms. In this article, I aimed to introduce it with particular attention drawn to its immediate context. However, due to the multiplicity of themes it is concerned with, and its significance for anyone studying the

development of twentieth century philosophy in Poland, it certainly merits much further study and critical engagement.

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