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Dynamisms of Spirituality Formation in the Biography of Natalia Tułasiewicz

Dynamizmy kształtowania duchowości w biografii bł. Natalii Tułasiewicz

Abstract: This article aimed to demonstrate the importance of spirituality for achieving happiness in all life circumstances, based on the biography of the Polish teacher Natalia Tułasiewicz. The biographical material is organised according to the dynamisms (powers) of education identified by the classical pedagogical thought of Stefan Kunowski. These dynamisms include *bios*, representing the natural, psycho-organic development of the human being; *etos*, denoting the social action of educators; *agos*, signifying the power of the moral action and mental authority of educators; and *fate*, an unpredictable and unquantifiable force. It has been assumed that educational growth arises from the simultaneous interaction of these dynamics, with spirituality playing a crucial role. The analytical-synthetic method has been employed, with the primary source being Natalia Tułasiewicz's four volumes of diary entries covering the years 1938–1943. This paper outlined the four dynamisms in Natalia Tułasiewicz's life, emphasising the role of spirituality in overcoming adversity. For her, spirituality was not an end in itself but a means to develop relationships with God and others. In doing so, she attained a level of maturity in both natural and religious spirituality, enabling her to perceive each event of fate as meaningful and valuable. During the tragic times

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of war, she managed to find happiness and bring hope to others too in a concentration camp – a place where hope had seemingly vanished.

Keywords: Natalia Tułasiewicz; spirituality; educational dynamism.

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest pokazanie znaczenia duchowości dla bycia szczęśliwym w każdych warunkach życiowych na przykładzie biografii polskiej nauczycielki Natalii Tułasiewicz. Materiał biograficzny został uporządkowany według dynamizmów (sił) wychowania wyróżnionych przez klasyka myśli pedagogicznej Stefana Kunowskiego. Należą do nich: *bios* jako naturalny, psychoorganiczny rozwój człowieka; *etos* jako społeczne działanie wychowawców; *agos* jako siła działania moralnego i umysłowego autorytetu wychowawców; *los* jako niedająca się przewidzieć niewymierna siła. Przyjęto, że wychowawcze wzrastanie jest wypadkową jednoczesnego działania tych dynamizmów. Zastosowano metodę analityczno-syntetyczną. Podstawowe źródło stanowią cztery tomy pamiętnikarskich zapisków Natalii Tułasiewicz, obejmujące lata 1938–1943. W artykule zostały scharakteryzowane wymienione wyżej cztery dynamizmy w życiu Natalii Tułasiewicz ze wskazaniem na to, że rozwój duchowy nie był dla niej celem samym w sobie. Miał przeznaczenie: wzrastać w relacji z Bogiem i ludźmi. Osiągnęła dzięki temu taką dojrzałość w zakresie duchowości naturalnej i religijnej, że mogła uznać każde wydarzenie losu za właściwe, nadać mu wartość i dostrzec sens. W makabrycznych czasach wojennych potrafiła być szczęśliwa i nieść nadzieję innym tam, gdzie jej nie było: w obozie koncentracyjnym.

Słowa kluczowe: Natalia Tułasiewicz; duchowość; dynamizmy wychowania.

1. Introduction

The author of the post-apocalyptic novel *The End*, G. Michael Hopf, encapsulated the cyclical vision of history in the following succinct statement: ‘Hard times create strong men; strong men create good times; good times create weak men; weak men create hard times’ (Hopf, 2014). Individuals must be able to find themselves at each stage of life, as they do not choose the time of their birth. However, they can adopt specific attitudes towards the circumstances of their time and, through education and self-education, shape the potential of all developmental spheres. One peculiarity of the present era is the vast differentiation of the axiological order of our reality, where generally

appreciated diversity yields to disorder. Consequently, individuals, instead of pursuing a life project grounded in rational moral choices, may lose their sense of personal and social identity. One possible reason for this is a reductionist approach to humanity, which impoverishes the theory and practice of education by neglecting specific dimensions of development. The omission of any dimension is concerning, as each is integral to a comprehensive understanding of the human being. What is particularly alarming today is the neglect of the spiritual sphere:

The experience of inner emptiness, numerous neuroses and feelings of social or psychological alienation are not always explained on a medical, sociological or psychological level. The forms of therapy employed do not provide a solution, as such problems are essentially of spiritual origin, and this is where the solution should be sought (Antoniewicz, 2010, p. 272).

Spirituality is an intangible reality that is challenging to comprehend and conceptualise; nevertheless, it is of interest to the ambitious fields of humanities, social sciences and theology because it is a phenomenon experienced by individuals. It represents a commitment to the non-material aspects of life, whether termed universal, ideal, sacred or divine (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 519). The most crucial phenomenon revealing human spirituality is acts of transcendence or self-transcendence (Starnawski, 2020, p. 89). Transcendence is 'like a second name for a person' (Wojtyła, 1976, p. 17). It fully opens up a person to reality. A close relationship exists between transcendence and self-fulfilment (Wojtyła, 1976, p. 17) and between self-fulfilment and happiness (Wojtyła, 2000, p. 216).

In this article, spirituality is understood as a property of the person that 'exists by itself, is the object of spontaneous manifestations of thought, speech, judgements, aspirations, creativity and impulses beyond temporality and sensuality' (Kunowski, 1981, p. 215). It is expressed, *inter alia*, in human reasonableness, their capacity to value and judge and their freedom or openness to transcendent and metaphysical issues (cf. Kunowski, 1996, p. 200). This article aims to highlight the significance of spirituality for achieving happiness in all life conditions, based on the biography of the Polish teacher Natalia Tułasiewicz. The biographical material is organised according to the dynamisms (powers) of education, as distinguished by the classic pedagogi-

cal thinker and author of the definition of spirituality, Stefan Kunowski.¹ These dynamisms include *bios*, representing the natural, psycho-organic development of the human being; *etos*, denoting the social action of educators; *agos*, signifying the power of the moral action and mental authority of educators; and *fate*, an unpredictable and unquantifiable force. Educational growth emerges from the simultaneous action of these dynamics.

2. Bios

Bios is the most fundamental power in education. In Greek, *bios* refers to human life, the world and a description of life, its permanence, manner and maintenance (Węclewski, 1884, p. 130). It represents the natural psycho-organic development of every human being, occurring independently of the will. Stefan Kunowski explained this dynamism as follows:

Based on the inherited constitution of the body structure, nervous system and endocrine system from the parents and several generations of ancestors, bios is expressed in the momentum of life (*biotonus*), which can be, from the child's birth, very strong, intense, resistant to stress factors, vital and flexible or, conversely, can be weak and faint (Kunowski, 1996, p. 172).

The owner of the bios consists of biological inheritance and mental dispositions, such as talents and abilities. The power of the bios arises from drives and passions. Thus, it is considered to be spontaneous and undirected in education (Kunowski, 1996, p. 172).

Natalia Tułasiewicz was born on 9 April 1906 in Rzeszów (Poland). Her father, Adam, was a tax office inspector in Galicia (in Eastern Europe). Natalia's mother, Amalia Bromnikówna, came from a family of burghers from Oświęcim (Poland) and was a homemaker. Natalia had five siblings – an older sister, Maria (1904), younger sisters, Zofia (1907) and Halina (1911), and two younger brothers, Tadeusz (1908) and Józef (1913).

¹ An article by Lucyna Dziaczkowska (2022) is an example of the application of Stefan Kunowski's theory of 'educational development of human' as a tool for analysing biographical material.

Here is what Adam Tułasiewicz's memoirs reveal about Natalia's appearance: 'I took a closer look at the baby, and I must admit that I found her quite ugly, with a swarthy complexion, extensive lips, raven black hair and a slightly flattened, tiny nose. She lay quietly and calm' (<https://blogoslawio-nanatalia.eu/dziecinstwo/>). Natalia remained petite in figure. The preserved photographs do not confirm Adam Tułasiewicz's initial impression: Natalia grew into a beautiful and delightful woman. The pictures depict a swarthy person with dark hair and large eyes, definitely an aesthetically pleasing female attired in carefully selected outfits with ornaments. Her shapely body – as she wrote, was 'petite but shapely and delicate' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 109) – and exuded charm and dignity. However, her slim figure, admired by women, was also associated with frail health. Even as a six-year-old, Natalia experienced a week-long hospital stay in Kraków (Poland). Throughout her life, she struggled with tuberculosis, which affected her bones and skin, and eventually her lymph nodes and lungs. In 1922, after lymph node surgery, she had to abandon her plans to pursue music professionally. During the 1922–1923 school year, she missed an entire academic year due to the progression of her illness, surgery and eight months of recovery. In 1929, she took a medical leave of absence (Judkowiak, 2018, p. 323). However, her frail body and poor health did not extinguish her indomitable spirit; rather, they motivated her. Natalia wrote in her diaries: 'I have so much to do in my life. ... I have so much strength to create, despite the constant struggle with a faint and often suffering physique' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 89). The petite body housed a spiritual colossus. Overcoming her poor physical condition served as an indirect motivation to fortify her spirit. The immediate motivation for her spiritual growth must be sought from other sources.

Natalia's temperament also contradicts the quiet calm described by Adam Tułasiewicz after the birth of his daughter. In her diary, Natalia described her nature as explosive and impulsive (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 66): 'I know this, that I will have to fight with impetuosity until the last breath of my life, and I do not delude myself that this will become easier for me in time' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 473). It was also her nature to be perverse and astute, as she added that 'Saints even tend to be rather ... impulsive ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 61) and 'If I were perfection, what would I be working on in life?' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 470). The difficulty of working on oneself was characteristic of Natalia's daily existence and necessary for her spiritual

growth: 'I draw everything – work, leisure, sleep, pleasure, food – everything without exception into my programme of self-improvement' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 415). She was active and energetic, never wasting time; she could subordinate her physical infirmities to her plans (<https://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/praca-nauczyciela/>). She asserted, 'What can I say! I like activity, and that's it' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 398). In other words, '... constant movement, constant creating are the essence of the spirit' expressed a conviction that characterised her (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 90).

However, it would be wrong to assume that Natalia was loud. She was capable of apologising for inappropriate behaviour (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 465), refrained from using ironic language, and was, above all, aware of her imperfections. In her words, 'And there are so many different human vices in me, urges in particular, an inner irritation, which often go unnoticed by those around me, for no reason' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 465). Her ambitiousness was not a hindrance but rather a reinforcement of her systematic work on herself. She loved solitude and silence, which she found primarily in contact with nature. She inherited this love from her parents:

And I think that this vision of the past that has been left before my eyes is, for me, a preternatural symbol of the lives of my dearest ones. It passed both amidst heavy struggles with the hardships of the bumpy road and sunny smiles we shared, especially from the beauty of nature, from which my parents always drew invigorating strength for their tired souls (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 365).

She considered the solitude and silence of the woods and fields wonderful. She confessed,

Generally, I find myself an excellent loner, and although I very much enjoy interesting company, I am never bored with myself. So much content sings and plays within me, so many thoughts seek expression and realisation that I greet solitary hours with true joy ... in solitude, I strangely always feel good (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 205, 321).

However, notably, her natural need for quiet and solitude was a matter of choice, rather than chance. She was emphatic that this was not a selfish choice but one related to self-realisation: 'I eagerly seek silence – I need it to

work, to study, to find myself ... I need silence to talk to myself' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 300 and 63). Such conscious 'being' in one's inner world (thoughts, emotions, conscience) is part of spiritual growth. Natalia pursued this out of a natural need for self-improvement. Reflective self-insight is the premise for shaping a remarkable interior. For Natalia, the non-egoistic choice of solitude was a form of rest in everyday life and her life path. She consciously opted out of both starting a family and joining a convent. She lived and worked in an atmosphere of educational altruism, managing not to feel lonely while being alone in the most beautiful sense of the word (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 303).

Natalia's thoughtfulness was accompanied by secretiveness and shyness in externalising her feelings and thoughts. She confessed in her diary: 'A kind of clear shame of externalising feelings, even thoughts, existed in me right from childhood' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 66–67). Perhaps this is why the diary and her original literary works became convenient outlets for expressing her rich inner self. However, to deliver speeches in the Sodality of Our Lady or the Polonist Circle (Polish: Koło Polonistyczne) and ultimately to become a teacher, she had to overcome her embarrassment – yet another proof of her effort to work on herself.

The power of bios also encompasses talents and skills. Natalia Tułasiewicz was resolute and 'curious' as a child, with high intelligence and organisational skills (<https://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/lata-mlodzienne/>). Since childhood, she exhibited artistic sensibility. She was musically and artistically gifted and enjoyed rhyming and singing. She studied violin with Bolesław Kopystyński in Kraków and Eugeniusz Sokołowski in Poznań. She enthusiastically pursued musicology studies at the Academy of Music in Poznań. Although she had to abandon extensive practice due to illness, she kept returning to music until she lost her instrument during her displacement in Poznań (Żmidziński, 2018, p. 148). She had to discontinue musicology, but music remained vital to her and was indubitably linked to her spiritual development. As she stated,

Music provides order in my spiritual life. It raises awareness of the unconscious, teaches me to distinguish the important from the less important and strives diligently to ensure that my humanity does not shrink to the realm of intellect alone. Music behaves like a queen conscious of her power. It does not spare feelings; it does not recognise hiding places or nooks. It cries out

to feel boldly, digest every feeling with thought and support if it is worthy of existence. I like to revisit past years with music. I am strong and good at such memories. ... Yes. Then I am a Nata² in the complex harmony of the world (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 90–91).

This clearly indicates that Natalia's musical experience contributed to revealing the essence of things, bringing harmony to her inner world and leaving a spiritual imprint.

Parallely with musicology, Natalia studied Polish at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Poznań. She obtained a Master of Philosophy degree in Polish philology with an excellent grade in 1932. The topic of her master's thesis, *Mickiewicz versus music (Mickiewicz a muzyka)*, confirms Natalia's interest in music and literature. She expressed her preferences thus:

... the music and the book lead each other. They walk together, but neither wants to give way to the rival. The book spiritually revives me, refreshes me, bathes me, stimulates me, provokes me and does not give respite in the best sense, constantly reminding me that the spirit does not know fatigue, that fatigue overwhelms only the body ... (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 90).

Natalia's musical and literary interests developed simultaneously. Before her high school finals, her intellectual ambitions increased, and during her studies, her academic aspirations expanded (Żmidziński, 2018, p. 141). She had planned to author a doctoral thesis on Karol Hubert Rostworowski, but the war thwarted the effort. She considered work on herself and her spiritual development the foundation of academic activity (<https://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/lata-mlodzienne/>).

Natalia Tułasiewicz was not only passionate about reading literature; she also created it. During her studies, she was active in her own literary production section at the Polonist Circle. She made her poetry debut during a competition in 1927. An excerpt from her thesis, recommended by her thesis supervisor, Prof. Roman Pollak, was published in the *Ruch Literacki* journal. In July 1937, four episodes of her report on the Batory voyage to Norway were

² A variation of her own name. Since her studies her friends called her the same as her family members, namely 'Nata' instead of 'Niuśka.'

published in the *Dziennik Poznański* journal. Unfortunately, her literary debut with a novella in *Pion* and a series of satirical poems titled *Ludzie u steru* (*People at the Helm*) in *Kultura* in 1938 was unsuccessful. Undaunted by her failure, a year later, she submitted a poem titled *Madonna ze Swarzewa* (*Madonna from Swarzew*) to *Tęcza* (Judkowiak, 2018, p. 326). Undoubtedly, studying Polish corresponded with her interests. She wrote, 'How fortunate it was that I devoted myself to the study of literature, that I was able to assimilate poetic culture easily, that I had the conditions for this, to become acquainted with the secrets of the poetic craft' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 202). In the duet of prose and poetry, the latter led the way for Natalia:

And although there was a period when I became enamoured by prose, I returned to poetry like the prodigal daughter, and today, I know again that one well-written, short poem sometimes gives me more of an experience than a bulky volume of a much-vaunted 'fashionable' book (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 202).

She identified herself as a poet, emphasising that poetry is primarily determined by one's attitude to life or 'the quality of experiencing reality and unreality' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 77).

Communing with art brought her happiness. Her interests also included theatre, painting, sculpture and film. She engaged with theatre from childhood, finding theatre and cinema her artistic passions (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 215). One marvels at her inner maturity, transcending selfishness and egocentrism – even with her passion, she sought to serve others:

And if I feel a special artistic attraction towards theatre and film art, then the joy I derive from this, the joy given to me in advance, should be transformed into such values that they can be the property of those people with whom life touches me or will touch me (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 215).

In Natalia, spiritual dynamism coexisted with artistic and intellectual activity (Żmidziński, 2018, p. 146). In this form, she developed the natural predispositions she was born with, shaping her individuality. Engaging with art opens individuals up to expression, which is particularly important for children, whose expressive behaviour determines their understanding of the world (cf. Ungeheuer-Gołąb, 2011, p. 153). According to art theorist Herbert

Read, art is one of the mechanisms that guide our lives, without which social and spiritual chaos ensues (1976, p. 21).

From her father, besides her impulsive disposition, Natalia inherited the ability and love of rhyming local songs and music (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 8). Natalia acknowledged that her grandfather Józef and both her parents played significant roles in shaping her passion for poetry and theatre:

Apparently, Grandpa's immense mental culture, Daddy's unpretentious improvisations, and, above all, Mummy's subconscious inclination towards poetry, some poetic nerve hidden in the depths of her being, played their part in the shadows. It leads people down its paths and will not allow them to be subdued. Sooner or later, it will claim its rights (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 202).

Her parents were also involved in amateur theatre performances, and Natalia could admire them as actors during her childhood. She loved reading books and attending cinema, theatre, concerts and exhibitions. Natalia's cherished singing was a constant element of family life (Żmidziński, 2018, p. 154). As a Polish literature teacher, Natalia put her interest in art and love of beauty to good use. In 1936, she took the state exam, obtaining a diploma as a teacher of Polish in secondary schools (Rzeszoś, 2019, p. 19) and the right to become a member of the Society of Secondary and Higher School Teachers (Towarzystwo Nauczycieli Szkół Średnich i Wyższych; Judkowiak, 2020, p. 15). In this dimension, she was able to draw on her family's legacy. Her paternal grandfather was a professor at one of the two eminent grammar schools in Kraków; Adam's paternal uncles had higher education, and his sister had obtained the semi-senior teacher training available to women in the 19th century (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 7).

A peculiar feature of Natalia's biography was the incongruity between her petite body, poor physical condition and strength of spirit (cf. Judkowiak, 2020, p. 6). Therefore, the sources of Natalia's spiritual power presumably lay in other dynamisms of her development. This does not diminish the role of bios, which was an essential platform for her growth, as its other specific feature was the diversity of Natalia's talents, abilities and interests, inherited and shaped by her family upbringing. The diverse and elemental power of bios had to be directed towards fulfilling Natalia's desire to be ful-

filled: 'I dream of a difficult but tempting thing: to harmonise the culture of the spirit with the culture of the body ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 331).

3. Etos

The vibrant dynamism of bios requires targeting appropriate goals, namely the social action of educators, which is determined by a given society's norms. In Greek, *ethos* is defined as customs, habits and that which are closest and best known (e.g. the household; Stawrowski, 2020, p. 22). This dynamism facilitates socio-cultural inheritance in education, which consists of 'the acquisition using learning employing speech, writing, print, radio, film images and television ... of all kinds of education, comprising scientific knowledge, religious, moral and aesthetic attitudes, tastes, ways of eating, dressing, relating to others, and conduct' (Kunowski, 1996, pp. 173–174). This dynamism is significant, as it enables 'the entry of the pupil into the group community of tradition, history, language, customs and nationality,' that is, the process of socialisation understood as preparation for life in the community, considering its customs and moral level (Kunowski, 1996, p. 174). The power of this dynamism depends on the ethical level of family, school and professional groups. It is expressed in the channelling of the power of bios by creating educational situations in social environments (e.g. family, school, peer group, work group, etc.) through which the pupil learns specific behavioural patterns and social roles according to applicable standards, such as the role of the good son, the conscientious pupil, the reliable employee and the honest citizen (cf. Kunowski, 1996, p. 173). The pupil experiences a sense of duty, obligation and responsibility and can learn through imitation. Thus, an ethos of work and play, autonomy and dependence, science and art and interpersonal relationships are shaped (cf. Kunowski, 1996, p. 173). Its content constitutes man's second nature – not biological, but social.

The first community a person experiences is the family. What an individual should experience, above all, is a sense of love and security. The atmosphere of the home, filled with harmony and warmth, was nurtured by Natalia's mother, who epitomised gentleness and kindness (cf. Rzesoś, 2019, p. 15). Natalia valued the contributions of both parents, as evidenced from her diary, 'And Father and Mother, both nicest and each in turn the mem-

bers of our home! Our place is so safe, it's like being in a secluded harbour; it feels so good' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 92). The love she experienced in her family home became the most essential value in her life. She wrote of herself:

... love ... has become a fundamental value for my life, and with this wealth of variety that it has given me in sufferings and joys, it sculpts me – from now on – making me what I am and what I will be tomorrow (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 462).

The words '... I don't want to take anything – I want to serve my neighbour with love, as much as I can ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 71) fully characterise her attitude towards her fellow man and her homeland.

Natalia came from a family of solid patriotic ideals. Her father's uncle, Wincenty, participated in the January Uprising in Poland, for which he was exiled to Siberia. Her paternal uncle, Władysław, was a legionnaire (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 7). Natalia's parents nurtured these models, raising their six children in their mould. Both parents participated in amateur theatre. As a child, Natalia could watch her parents in patriotic plays, such as *Kościuszko at Raclawice* (*Kościuszko pod Raclawicami*) by W.L. Anczyc or *Night at Belvedere* (*Noc w Belwederze*) by A. Staszczyk (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 8). Patriotism played a vital role in Natalia's spirituality:

I remember well when we did not have a homeland. I was born in slavery. That is why every bit of our land is sacred to me. I can embrace foreign interests and necessities with my mind, but what is my own, Polish, is the only law for me (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 59).

Natalia's family also fostered a climate of genuine piety. Her father was a member of the Sodality of Our Lady, educating the Catholic elite. He had once served Mass to Brother Albert (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 7). Her parents raised Natalia and her siblings in the sodality spirit of the need to work on oneself. Natalia's need for continuous character formation, systematic and disciplined self-education and the pursuit of excellence, including holiness, stemmed from her family. This attitude significantly impacted her spiritual development, particularly her religious spirituality. She attended Mass almost daily, meditated on religious readings and sought silence and solitude to be close to God. Experiencing this was part of her spiritual growth:

After all, this is why I come to Jesus: so that he can help me overcome myself and the difficulty of becoming aware of myself. And I don't feel humiliated. Seeing how close the average human kindness, and therefore mine, is to ... cruelty, I look confidently into every tomorrow because I do not walk alone. God Himself supports me – with Him, my average human goodness can become exalted, holy and divine. This is a huge, essential consolation because even repeated mistakes are turning points with this attitude of the soul. The mistakes do not sweep you off your feet – they teach loving and serene humility (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 76).

The family atmosphere of sacrificial love, the mutual respect of its members, the high personal culture of her parents and the climate of sincere piety and patriotism were appreciated and nurtured by Natalia in her adult life; these were further reflected in the way she related to others, in the work she did and in the decisions she took. She returned to the harmony, cordiality, and warmth of family relationships several times in her diary. She cared about these relationships amid a difficult daily life, and at a time when she could not experience them directly, their memory provided solace.

It is worth highlighting the family's intellectual aspirations. Natalia's parents ensured that their children's schools provided high teaching and education levels. After moving to Kraków (1916), Natalia attended the Poor Clare Sisters convent school. After independence, the family settled in Poznań, where Natalia studied at the Ursuline Sisters' secondary school. She also attended the music academy, taking lessons in violin and music theory. She was an excellent, diligent and active student at all educational levels. The headmistress of the Ursuline Sisters' secondary school, Maria Waśkowska, regarded Natalia as 'the good spirit of the school' (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 8). Her parents' care, a sodality education focused on systematic work on oneself and the carefully chosen schools, not only from a didactic but also from an educational perspective, were important contributors to her development and the formation of her spirituality. School education is, after all, a time of transition from carefree play to acquiring knowledge and learning the dutifulness and responsibility necessary for social functioning. It is a stage of widening the range of social experiences, a time of relationships with new people, peers, and teachers, of learning with and from them, of learning to be in these relationships and the norms that govern them. It is also about inter-

acting with culture and learning the culture of being. It is a time for learning about one's skills and limitations, experiencing successes and failures, developing self-esteem and shaping career aspirations.

Natalia continued to learn the ethos during her consciously chosen studies. She was admitted to the Polish Studies Department at the University of Poznań with an excellent certificate for high school finals. She broadened her scientific horizons, attended concerts and exhibitions, cinemas and theatres and loved hiking. Being a bookworm, she worked as a tutor to afford books, and the family joked that 'it was enough to give her an encyclopaedia under her head, and she would cover herself with *Kultura* journal' (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 10). She enjoyed being with friends but avoided frivolous entertainment. She was active in the Polonists' Circle and participated in poetry evenings as an organiser and author of her first literary works. She possessed a high intellectual capacity, ease of discussion and the courage to stand up for her opinion, which attests to a strength of spirit, especially considering her secretiveness and shyness in externalising her feelings, as revealed in the bios characterisation. She remained engaged in the sodality, including in her new role as a speaker. She was also invited by other organisations, such as the Young Women's Association and the School of Nursing (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 16). All the hardships, such as her older sister's death, first love for a boy, unsuccessful literary debut, illness and inability to continue her musicology studies, strengthened instead of discouraging her. She viewed them as challenges that toughened her spirit in an uneasy everyday life: 'It is not always good to live a life of just peace. If, therefore, we are judged to fight and toil, we will accept the gift of difficult but fruitful transformations ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 92). Elsewhere, she wrote of herself, 'I just felt like trying my hand at all these obstacles. I am something of a Viking by nature. The dangers, the uncertainties make me a little nervous, but they excite me and intrigue me even more' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 263). She was spiritually strengthened by long days of recollection, both locally and away (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 16). Natalia made intensive use of her time to gain education, shaping the ethos of science and developing the philosophy of art and interpersonal relationships. She lived intensely, was a stranger to boredom and laziness and developed moral, religious and aesthetic attitudes, thus enriching her spirituality.

After graduating, Natalia chose the teaching profession. Her work and professional environment also served as a space for ethos-building. After

defending her master's thesis (1932) with an excellent grade, she was employed at the St Casimir of Poland Private Coeducational School in Poznań. It was an elite institution that pursued a motto in line with Natalia's values of 'God and fatherland to serve.' Natalia taught Polish, singing and drawing there. Professor Barbara Judkowiak of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań – Natalia Tułasiewicz's alma mater – having access to the Tułasiewicz family archive, wrote the following about Natalia's work as a Polish language teacher:

Here, she demonstrated not only conscientiousness and adherence to the postulated modern rules of integrated teaching but also didactic inventiveness (which is documented in two preserved notebooks of Polish language lesson plans) and, finally, activity outside lessons, leading the choir and preparing performances according to her own scripts. Her commitment to the educational process also distinguished her. The content of Natalia's preserved papers that were intended for pedagogical councils and parents' meetings, as well as observations written in her notebooks of lesson plans, prove that her enthusiasm for regained independence (which marked the years of her youth), her dedication to the education of the ethical and civic dispositions of her pupils ... were still alive (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 14).

Natalia Tułasiewicz used her interest in art and love of beauty in her work as a Polish language teacher, diversifying the didactic and educational forms and means. She wrote, 'School, theatre, radio, journal, desk work from inspiration drawn in the world – so many things attract me!' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 208).

In 1936, she passed the state examination at the University of Poznań, also with excellent results, to become a teacher of the Polish language in secondary schools. She accepted a position at the Ursuline Sisters' secondary school, from which she had graduated. Her pupils perceived her as demanding but kind and extremely committed not only to the didactic and educational process but also to social assistance. An example would be her dedication to children from a poor village school in Krzyżownik near Poznań, which further testified to her social sensitivity (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 14). Students also experienced her generosity after the outbreak of the Second World War. In the first week, risking her life, she voluntarily organised a backyard school for neighbourhood children, as learning was impossible in secondary

school. The school's work was interrupted by mass displacement. With her parents and siblings, Natalia had to leave the family home. In 1942, while living in Kraków, she decided to visit her former pupils (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 382), and carried meals to one of them, who was ill, several times a week (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 426). Her actions were not casual or sentimental but had an educational purpose:

I want to speak to them, awaken in them a love of knowledge and help them with all my might so that the war does not drain their sense of beauty and goodness. The first in a series of these visits was unexpectedly successful, and I seem to be on the right track in realising such a tour (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 382).

Natalia described her professional choice in the following words:

Had I studied only musicology or nature or medicine, which I was also attracted to, it would have been different. I have never yet regretted devoting myself to Polish studies, although pedagogical work, for all its beauty, is exhausting to the marrow (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 202).

Despite her frailty, her high level of self-development activity, her enormous commitment to the teaching-learning process and her social activity, Natalia exuded a cheerful disposition. Liked by superiors, colleagues and students, she was conscious of her ability to connect with people. She regarded it as a gift (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 274), although, given her impetuous nature, she must have invested considerable effort to maintain this way of life. She wrote of herself: 'At school, I am lively and almost always cheerful ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 75). Regarding her work, she wrote: 'My daily work is arduous but beautiful, joyful in the sense of my effort' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 383) and '... professional work provides me with a lot of joy ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 318). Natalia's way of life as a person and a teacher was characterised by the dominance of affirmation over discouragement. Her engaging radiance testified to her spiritual qualities. It also featured an important aspect in terms of educational relationships: '... I am not one of those who impose their spiritual world on others as the most appropriate' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 201). The places where she worked were not accidental; she chose schools that pur-

sued the ideas of ethical and aesthetic education, aligning with her ethos and simultaneously reinforcing that ethos. A teacher implementing a particular ethos creates conditions for pupils to learn about it. The socio-cultural inheritance initiated in the family environment, developed independently by Natalia during her studies and realised in her professional practice was waiting to be continued by her students. In fact, nothing prevents it from transcending the place and time of Natalia's life. Her model of life and work as a human being, teacher and community worker can be adopted by anyone who wishes to, anytime and anywhere.

4. Agos

Students learn to live within a community through the socialisation process. They become acquainted with the behavioural patterns that are expected and accepted within a given social group. Such patterns are typical and average for all its members, making dynamism essential in education, enabling individuals to transcend mediocrity in the pursuit of noble ideals and excellence. Stefan Kunowski referred to this concept as *agos*, derived from the Greek word *ago*, meaning *guide*. He attributed the guiding power of *agos* to the moral and intellectual influence of educators (cf. Kunowski, 1996, pp. 174–175). The depth of knowledge and character possessed by such educators has the potential to profoundly influence others. As prominent figures in society, they inspire their students to engage in self-improvement, self-mastery and growth in spiritual culture. Consequently, the *agos* of educators embodies the power of education 'to elevate and ennoble the younger generations, developing them into mature personalities through the process of personalisation' (Kunowski, 1996, p. 175).

Education cannot exist without authorities, as they embody the values to be imparted. For Natalia, her parents were the first authorities. In her diary, she affectionately refers to them as 'Daddy' and 'Mummy,' always capitalising the words. She modelled herself on them, choosing love as the essential value and foundation of her life. From them, she learned respect for others. They instilled in her a love for nature, poetry and theatre, allowing her to develop her talents. As a student, her intellectual authority was Prof. Roman Pollak, a lover of Baroque and Italian culture. He exemplified precision of

thought and reliability and being an ‘artist of words’ and a great educator.³ Natalia planned her academic development under his guidance, selecting Prof. Pollak as the supervisor for her doctoral thesis. She discussed the topic and content of her work with him, and although the war disrupted these plans, Natalia maintained correspondence with her intellectual authority throughout the conflict. Authority figures play a crucial role in spiritual development. In his speech inaugurating the 1925–1926 academic year at the University of Poznań, Vice-Chancellor (Polish: *Rektor*) Prof. Stanisław Dobrzycki stated: ‘Science is by its very nature disinterested. The result of scientific work is an intensification of the spirit. The reward for scientific work is the inner exhilaration of the soul.’⁴ These words aptly describe Natalia’s attitude towards the study process and the fruits of her encounters with intellectual authorities, who were also moral authorities at that time.

Authorities in the relationship of real-life encounters serve as examples and sources of motivation for students to rise above the average. Authority never disappears; it remains in its works, examples and the continuation of the pattern by the student. Brother Albert serves as an example of such a ‘nurtured’ authority in Natalia’s family. Natalia’s father recalled getting to know Brother Albert directly by serving him at Mass (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 7). Brother Albert (Adam Chmielowski, 1845–1916) was an insurgent in the January Uprising, a painter, a Franciscan friar and a protector of the homeless. He founded the Order of Albertine Brothers and Albertine Sisters. He shared the fate of the homeless and the poor, striving to restore their dignity and teach them work and religious practices. Natalia referred to him as the ‘father of misery’ (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 210). She hung a painting of Brother Albert, as depicted by Wyczółkowski, over her desk in her family’s flat in Poznań (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 154). After her resettlement, she located Brother Albert’s grave in Kraków, which she visited frequently; for instance, on her name day, she recorded having visited the grave of her ‘beloved saint, Brother Albert Chmielowski’ (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 298). She also visited the Albertine Brothers in Kraków and peered through the window into the cell

³ The information was obtained from an exhibition titled *Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz – patroness of Polish teachers (Bł. Natalia Tułasiewicz – patronka nauczycieli polskich)* at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Szczecin on 6/03–4/04/2024.

⁴ The information was obtained from an exhibition titled *Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz – patroness of Polish teachers.*

where Brother Albert died. She prepared a draft of a play about Brother Albert and stated, 'Before I get down to writing, I must see Brother Albert's cell up close' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 309). She confessed, 'My veneration for Brother Albert becomes even more vivid' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 309). The diary provides evidence of Natalia's spiritual closeness to Brother Albert, particularly her trust in him and her belief in the efficacy of his intercession:

On several occasions, in sudden requests, this saint has listened to me remarkably. Now I have three larger requests from him, one of which is that my play about him should not be an aborted foetus because I dare to do a lot, but also maturing slowly for this work (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 309).

She read *Brother Albert (Brat Albert)* by Rev. Czesław Lewandowski (1927) and *The Spirituality of Brother Albert (Duchowość brata Alberta)* by Rev. Bernard of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, a Discalced Carmelite, published by the Albertine Brothers in Kraków in 1938. Notably, Natalia herself grew in spirituality and read these books to people whose spirituality she wished to strengthen (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 228, 230). She was also familiar with Maryla Wolska's volume of poems titled *A Jug of Raspberries (Dzbanek malin; 1929)*, which included the piece *Brother Albert (Brat Albert)*. She used this volume during literary Wednesdays in 1942.⁵ Even then, Brother Albert was known for his sanctity, although his beatification occurred in 1983 and his canonisation in 1989. The significance of Natalia's bond with him for her spiritual life is expressed in her words thus: 'I am passionate about everything related to the life of this saint. He died painfully, like Christ, but he knew that he was going towards the light' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 394) and 'I value and love Brother Albert's plain habit' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 331). He was a model of poor in spirit for her, which she valued more than corporal poverty (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 332). Thus, Franciscan spirituality was closest to her.

Given that Franciscan spirituality attracted Natalia in her spiritual growth, it is unsurprising that her closest model was the life of St Francis. His real name was Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone (1181–1226). He was born

⁵ The information was obtained from an exhibition titled *Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz – patroness of Polish teachers*.

in Assisi to a wealthy Italian merchant. He renounced all his possessions to aid those in need, lived a life of poverty and served lepers. He founded the Franciscan Order and, indirectly, the Poor Clares and Tertiaries. In preparation for her trip to Italy, Natalia wrote: 'I would like, in the splendour of spring flowers, to see the tomb of the holy poet – Francis of Assisi, my most beloved saint' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 56). Two elements in this quote resonate with both Natalia's daily choices and those of St Francis, the first being the role of a poet. Natalia stated, 'Talent must not be buried in the ground. In this respect, he will always be the unsurpassed role model of St Francis of Assisi to me' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 216). She possessed many talents and developed each one with care and responsibility. A special emphasis was placed on her poetic works, which are available and constitute an appendix to her published diary notes from 2020 (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 477–524). St Francis was her ideal artist because 'what he spontaneously created stemmed from the spirit of Love and fully corresponded with his inner life. My hunger for artistic expression in a work of art has the same origins. I want to create from love' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 335). The second element in the quoted sentence, 'in the splendour of spring flowers,' relates to her predilection for nature. St Francis loved God in others and in the natural world. He is the patron saint of environmentalists and animals. Natalia cherished her time in nature, stating, 'When asked what gives me the most joy in life, I would answer without hesitation: nature' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 90). Their shared appreciation for nature involved contemplating God in its beauty. In the case of St Francis, this is confirmed, for example, by the lyrical canticle titled 'Canticle of the Sun.' Natalia expressed this similarity directly in the following manner: 'I am by nature endowed with a Franciscan, prayerful contemplation of God in the beauty of nature' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 302). Her unfinished poetry cycle is titled *Sunny Love (Miłość słoneczna)*. Joy is a common theme in their spirituality: 'Nature can bring such happiness that there are no words to describe the joy it provides' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 109). Further, Natalia valued humility in Franciscan spirituality as a source of joy in life. She admired St Francis for

how, despite his quiet mortifications, he knew how to enjoy life! How he loved them. Even during his death, he is said to have requested for joyful, cheerful songs to be sung to him, which scandalised some of the brothers (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 216).

She observed this in herself:

... I rejoice in life but love it; I dare to love it only by learning asceticism in the spirit of St Francis or St John of the Cross. The fullness of the joy of life is the fullness of self-surrender (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 302).

She further expressed, '... my dream is to reconcile this asceticism with ... the serenity of the everyday way of being, with mortification in silence' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 302). She oriented her spiritual work in this manner because joy, despite and against suffering, invigorated her (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 383). She embraced a Franciscan way of life, albeit in the lay state, which she embodied. She was ahead of her time, frequently writing in her diary about the necessity and significance of the lay apostolate. While she cherished Brother Albert's rakish habit, she equally appreciated the saint in a dinner jacket, ball gown or sports attire (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 331). This Franciscan approach to sanctification was closest to her (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 469).

Natalia's trip to Italy was made possible by a two-week journey organised by the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union to celebrate the canonisation of St Andrew Bobola. Natalia graduated from a gymnasium in Poznań run by the Sisters and later became a teacher at the school. Unfortunately, she lacked the funds for the trip. Nevertheless, she approached the situation 'practically,' stating the following about herself and her sister Zosia, who also wished to participate: 'We begin a novena to St Andrew Bobola – if he wants us at this celebration, may he support us. We will go if it is God's will. I have the best hopes ...' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 55). Andrew Bobola (1591–1657) came from a noble family and was a Jesuit priest, preacher and missionary to the south-eastern borderlands of the Republic of Poland. He died a martyr's death at the hands of the Cossacks. His beatification occurred in St Peter's Basilica in Rome in 1853, and his canonisation took place there on 17 April 1938. Natalia attended the ceremony; her hope placed in God through the saint's intercession was not belied. She recorded in her diary:

And when, in the basilica, *God Save Poland* (*Boże coś Polskę*; Polish Catholic patriotic hymn) echoed against the dome's ceiling like the thunder of the victorious tide of the sea, it felt like a symbol of upcoming events that were a hundred times more important (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 129).

St Andrew Bobola was proclaimed the patron saint of Poland only in 2002 but has always been recognised as the patron saint of Polish freedom fighters and a model of bravery (cf. Warchoń, 2017, pp. 153–155). Natalia's notes reveal that this spiritual authority evoked in her not only religious but also patriotic sentiments:

When God allows us to participate in the canonisation of Bobola, I shall have a greater opportunity than ever before, perhaps, to implore God with all the strength of my soul through his intercession to protect Poland, to bless Poland in the days of turmoil that may arrive. I remember well the time when we did not have a Homeland. I was born in slavery. That is why every bit of our land is sacred to me (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 59).

Elsewhere in her diary, she reflected,

During the canonisation of St Andrew Bobola, I suddenly understood with full clarity that when Providence demands of us the highest, seemingly superhuman effort, it also invisibly endows us with superhuman power. In such moments, what would seem impossible to human reason becomes real, and we ask ourselves: Is it not an illusion that we are capable of so much? The same occurs in the history of individuals and entire nations (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 65).

The Tułasiewicz family recited a novena to the saint in October 1939 for the return of their loved ones or at least news of them. Natalia recorded the fruits of the saint's intercession as follows:

While we were celebrating this novena, first Zygmunt returned from Warsaw, the following day Józek, also from Warsaw (7 and 8 October), and that Sunday, 8 October, we found out that Halina was safe and sound in Warsaw ... Today, by midday on Saturday, Halina returned from Warsaw strong and well. She left Warsaw on 10 October, i.e. when we finished the novena to St Andrew Bobola (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 128–129).

The timing was macabre, as noted by her in the following:

If only I could write what I am experiencing and thinking in these notes! It seems to us all that this is some incredible dream, all that is happening around us and all over Poland. How many thoughts must be stifled, how many must be broken down within oneself not to give in (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 129).

Masters, authorities and role models exemplify confidence and bravery. The hope and fortitude inspired by St Andrew Bobola's bravery was rooted in God and reinforced by his participation in the Sodality of Our Lady – the same sources of bravery applied to Natalia and her family. St Andrew Bobola is reported to have had an impulsive character, yet he constantly worked on himself, ultimately achieving the highest degree of spiritual perfection (cf. Wejman, 2020, p. 319); he also possessed an extraordinary ability to interact with people (cf. Wejman, 2019, p. 97; 2020, s. 317) – qualities that characterised Natalia too. It is no wonder that over her desk, next to a picture of Brother Albert, 'hidden behind the dry bud of a Jericho rose, St Andrew Bobola raised his eyes to heaven in silent prayer for perseverance in his ordeal' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 154). She penned these words while recalling a 20-minute visit by German soldiers to her family flat in Poznań. That was the duration for which the Tułasiewicz family had to vacate their home. They were forced to leave everything behind. Resettlement had begun. St Andrew Bobola and blessed Natalia exemplify committed apostolates and sanctity in difficult times.

Other authorities, such as St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Ávila, also played significant roles in shaping Natalia's spirituality and her journey beyond the ordinary. Their writings led Natalia to realise that she possessed the spirituality of a mystic. She regarded the challenges of ordinary, everyday life as a test of mysticism (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 351). However, the chosen characterisation of agos suffices to note that Natalia shaped her spirituality by drawing inspiration from various intellectual, philosophical and religious models. Her spiritual culture was founded on diligent study, conscious choices and persistent self-improvement. By using role models, she consistently sought her path and vocation. The primary impulse animating Natalia's spirituality was love (Teusz, 2018, p. 261), for her ultimate master was God. Upon realising her life mission, she wrote the following just before voluntarily going to work in Germany:

Enlightener of souls, grant me to bring Your light to those to whom You wish to send enlightenment through man. ... You know me, for I pray to you constantly, I pray with all my life. ... My love! I am coming! I know you are blessing me (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 474).

She set out to bring hope where there was none, in poverty of spirit, with joy despite suffering and a sense of happiness. She was unique, becoming a model teacher and lay apostle for others.

5. Fate

Fate is an unquantifiable and unpredictable force, mysterious and incalculable; yet it inevitably impacts individuals' biographies and national histories (Kunowski, 1996, pp. 173–176). When examining the course of Natalia Tułasiewicz's life 'from the outside,' one might conclude that fate was exceptionally unkind to her. She had frail physical health and suffered from illness. At just six years old, she experienced her first week-long hospital stay. Throughout her life, she struggled with tuberculosis. Following lymph node surgery, disfiguring scars remained on her neck; she also had to abandon regular violin practice at 16. Given that music was her passion, this must have been a challenging moment, followed by further difficulties. In the 1922–1923 school year, she missed one academic year due to the progression of her illness, surgery and eight months of recovery.

At 21, she bid farewell to her older sister, who succumbed to tuberculosis. During her studies, she fell in love with a boy. However, differences in character and worldview led to arguments, break-ups and reconciliations, ultimately resulting in her decision to end the engagement. True love never allowed her to forget this boy. She loved reading and creating poetry and prose, but her attempts at a literary debut were unsuccessful. The Second World War broke out when she was 33. Within three months of the war's onset, she and her family experienced displacement. She left everything in her flat in Poznań, including her written diaries, books, and, above all, her dog named Muszka. She described the moment thus in her diary:

He snatched the line out of my hand. Muszka looked at me, terrified, with all the helplessness of fear. ‘Muszka, you have served me faithfully!’ – I barely had time to touch her hair with my hand. Trembling, I called out after the soldier who left with her: ‘Don’t hurt her, please, give her to good people; she’s my faithful friend, the best!’ (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 155).

Seeing that she was following a soldier, her brother restrained her. Initially, she stayed in a transit camp, followed by a journey in cattle wagons to Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, living without work or means of subsistence; eventually, she found a job in Kraków and created living conditions for her family there. At 34, she bid goodbye to her beloved ‘Daddy;’ she wrote about the moment in the hospital: ‘... it seemed to me that this could not happen, could not, for me to lose my Daddy’ (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 184). In July and August 1943, she underwent secret training to become an emissary of the London Government Delegation in the German Reich and a lay minister under the authority of the underground organisation ‘Zachód’ (West) in the Home Army (Polish: Armia Krajowa), then volunteered to go to Hanover. She worked three physical shifts in a German factory to conduct educational and pastoral activities in the forced female labour camp. She taught German and Polish, established a collection of books, conducted meetings discussing hygiene issues and marriage preparation, read *Pan Tadeusz* by Adam Mickiewicz during daily chores, talked about ancient Greece, films and art, preached religion lessons, conducted services in the barracks and led mass with spiritual communion (Judkowiak, 2020, p. 23). While carrying out this mission, she was arrested due to the carelessness of a courier from Poland. After being interrogated in several prisons and subjected to violence, she was battered. Awarded a death sentence as a political prisoner and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, she continued her educational and pastoral mission there. Exhausted and sick, she was selected to be sent to the crematorium on Good Friday, 30 March 1945. A day later – on Holy Saturday – the crematorium released smoke for the last time.⁶ Natalia experienced a harsh and ruthless fate, robbing her of all that she held dear.

Looking at the course of Natalia’s life ‘through her eyes,’ one might conclude that her biography tells a different story. Fate blessed her with a loving

⁶ Biographical facts can be found in: Judkowiak, 2018; 2020; <https://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/>.

family, which she regarded as an exceptional value in life. Fate endowed her with numerous talents, which she was aware of and had the opportunity to develop. She studied in schools with high teaching and educational standards. She graduated in line with her interests and realised her ambition to become a teacher, the profession she desired. She also pursued her passions for literature, theatre and concerts and helped others. According to her, she was fortunate to have good people and excellent educators – both intellectual and moral authorities (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 430). She experienced happiness – as evidenced by numerous entries in her diary (cf. Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 62, 77, 79, 110, 111, 186, 212, 323, 409, 447, 452, 462, etc.). The Polish philosopher Andrzej Zachariasz defined human fate as a specific dimension of one's life (Zachariasz, 2000, p. 199). He pointed out that fate is everyone's lot (Zachariasz, 2000, p. 200). Under all conditions, human beings can engage in activity, i.e. change the course of events. A person adopting an attitude of submission to the course of events is also a form of activity where the individual has made a choice (Zachariasz, 2000, p. 202). However, because humans are conscious beings and their actions can, to some extent, shape the course of their lives, surrendering to fate should be viewed as an attempt to exclude oneself from influencing the surrounding reality and oneself (Zachariasz, 2000, p. 203). At no point in her life did Natalia limit her influence on fate. She regarded every difficulty as a challenge, rather than an obstacle. Addressing challenges requires effort, perseverance and patience. It sometimes involves accepting failure and at other times, rejoicing in success. Both experiences strengthen the spirit. In the barbaric times of war, Natalia was able to radiate joy, provide hope to others and deepen her faith and closeness to God, writing the following in her diary 'And yet, despite all odds – despite the tribulations we have gone through, despite the total dispossession and the simplification of life below the minimum – I say to myself again and again in spirit: life is beautiful!' (25 February 1940; Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 143); 'Today, I love life even more than I loved it before' (31 August 1940; Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 192); and 'In this constant dynamic tension, life is beautiful!' (2 February 1942; Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 341). She possessed a passion for life and work; through her humanity and teaching, she was building a civilisation of love amidst a civilisation of death. Passion signifies that what she was doing was meaningful and exhilarating, despite the drudgery.

Fate is an unquantifiable and unpredictable power. Humans cannot entirely create fate; it lies beyond their control. However, the attitude and stance towards fate is a human decision. How a person approaches events is up to them. Natalia Tułasiewicz experienced extreme situations throughout her life. Victor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and concentration camp prisoner, explained that ‘it is precisely when we are powerless and hopeless to such a degree that we are unable to change the situation – we are, to some extent, called upon and required to change ourselves’ (Frankl, 2002, p. 34, quoted in Michalski, 2020, p. 96). Natalia accepted fate; she shaped it as much as possible and endured it when necessary. To endure was not to be passive but to accept and value what she experienced. Thus, past, present and future events made sense to her. She created her existence at every point in her life. There was something beyond mere acceptance of existence and self in Natalia. There was an affirmation of life within her, an acknowledgment of the events of fate as appropriate. That is why she loved life even during macabre times. This represents a form of mastery over fate. Through strength of spirit, one can rise above whatever fate may bring (cf. Frankl, 2015, p. 112).

6. Conclusion

This article highlights the dynamics of Natalia Tułasiewicz’s spiritual development. Her *bios* was frail health but numerous talents. Her *ethos*, encompassed a loving family, schools with high teaching and educational standards, good relationships with others and a dream job as a teacher. The dynamism of *agos*, sourced from the moral and intellectual influence of the authorities she encountered and consciously chose, shaped her individual culture of the spirit and harmonised it with the culture of the body. Natalia’s *fate* inscribed the course of her life within the macabre context of war. She accepted this fate but did not remain passive towards it. By recognising the events of fate as appropriate, she imbued everything she experienced with value and meaning. She recognised her life’s task and realised it uniquely. The strength of each dynamism contributed to her spiritual maturity. She stated, ‘I went into life with a sense of moral power ...’ (Tułasiewicz, 2020, pp. 97–98).

Natalia Tułasiewicz’s spiritual development was not an autotelic value. Her growth had a consciously defined purpose – to deepen her relationship

with God and others; thus, natural and religious spirituality co-evolved in her educational journey. A property of spirituality is the ability to 'be open' to the environment (Marek, 2015, p. 13). In the natural dimension, this openness involves aspiring to live an ordered life based on good relationships with oneself and others, seeking the meaning of life and one's vocation (cf. Marek, 2015, p. 12). In the context of natural spirituality, the pursuit of development and the attainment of maturity, i.e. the fullness of humanity, is valued in the temporal dimension (cf. Marek, 2015, p. 15). In religious terms, spirituality additionally opens individuals to a relationship with God. The 'ultimate concern' transcends limitations when explaining the essence of maturity, perfection and humanity (Marek, 2015, p. 15). Natural spirituality encourages the acquisition of intellectual and sensory cognition, while religious spirituality further opens the human being to cognition through divine revelation (Marek, 2014, p. 50). The development of natural and religious spirituality in Natalia Tułasiewicz's life manifested in a combination of the temporal and the supernatural. Blurring of the boundaries between these realities was expressed in Natalia performing every temporal activity with an orientation towards eternity. This was the foundation of her peace and joy, even amidst tragic circumstances, as her words attest: 'Spiritually, how happy I feel!' (Tułasiewicz, 2020, p. 110).

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