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The Worth of Words: The Ethical Significance of Dialogue Structured as Asking—Responding in Józef Tischner's Philosophy

Wartość słowa. Etyczne znaczenie dialogu
ustrukturyzowanego relacją pytanie—odpowieź
w filozofii Józefa Tischnera

ABSTRACT

The importance of words has been emphasized by many ethicists and philosophers. Within interpersonal relationships, a significant dimension of the analysis of the word is its value. Ethics is dependent on the value of words, since without honest words we cannot have a real dialogue or then build a trustworthy community. In this paper, the author tries to show that within such a philosophical framework, the most fundamental element is a question—answer relationship, which is a basic structure for a dialogue. Asking is given special consideration by the Polish philosopher and priest Józef Tischner, who sees a question as a kind of request in the world of poverty which demands an ethical response. In this article, the author also presents Tischner's original philosophy of drama—especially in respect to his view on a dialogic relationship between people—and then relationships within various groups, from large societies and nations to small

KEYWORDS

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communities. The ethical, axiological, anthropological, and even agathological and ontological significance of dialogue as asking–responding are also presented as a basis for a deeper communication.

ABSTRAKT

Rolę słowa podkreśla wielu etyków i filozofów. Istotnym wymiarem analizy słowa wykorzystywanego w relacjach międzyludzkich jest jego wartość. Od wartości słów zależy etyka, ponieważ bez szczerych słów nie można prowadzić prawdziwego dialogu, a także budować społeczności opartej na zaufaniu. W niniejszym artykule autorka stara się ukazać, że w takich ramach filozoficznych główną rolę odgrywa relacja pytanie–odpowiedź, która jest podstawową strukturą dialogu. Szczególną uwagę zadawaniu pytania poświęcił polski filozof i ksiądz Józef Tischner, który w pytaniu widział rodzaj prośby w świecie duchowego ubóstwa, która wymaga etycznej odpowiedzi. Autorka przedstawia w artykule również jego oryginalną filozofię dramatu, zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do wyrażanego przez niego poglądu na dialogiczną relację między osobami, a następnie relacje wewnątrz różnych grup – od wielkich społeczeństw i narodów po małe wspólnoty. W artykule ukazano także etyczne, aksjologiczne i antropologiczne znaczenie dialogu, a nawet jego agatologiczny i ontologiczny charakter, który jest ustrukturyzowany relacją pytanie–odpowiedź, stanowiącą podstawę pogłębionej komunikacji.

Introduction

An outline of the ethical problem of the use of words

From the perspective of ethics, a very significant question which should be asked about the word is “What is its value?” How valuable are words in today’s world? Do words mean anything? Can we trust words? Can we believe in them? Should we rely on them? The value of the word is biblical, as it is said in the prologue to the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John, 1:1). Also bearing in mind the Peircean thought that “a sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce, 1955, p. 99), it is worth asking about the world that stands behind words. As a simple example, if you tell me that tomorrow we will meet at 7 a.m.—to what extent does it mean that you want to

meet me tomorrow at 7 a.m.? What kind of world stands behind our words: is it still the world which is represented by those words? How deeply—or how shallowly—are words today fulfilled with the declared meaning? And how empty are they?

Classically, this problem is firmly connected with a semantic analysis of language, but in fact it goes far beyond this epistemic frame. There is also an ethical dimension of this problem, which stresses the authenticity and absence of lies in propositions. Theoretically, anything can stand behind a particular word that somebody utters. Unfortunately, though, there is no provable and necessary connection between the word and the world. The Aristotelian/Thomistic *adaequatio rei et intellectum*, which should be enriched with *et verbum*, is more an ethical imperative than an ontological necessity. What we mean is that, for example, if I tell you that I love you, then I can equally tell you that you are my everything despite simply feeling nothing for you. This second option would be a lie, of course, because behind my words of love there is no loving attitude towards you. In other words, behind words can stand anything, nothing, or exactly what the words are meant to represent. The third option is the most ethical one, that which guarantees both the most honest word and the clearest world, as Confucius explains in his concept of *zhèngmíng* (literally “rectification of terms”):

If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success. When affairs cannot be carried on to success, proprieties and music do not flourish. When proprieties and music do not flourish, punishments will not be properly awarded. When punishments are not properly awarded, the people do not know how to move hand or foot. Therefore, a superior man considers it necessary that the names he uses may be spoken appropriately, and also that what he speaks may be carried out appropriately. What the superior man requires is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect. (Confucius, *Analects* XIII, 3)

According to many ethicists and pedagogues, the appropriate and correct word is *conditio sine qua non* for a peaceful and reasonable community, and further for a harmonious society founded on trust. Trust is only possible when the words we communicate do not fail. Building a healthy community (any kind—a school group, social organizations, schools, etc.) is strictly connected with communication.

Especially within an ethical education, one should be aware of the power of words and their role in forming good or bad interpersonal relationships. This idea is very vivid in the original Polish philosophy of drama created by Józef Tischner (1931–2000), a Catholic priest, philosopher, and lecturer. In this article, I would like to present his view on the word, which in his original philosophy of drama is essentially based on dialogue structured as asking–responding.

Józef Tischner's view on words: An introductory keyline of dialogue and its question–answer structure

Tischner's philosophy is inspired by many philosophical traditions, including personalism, the philosophy of dialogue, existentialism, Thomism, and phenomenology. That is why his original philosophy of drama is very rich and Catholic in its inspiration. He does not analyze the human being as a lonely existence, but as a dramatic person who meets the Other and creates various interpersonal relationships through dialogue. In our interpretation of Tischner's view, a person is fundamentally existentially situated in a position of drama, since dialogue is based on asking and responding. My asking originates in a real poverty and need of response, so nothing but the truth can stand behind the word which comes in answer to my question. Otherwise, a great suffering drops on the person who asks. Such a morally burdened view of words is a consequence of the postulated connection between true words and a happy community, the causal relationship of which is based on the sincerity of asking and the possibility of adequately responding. Only when you genuinely ask me for something can I sincerely respond to you. Only when I am answering your question sincerely can you receive trustworthy words. This in turn builds our interpersonal dialogue, which determines the character of the community.

To give an example: If you call for help, my answer to your call is only appropriate if you are in need of help; my help could be good, for you and for me. Otherwise—if your request for help is not truly meant—I, with my honest response, jump into the world of fallacy and my actions become empty. If I were to find out that you were not in true need of my help, I would find myself in the meaningless world of lies, which would destroy my soul. Furthermore, if you

behave this way many times, then at some point I will not trust your word. A trusting relationship cannot be built if one of the sides of a dialogue is not decent.

Moreover, when somebody else calls for help—and they truly are in need of help—I will refuse to answer because, based on my experiences, I will suspect that behind these words there is no true call. In this scenario, I give an empty response to a genuine request and the person is then left in lonely calling and in the world of emptiness and hopelessness. Again, a trusting relationship cannot be created. At the next level of our dialogue, the problem can occur again, since even if I answer your honest question truthfully, you cannot listen to my words and place me in a morally difficult situation. All my energy spent listening to your question, considering my answer, and sincerely responding is wasted when you do not appreciate my response. This potential failure in dialogue can occur at any level. This disappointment in the question–answer relationship can spiral deeper with no end. Finally, the words of a lie generate suffering in human relationships, which hampers the building of a harmonious community. One real-life example of such a historical lie was the Auschwitz deathcamp gate, which stated “Arbeit macht frei.” This directive from the Nazis to the prisoners of their “labor camp” led them straight to the opposite world—not the promised world of freedom, but a world of total slavery. The people in World War II asking for their free life back were given the opposite—imprisonment and death—in spite of the words declared to them.

This drastic and macabre lie shows how deeply injurious and evil a lie can be. The destructive power of a lie can be seen not only in history, but also within many religious traditions. Apart from the above-mentioned Confucianism, a similar ethical prohibition against lies can be found in Judaism: “You shall not utter a false report” (Ex., 23:1). Similarly, in the Arabic world Allah says, “And you shall speak to men good words.” Within Buddhism, there are four kinds of correct speech, one of which is *words of truth*, which must be true, honest, and not duplicitous. Naturally, believing in the Ten Commandments, Christianity condemned false reports as well. Also, within the Christian spiritual tradition, an original philosophy with the highest concern for the word was developed: the philosophy of drama by Józef Tischner. Nevertheless, this Polish thinker is not a lonely island in

the philosophical ocean. Contemporarily, many Polish philosophers and linguists analyze the value of words in the spirit of Tischner's account of dialogue, and for some philosophers the question–answer relationship has the highest philosophical importance. Therefore, an analysis of Tischner's view from other thinkers' perspectives seems unavoidable. Last but not least, when critiquing Tischner's understanding and the significance of dialogue, we should be aware that we can treat words in many various ways. The possibilities span from the extreme of treating words as undistinguished streams of sound—similar to that of a wind blowing or birds singing (such as when we hear a language we cannot speak)—through recognizing words as signs that more or less adequately represent some world, to treating words very seriously, ascribing to them the power to tell us what to do, as in the case of a captain's order or judge's sentence. The uttered word can be treated very frivolously, significantly, or absolutely seriously. The value of words seems to depend on our will to utter and treat words meaningfully.

Our analysis of Tischner's philosophy of drama shows that the question–response relationship which builds a dialogue has a profound ethical significance. It is not only that by asking we hope to receive a correct or true answer; it is rather that since the one who asks needs to receive an answer, the one who responds becomes responsible for an answer. And if someone is responsible for an answer, they can be blamed morally. In unpacking this idea, we will present the key concepts of Tischner's philosophy of dialogue and drama. As we will see, these concepts are immersed in the specific vocabulary of the philosophy of drama, but we will also elucidate these concepts by invoking some different philosophical traditions.

The philosophy of Józef Tischner

An introduction

Józef Tischner grew up in the village of Łopuszna in the mountains of southern Poland. He studied at Jagiellonian University in Krakow under Roman Ingarden and was a professor of philosophy at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow. He was connected with the Solidarity movement and he criticized Marxism and

communism. He created the original philosophy of drama, immersed in the philosophy of dialogue and existentialism.

To understand the entirely new view of the metaphor of drama as a way of understanding human existence, first we need to note that Tischner belongs to the dialogic paradigm in philosophy, as he claims that “if there was not some kind of mysterious dialogic bond, there would not be ethics” (Tischner, 2012, p. 263).¹ Thus, it is essential for him that dialogue is the basis for ethics.

One of Tischner’s interpreters, Jarosław Jagiełło, underscores the importance of dialogue as well. In his article “From Axiology to Agathology: Józef Tischner’s Philosophy of Man” (2020), he shows the evolution of Tischner’s thought. First, he claims that his philosophy grows from a reflection on ethical values, which leads him to form the concept of *axiological me*. Then, Tischner’s philosophy evolves into a stage of reflection on human drama, formulating the characteristic *triada*: Person, Stage, and Time. Drama takes place in the dialogic encounter of people. Tischner’s idea ends with agathology, concluding that there is a need for good and God in order to save humans in their dramatic existence. Jagiełło also mentions that “though the axiological outline of Tischner’s anthropological philosophy is a solid fact, one cannot say that early Tischner tries to reduce the philosophy of humans to the philosophy of values or anthropology to ethics” (Jagiełło, 2020, p. 44).

In this article, dialogue—as a sphere where two people meet in an ethical, axiological, and agathological sense—is the most important element of the analysis. Tischner’s understanding of dialogue is very deep, has many dimensions, and is rooted in many philosophical traditions. As we will see later on, dialogue is basically structured as a question–answer paradigm.

Józef Tischner’s philosophy of drama

Józef Tischner constructs an original anthropology, seeing a man as a dramatic entity. The drama of a person takes place in this world—which is understood as a stage—among their contemporaries, who

1 All of Józef Tischner’s quotes and other as yet untranslated quotes of Polish philosophers were translated by the author of the paper.

are seen as actors in a play. On the stage of this play, a specific time is running—the time of our life. The whole existential situation of a person being thrown into the world (*in-der-Welt-Sein* in German) is compared to the situation of an actor in a play.

Human drama runs within the phenomenon of speech: first we talk, we ask. That is why, for Tischner (2012), speech (*parole* in French) is prior to language (*langue* in French):

Speech consists in an event and language is the possibility of events in that sense that having language, having grammar, semiotic, and semantic structures, a man can speak, but it doesn't mean that he will speak. Nevertheless, speech is entrance into possibility, into the sphere of reality, into the sphere of facts. In that respect, speech definitely goes beyond any language. (p. 260)

The Polish philosopher takes this idea over from Emmanuel Levinas, who concentrated on the analysis of speech in opposition to the analysis of language (Tischner, 2012, p. 261). He states that speech is irreducible to the relationship between subject and object, since things are ascribed data and people reveal themselves. The difference between people and things lies in the possibility of responding and participating in a dialogue: “If the Other did not ask me a question, there would not be a system of signs, so firstly the fact that somebody asked and I answered is the source of semantic and semiotic structure” (p. 262). He also points out that “If there is no dialogue or understanding, if there is no will to participate in the event, the intentional event will not occur” (p. 234).

This very fine point of interpersonal relationships was also analyzed by Friedrich Nietzsche, who opts for understanding dialogue as order and obedience in his well-known master–slave relationship. Tischner (2012) tries to differentiate the relationship of obedience and that of “coming after me” and “going after you,” which he claims is the basis for a proper dialogue (p. 33). In his view, this kind of relationship builds up reciprocity. A nonreciprocal community occurs when one side of a dialogue does not follow the other side. As he writes, “I go after him, but ‘he’ does not go after me and there is no relationship of reciprocity” (Tischner, 2012, p. 233).

According to Tischner, through true speech, true existence can happen. A similar idea was put forward by Martin Heidegger, who indicated the crucial difference between *Gerede* and *Rede*. He says

that only the latter leads to an authentic way of life and then *Mit-sein* underpinned by *Sorge*. As Tischner (2012) says, “opposition to *Gerede* is *Rede* (speech); when describing it in the form of authentic and non-authentic ways of existence, Heidegger opposes them” (p. 196).

Aleksander Bobko (2007, p. 12) points out that freedom in Tischner’s philosophy obliges us to take responsibility for ourselves and others and enables us to meet others authentically. “Responsibility is an ethical category. To explain the genesis of the responding, one should reach the ethical element” (Tischner, 1998a, p. 90). To clarify, “there is no force outside me to make me answer. The connection between question and answer is not causal. In a sense, Gottfried Leibniz had it right when he claimed that ‘monads have no windows.’ If I respond, it is only because I want to” (Tischner, 1998a, p. 89). Tischner (1998a) continues:

Around me and beside me there are people, especially those who are participants of the same drama in which I take part as well. In spite of prevalent opinions, I do not see them, I do not hear them, do not touch it, and do not perceive it. What I perceive is externality and not a man as a man, the other as the other. Another man as a man can only appear when—not excluding the whole “externality”—standing in front of me as a participant in my drama. Participation in drama I cannot hear nor see; it requires quite another openness than the openness characteristic of intentional consciousness. Another man stands before me through some recourse, and in consequence an obligation appears in me. Consciousness of the presence of the Other is filled as consciousness of a recourse—a recourse which obliges. Here my ears hear your question. Afterwards comes a moment of silence—shared presence. You wait for an answer. One should give an answer. This “should” is essential. (p. 9)

The main factors of this existential drama, then, are person, stage, and time. Tischner (1998a) writes that “a dramatic existence means experiencing the given time and having other people and the world as a stage underfoot” (p. 7). He further explains dramatic time as “the time that happens between us as participants in one and the same drama. The dramatic time binds me with you, and you with me, and binds us with the stage where our drama takes place” (Tischner, 1998a, p. 8). The drama, then, is between a person and another person. It is filled with tension and it runs between the tragedy’s various turning points. The peripeteias of the actors in their drama-life—as will be shown—are spread between two fundamental points of dialogue: question and answer.

Tischner's philosophy is not only an original philosophy of drama, but also a philosophy of dialogue. The importance of a word uttered in a social environment springs from the fact that an answer binds me with the person who asks me a question and the question that somebody asks me binds us in the sense that we become a dialogical unity: "The relationship which is born between the asked and the asking is called a dialogic relationship" (Tischner, 1998a, p. 90). The dialogue runs between two subjects and is played within the world of words. It is worth emphasizing that the crucial role in Tischner's philosophy is played by a dialogue. It has its highest significance, since it is a way of communication.

But it is also important to note that not every philosophical tradition holds language to be a group of relationships between people (*lingua ac communitas* in Latin). Very often, we speak to preach (Augustin), to divide useful things from useless ones, divide the just from the unjust (Aristotle), or to share our thoughts with other people (Aquinas). Language can also be treated as a way of reminding ourselves of innate knowledge as ideas (Plato), the work of our spirit (Humboldt), an expression of our inner life and freedom (Swedenborg), or our attitude toward the world (Schelling) (Andrzejewski, 2016). When it comes to dialogue alone, it can be understood differently as well. The most multi-dimensional and serious attitude toward dialogue is represented by philosophers of dialogue, of which Tischner definitely is one. Witold P. Glinkowski, in his book *Człowiek w dialogu* [Human Beings in Dialogue] even postulates that we are *homo dialogi*, since "humans are an extraordinary and unprecedented entity in the ontical universe, owing their existence to dialogue, to which they were invited" (Glinkowski, 2020, p. 15).

Tischner (2012) alone claims that "each and every language is directed to somebody—when talking, we talk to somebody or with someone. This 'to somebody' or 'with someone' is a sphere of communication or dialogic dimension" (pp. 258–259). It is worth noticing that, even within the ancient philosophical tradition dialogue had already received attention, with Socrates' three sieves of speech (truth, goodness, and necessity/usefulness), five canons of rhetoric—*invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery*—three functions

of rhetoric—ethos, pathos, and logos—or the virtue of truthfulness as a mediocracy between two extreme vices—undue humility and undue boastfulness—proposed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* as an application of the golden mean to speech. The significance of words in antiquity is expressed in Plato’s *Phaedrus*: “Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul, and therefore he who would be an orator has to learn the differences of human souls—they are so many and of such a nature, and from them come the differences between man and man” (Plato, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>).

This platonic concept of treating words as those operating on human souls can also be seen in Tischner’s (1998a) understanding of dialogue. We can read that “openness to the Other has a dialogic character” (p. 9), that “to listen is to step into the speaker’s shoes” (Tischner, 1991, p. 15), and that “dialogue constitutes, enforces, and develops, lasting longer or shorter, being richer or poorer, spiritual reality—interpersonal reality—which exposes the essential meaning of the dialogic reciprocity of people” (Tischner, 1998a, p. 20). Contemporarily, John Searle explains:

We find there are five general ways of using language, five general categories of illocutionary acts. We tell people how things are (*Assertives*), we try to get them to do things (*Directives*), we commit ourselves to doing things (*Commissives*), we express our feelings and attitudes (*Expressives*), and we bring about changes in the world through our utterances (*Declarations*). (Searle, 1979, p. VII)

Within Searle’s categorization, Tischner’s view would embrace *directives*, *commissives*, and *declarations*. This is so because, in accordance with the Polish thinker, the ontology of a person living with other people on a stage is based on a series of meetings and separations which engage us in human affairs through dialogue structured as a question–answer relationship.

Józef Tischner’s philosophy of meeting

As Tischner (1991) explains, “drama begins with meeting, evolves in various forms of encounters, and ends with separation—break-up or death” (p. 12). Within this philosophical understanding of a human’s life, he describes the role of the Other in this way: “Another

person stands in front of me with some expectation/demand, which gives me a sense of responsibility” (Tischner, 1991, p. 13). Tischner’s student, Jarosław Jagiełło (2020), says that

it is clear that in Tischner’s optics, dramaturgy—and even the tragedy of existence—and inner conflict which happens in the axiological horizon of a person’s own existence, takes place in the face of the Other: both another person and God. (p. 68)

Tischner is clearly inspired by the thought of Levinas, whose analysis of a *tête-à-tête* encounter also includes those elements of asking and responding, since Levinas’ well-known *face* appears while asking, commanding, and listening. As Tischner (2012) writes, “metaphysics here is that one asks another and the Other answers; metaphysics here is where somebody says something to another and the Other listens. There is also the metaphysics of request” (p. 256).

The question is a *prima facie* request—it is a kind of turning toward the Other with some desire. This situation of asking awaits a response. It also generates some tension between the two parties, which stems from awaiting for an answer. Will it come at all? Or maybe only partially? Will it fulfil my desires? Will it meet my expectations? Will you generally take my asking into account or will you just ignore it? Will the words which come in response be truthful?

Tischner sees human relationships in some specific setting—the setting of encounter. First, we meet someone. Second, within such a meeting, the Other can ask me a question. Third, my decision to answer or not to answer makes me a participant of somebody’s drama. To use Tischner’s words (1989a),

a man stands in front of me and asks me a question. I do not know where he comes from and I do not know where he is going. Now he is waiting for a response. By asking, he apparently wants to make me a participant in his affairs. (p. 89)

The ethical dimension of the question–answer relationship in Józef Tischner’s philosophy of dialogue

Preliminary remarks

Tischner (1998b) highlights the ethical importance of the question–answer relationship by saying that

the “quality” of asking—being asked does not concern some abstract idea of freedom, but freedom as a stand-in. Revelation is happening by chance, but it is not a “meaningless” chance. It is chance “by choice” Firstly, freedom is freedom of another who has asked me a question and by asking he has “confided in me.” (p. 175)

It is exceptionally worth pointing out that within Tischner’s theory, the one who asks simultaneously reveals themselves and confides in the Other. We do not open ourselves up to just anybody: “The epiphany of face is not a revelation of everything to everybody, but a revelation of the truth-teller to the chosen one” (Tischner, 1998a, p. 32). When asking, we need to trust another person and hope that they will not let us down, will not lie to us. “The one who reveals himself firstly looks for somebody in whom he can confide and self-entrust” (Tischner, 1998b, p. 179). Asking is an act of trust and faith and it is never a one-sided relationship, since “revelation is a call-up, which runs on the level of a dialogic relationship between a person and another person” (Tischner, 1998b, p. 179). Me asking you, accompanied by my revelation of myself, binds me with you and is a chance for us to build a trustworthy, faithful, and strong relationship.

The person who asks starts a relationship with another person with their question. Nevertheless, in order to create a relationship, the responder needs to answer. As is quite clear, the responder in general is spread between two logical options—saying honestly “yes” or sincerely “no”: “Revelation understood as asking, challenge and entrustment bridges the distance of separation between Me and You, who can say ‘no’” (Tischner, 1998b, p. 180). A bridge between the two parties to a dialogue will be built if a positive, trustworthy answer comes. If a silent and empty answer or a negative response comes, then a drama is born.

It is important to understand how great a role the question–answer relationship plays within Tischner’s philosophy. It has a huge moral burden—indeed, it builds the ethics—since only through asking–response can responsibility be established.

Another person is present in me—or present by me—through expectation which he awakens in me. It is seen in the awareness of question. Another has asked me Question is expectation. The one who has asked has a right to be given an answer In this obligation we feel the presence of another person. The Other is presented by me through what I am obliged to do for him; and I am presented by him through what

he is obliged to do for me. This relationship is one of liability. Liability is a relationship of responsibility. Responsibilities are born in meeting. (Tischner, 1998a, p. 18)

In front of me stands the Other—they have a different character and essence than any other entity in the world; they are not only some non-interactive grain of sand or clouds in the sky. The difference is that when they ask, they open the possibility of a deep, interpersonal relationship. Animals may sometimes ask us for something—mainly for food—but a request from a human being is nevertheless different. This is because, according to Tischner, the person who asks wants somebody to become a true participant in their drama. They want someone to be involved in their affairs. They may be in need, they may have some desires to be fulfilled—and certainly by asking they need a response. Nevertheless, there are no ethical means to force a person to answer our question. The response is born in the conscience of the responder and is an act of free will. This makes the first person dependent on the other, since Tischner sees the act of asking immersed in a sphere of poverty.

Question—answer as a relationship of dependency in poverty

“What is a question? It is a kind of request. Whoever asks a question is asking for a response. Question and answer are possible where requests are possible—i.e., in the world of poverty,” Tischner writes (1998a, p. 92). A question reveals our poverty, or a need that sparked the request. Poverty is the father of a question, and an answer functions as a gift of free will: “asking questions and questioning asks—is a presence of some kind of neediness. Neediness requires *misericordias*” (Tischner, 1998a, p. 90). If an answer is given to us, it does not take the form of an act of the wealthy toward the poor, but rather of a master teaching a student. Tischner (1998a) explains it this way:

Me—one who is asked—I know thanks to the question which has come to me that another man is present by me, but I know that I am present by him as well Giving an answer to the question I am starting—if I am really responding—to be “for somebody.” (p. 90)

This dependence on the Other in the act of asking puts the one who asks in a humiliating position, in a way. While asking, we confess to another person that we need them. It puts us on some unequal

level with the person whom we ask for something. And we reveal through the act of asking that we are not self-sufficient and we are in need of another. Moreover, this factor of having or not having the answer is also quite inconvenient for the one who asks. Not only do we reveal ourselves as naked in some way by asking, but we also take the risk that our nudity will be disdained:

I answer because the question was a request and a calling, and request and calling has an established moral responsibility. I answer in order not to kill. If I remain silent, I could hurt the face of the Other. My silence would be an act of contempt—metaphysical contempt. (Tischner, 1998a, p. 103)

In the spirit of Tischner's Levinas-inspired philosophy, the one who does not respond, who choose not to answer sincerely, is the one who sentences the other to contempt. Not responding is an entirely dramatic situation of being rejected, disdained, ignored, and left alone. It has an even deeper metaphysically-based ethical dimension: "A lack of reciprocity, and especially its refusal, completes itself in the perspective of evil." (Tischner, 1998a, p. 117). It is ethically wrong not to answer and deny reciprocity, because Tischner sees asking—responding this way:

At the source of answering the question of a human being must be some ethical choice—a choice between good and evil. The responder not only gives an answer to the Other, but also to himself—as a participant in the drama of good and evil. (Tischner, 1998a, p. 91)

Summary and a short solution to the research problem

In accordance with Tischner's view, a person living among people is sentenced to a dramatic situation—drama is born when we need the true word and we are given a lie. On the stage of life's theatre, the plot runs according to question–response, which can be seen on different levels of human existence (personal, social, regional, national, or global). The Polish philosopher treats this dialogic relationship very deeply, even claiming that it is a necessary condition for us to fully become ourselves, since "in reciprocity, I become who I am thanks to you, and you thanks to me" (Tischner, 1991, p. 12). Enriching this view with Emmerich Coreth's (1986, 1994, 1980) metaphysical perspective, it should be emphasized that the situation of a person is even

more tragic—his existence depends on Pure Being while his essence separates him from it, which we discover by scrutinizing the question. Taking all those views on a human being together, we can conclude that within this philosophical perspective, a person in social and ontological settings is constructed as a beggar. They are situated in constant poverty on different levels: personal, existential, social, interpersonal, etc. At this point, Tischner (1998a) admits that “basic questions, from which the philosophy begins, are, without a doubt, a call of pain” (p. 96). When we situate ourselves in the position of one who asks, we sentence ourselves to a real drama, since we ourselves depend on the response, which may or may not come. And even deeper, by asking we confess and confirm that we are not self-sufficient entities, because we are in some need of something. Asking has a hidden nature of striving for something and is founded on some kind of hunger. From the metaphysical perspective, agreeing on our relational construction that is revealed in the question–answer paradigm, we confirm that we are limited and imperfect beings, sentenced to eternally searching for something which fundamentally cannot come, because even if some partial fulfilment comes, another kind of deficiency appears.

We can be involved in this spiral of question–response *ad infinitum*, never attaining satisfaction. The question–response structure is based on desire, and as Buddha Gautama notes, every misery and suffering (*dukkha*) originates within a craving:

And what is the stress of *not getting what is wanted*? In beings subject to birth, the wish arises, “O, may we not be subject to birth, and may birth not come to us.” But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted. In beings subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, the wish arises, “O, may we not be subject to aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, and may aging... illness... death... sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair not come to us.” But this is not to be achieved by wanting. This is the stress of not getting what is wanted. (*The First Noble Truth...* 2013)

According to Buddhist teaching within the structural craving and wanting, no peaceful mind can be attained.

Tischner is fully aware that craving is the cause by which suffering, poverty, and misery come into play on the stage of our dramatic life. He tries to alleviate this quandary by distinguishing between longing and craving/desire, inspired by Levinas:

Being-for-another is expressed, according to Levinas, in longing which is essentially distinct from desire. Desire, even in the most sublimated form of openness to beauty of the Other, is always desire of the-same; whoever lives on the level of desires awaits “the eternal return of the same.” Longing is an openness to something else—to something totally different. (Tischner, 1998b, p. 245)

Following Levinas, he claims that longing for something totally different is not the same as desire, which is wanting of the-sameness. This is how he steps into reflections on God and agathology. Following St. Thomas Aquinas, Coreth also claims that only Being (*Sein*) is *actus in seipso subsistens*.

However, the fullness of all real perfection of being could still be thought of as finite; but it can only be limited if other unfulfilled possibilities are also open, i.e., unrealized possibilities of further perfections of being. (Coreth, 1958, p. 54)

In other words, unfulfilled possibilities within this ontological hypothesis of a construction of entities without Pure Being will always assist us. Nevertheless, we leave aside considerations about transcendence as a possible fulfilment of the question–response quandary in this article, bearing in mind that such a solution has been proposed by some metaphysicians. For now, we can only recollect the perspective of Pippi Longstocking, who eagerly searches for “spunk” and after a long adventure regarding the meaning of the word “spunk,” she discovers it in her own hands (Lindgren, n.d., chapter 3).

Getting back to the initial inquiry: What is the value of words? What do words mean? Can we trust words?—Perhaps the answer to those questions is simpler than it seems. Perhaps with any word, even an imaginary, misleading, or deceptive one, we can follow Pippi and play both meaning-finding and thing-finding (see: Lindgren, n.d.).

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