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# THE UNIVERSALISTIC CONCEPT OF SCIENCE IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE OF KAROL WOJTYŁA – JOHN PAUL II

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## Abstract

The voice of Karol Wojtyła, better known as John Paul II, is very important among contemporary theologians and Catholic philosophers. Many times the Pope paid attention to scientific issues, i.e. scientific and technological development and its ethical consequences, relation between cognition and faith as well as the mission of the Science. His concept is becoming a universalistic idea, in its philosophical and ethical sense as well as in an institutional one. He often pointed at the universalistic character of Science in his papal documents and speeches. The core of Science is expressed by the postulate of searching a universal and absolute truth. It is a mission of humanities as well as sciences.

*Keywords:* Karol Wojtyła, universalism, Philosophy of science, truth, scientific cooperation

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## 1. Introduction

The main field of philosophical and theological study of Karol Wojtyła, the professor of the Catholic University of Lublin, better known as John Paul II, was Anthropology and Catholic ethics. He was the author of many philosophical works; one of the most respected works was the dissertation *The acting person* (Polish original text has been titled *Osoba i czyn*) which is a deep study devoted to human activity and ethical and anthropological consequences of human activity. The aim of this article is not present his achievements on Anthropology or Social ethics field but to reflect upon science, its essence and role in the contemporary world.

The source base mainly consists of the Pope's speeches due to the fact that Karol Wojtyła as John Paul II reflected upon issues concerning the world of Science. A part of these materials (e.g. the encyclical *Fides et ratio*) can be treated not only as an official interpretation of the Catholic church but also as works from the field of Epistemology and Philosophy of science, however

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majority constitutes the speeches, addresses and pastoral letters addressed to a vast group of recipients. Other earlier philosophical works of the Pope should be taken into account. In these works he expressed his epistemological views directly and indirectly. Quotes about truth, cognition and science are scattered in many places and they constitute a coherent notion of science which is worth experiencing due to the role John Paul II played in the contemporary world. His teaching can be treated as a collection of normative postulates for scholars, both humanists and representatives of sciences, regardless of the fact whether they are believers or not. The content of his speeches appears to be much more common than the Church which he was the head of for nearly 27 years [1].

Science is a specific kind of culture-forming activity; it is an attempt of cognition and understanding the surrounding reality as well as the intrapersonal reality (the task of Psychology). There are also opinions that it is one of the highest forms of culture [2]. Therefore, it is worth learning Karol Wojtyła's attitude towards scientific and cognitive matters. Especially as 'the spirit of universalism' can be found in Wojtyła's reflection upon theory of knowledge issues and the field of Philosophy of science.

## **2. Epistemological perspective**

The notion of science is inseparably connected with the category of truth. The basic aim of Science is to recognize the truth. During one of his papal speeches John Paul II put it briefly "who says science, also says truth". And further: "there is no real academic spirit where there is no truth, joy of searching and cognition inspired by love. The searching for truth gives greatness to scientific knowledge." [3]

Wojtyła's philosophical formation oscillated between two great trends of Philosophy, i.e. Thomism and phenomenology, which implied his attitude to key issues of the theory of knowledge. His great masters were Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and a German phenomenologist Max Scheller (1874-1928). Wojtyła devoted his postdoctoral (habilitation) degree dissertation to the thought of Scheller [4].

As a Thomist Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II understood the truth in absolutist, objective and universalistic categories which was already noticed in the first subsection. He rejected any form of cognitive relativism. He understood truth as an absolute and objective value, and consequently as a universal value [5]. It is not 'closed' within the borders of any culture and it is not limited by time and history. His reflections on the issue of truth are inscribed in the tradition of classical Philosophy, especially Thomism and Aristotelian philosophy, in which truth has been defined as an agreement between cognition and reality, in other words factual state [6].

A commonly known is a definition formed by a Jewish doctor living in Egypt Isaac ben Salomon (845-940), which was repeated and specified by Thomas Aquinas: *veritas est adequatio intellectus et rei* [7]. In this definition there is a relation between the object of cognition and thought. The object is

always an actually existing being, that is ‘something’ that is, that exists. Truth is expressed in an absolute and objective manner, which means that the object is indicative of truthfulness of cognition. The cognitive subject interiorizes the essence, that is the content of the object of cognition. Therefore, truth occurs when interiorized contents are adequate with contents which are the features of the being itself which is the object of cognition. Logical truth, that is the agreement between cognition and reality, is a derivative of so-called Ontic truth. The being itself which actually exists, that is irrespective of cognition, of cognitive intellect, which is the subject, has its own essence, content, which determines being, so it is what it is. It constitutes the truth in itself: *ens et verum convertuntur* (being and truth are variable values) [8]. Every object of cognition, before it is recognized either in colloquial or scientific cognition, is true in itself. Truthfulness is a universal feature – according to Thomists transcendental – of beings.

The object of scientific research and *implicite* science itself are universal. Assuming that its aim is to recognize the reality which is true in itself in Ontic sense, scientific establishments related to reality and expressing logical order, should express objective and universal truth, that is should be true ‘always and anywhere’ because agreement between cognition and reality is the truth and this agreement is not conditioned historically or culturally as it is perceived by the representatives of epistemological relativism. *Tout court* cognition is in accordance with reality or not, in other words the content of cognition is adequate with ‘internal’ content of the object of cognition or not. If this agreement is achieved, even fragmentarily, that is with respect to a fragment of reality, it can be stated that the cognition is true. Since the object of scientific cognition is generally true, then scientific establishment, i.e. the result of cognitive process, and Science itself which aim is objective and universal truth must be true as well.

As a phenomenologist Karol Wojtyła paid attention to the object of cognition. What is also universal (common) from the Polish Pope’s point of view is the aspiration for the cognition of truth, willingness to achieving and experiencing it. Truth is inscribed in human nature, it is its integral part. In the life of every individual searching for the truth is a process which belongs to his personal history. Man experiences the truth in his inner life. The contemplation of truth leads to building a human personality which is manifested outside by human deeds. In these deeds man – person expresses himself [9].

### **3. Science at the service of truth and good**

Science is of the forms of common aspiration for the cognition of truth. It is the form standing out due to its methodology, order, internal coherence, criticism etc. In any case it leads to the cognition of truth like any other kind of human cognition. ‘Spirit’ or a less metaphoric essence of science – scientific cognition, influences directly as a result of universal need for experiencing reality [10].

Having been brought up in a classical spirit Karol Wojtyła saw the most important function of Science in cognition. In other words, he gave priority to cognitive function over practical function of Science. Therefore, he gave a primacy to sciences defined by him as the basic ones, and their basic task – function is to search the truth. This approach to cognition was called ‘pure knowledge’. Cognition was regarded as an autotelic value, that is a value in itself. In a characteristic way he expressed his opinions during one of his speeches for the members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: “The search of truth is the task of basic science. The researchers who moves on this first aspect of sciences, feels all the fascination of Saint Augustine’s words: “Intellectum valde ama” (*Epist.* 120, 3, 13; PL 33. 439), (he loves intelligence) and the function that is characteristic of it, to know truth. Pure science is a good, which all people must be able to cultivate in full freedom from all form of international slavery or intellectual colonialism.” [John Paul II, *Speech on the Centenary of the Birth of Albert Einstein*, available at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2ALEIN.HTM>]

While searching for pragmatic attitude towards the issues of Science in the works of John Paul II, first of all one finds its dignifying properties. There is a clear reference to Socratic tradition of ethical intellectualism. While contemplating truth, man grows spiritually, becomes more human, and experiences his personality in a more perfect manner. Therefore, the following ascertainment does not surprise: „No less important than research in the theoretical field is research in the practical field — by which I mean the search for truth which looks to the good which is to be performed” [John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio_en.html), no. 25]. However, it does not concern the practical use of the results of scientific research or assigning a pragmatic function of a higher rank, but it is about the ethical consequences which result from conducting scientific research due to the fact that for every human being „there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known” [John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html), no. 38].

The truth in anthropological and ethical notion of Karol Wojtyła is inseparably connected with good and beauty which similarly to truth are universal values. By experiencing them works of art are born. In the aspect of considering the essence of Science, the relations between truth and good are especially important [11]. As he noticed in one of his articles: "Rationality is not only the ability to create general concepts and express judgments. It is an ability to learn the truth, in a way it is a natural relation to truth. Among others it is the ability to express the truth about good and the truth about goods." [12] Inevitably the truth or rather the cognition of truth leads man towards good, towards the cognition of good. As a consequence John Paul II recognized the ethical obligation which is a burden to Science and it is the contribution to the

good of man. He believed that science has sense and rightness when it is recognized as capable of discovering the truth and when human good is recognized in truth [3, p. 83]. Good has an individual dimension when it concerns particular persons but also a communal one when various communities, countries, nations and the whole globalised world are taken into consideration. That is the reason why science as a tool to create good has its universal dimension. Beyond political and cultural divisions scientific community is predestined to build a peaceful and just world, the world professing universal values, especially the universal truth. He emphasized that “Creativity and new discoveries ought to bring both the scientific community and the world’s peoples together, in a climate of cooperation which values the generous sharing of knowledge over competitiveness and individual interests” [John Paul II, *Speech to the Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, Monday, 8 November 2004, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2004/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20041108\\_academy-sciences\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2004/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20041108_academy-sciences_en.html)]. In his speech entitled *Science in the Service of Peace* he ascertained: „Now science, which seeks the truth and is free from all ideologies, can and must promote justice in the world; while not remaining a slave of the economically privileged peoples, it can and must spread everywhere, in order to ensure, through appropriate technical means, that all peoples and all individuals are given their due” [John Paul II, *Speech to the Plenary Session on the Subject ‘Science in the Service of Peace’*, *Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, November 12, 1983, available at [http://www.disf.org/en/documentation/12-831112\\_PASC.asp](http://www.disf.org/en/documentation/12-831112_PASC.asp)]. As he noticed in the next part of the speech: „More than any other, the scientific community is a community of peace, for your rigorous search for the truth in the field of nature is independent of ideologies and therefore of the conflicts that result from them”. Science, in the opinion of Karol Wojtyła, connects and does not divide people; it connects cultures, nations and civilizations because it is subject to truth, that is the universal value.

This peculiar categorical imperative is also a burden to technology and technological (practical) sciences. They should contribute to the social development in the world. Its drive should be the good of every man.

However, already in the past and also in the present there is an antinomy between the aims of technological development and ethics. John Paul II noticed the dangers which are involved in the technological development freed from fundamental ethical rules and norms. He warned against three ‘temptations’ which accompany the technological development. The first one is to treat technology as an aim in itself, and its only norm is a constant growth. The second is the evaluation of technological development only according to economic criteria in which rights of common good for all humanity are ignored. Finally, the third temptation is politicization of technology and using it only to reach the aims and maintain the power. According to the Pope the only criterion of technological development should be man. Therefore, he encouraged all people of science, scientific institutes

and universities to study the ethical issues of contemporary technological society more profoundly. The aim of technological development based on the principles of ethics is to establish a just and peaceful international order. That is why the Pope regarded the involvement of a great number of scientists in the military work as morally doubtful [3, p. 107-108]. Such situation intensifies the divisions in the world, causes the tensions in international relationships to grow, does not lead to a peaceful and harmonious co-existence of nations, cultures and civilizations.

#### **4. On the need for universalisation of scientific activity**

In his contemplations the Pope also paid attention to one more danger connected with the world of Science, that is the marginalization of scientific circle from the civilizationally underdeveloped countries and brain drain which weakens the developmental potential of developing societies. Science as a universal value is the value of all human societies. Highly developed countries should not lay a claim to it, however it often occurs. The state that is lasting now was called 'scientific and technological colonialism' by John Paul II. It is the openness to the heritage of other cultures and civilizations which may lead to a real global social development. It comes from a creative exchange of ideas and opinions. The exchanges, also in 'transborder' sense, go beyond the countries' border, cultural and civilisational barriers.

As a spokesman of universal values John Paul II ascertained almost 25 years ago: „The scientific community, a community of peace, must be extended to all nations, through the foundation everywhere of institutes for the research and sound technological application. It is not enough that political colonialism has ceased; every form of scientific and technological colonialism must cease as well. I cannot fail to note with satisfaction that the Pontifical Academy of Sciences includes an ever greater number of scientists from all the nations of the world, with no racial or religious discrimination. This is a form of cultural ecumenism which the Church, as the promoter of the true religious ecumenism, cannot but regard with a sense or lively satisfaction. From the scientific community, especially when it extends to all the regions of the world, there have come discoveries which have helped by the development of humanity in every field...” [John Paul II, *Speech to the Plenary Session on the Subject 'Science in the Service of Peace'*]

Full realization of the tasks of science, i.e. discovering an absolute and universal truth may occur only in adequate conditions. Above all it requires freedom. John Paul II noticed that: "Freedom has always been an essential condition for the development of science even if it wanted to preserve a deep dignity of searching for truth and cannot be limited only to the function of the tool of ideology" [3, p. 123]. Science should be free from ideology, politics and economy, and from any pressure. Otherwise, it will not be able to cope with its basic mission, which is the truth. The involvement of ideology, politics or economy limits the ability of Science to search, to ask research questions

and give answers. Its subject is then subordinated to temporary aims, justification of certain activities by means of which political or economic interest is realized. Science in the service of ideology, politics or economy becomes a pseudoscience. It cancels its universal character because it becomes a justification of particular interests.

However, contemporary man may have some doubts whether subordinating science to truth does not lead to its enslavement by the truth. Nowadays, when there is relativism trend and promoting subjective judgments and opinions as absolute and final truths so-called 'total truths' which is often a practice among politicians, publicists and journalists, the existence of universal truth which would be a real aim of science is doubtful. What should be taken into consideration is the fact that science aims at truth, and this aspiration is a process in which being mistaken is involved. By reaching partial truths scientists aim at an absolute truth. In their 'peregrination' there are some mistakes and faults but also a constant tendency towards an ultimate aim. The aim which is always distant. The thought from the quote of The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians comes to mind here. The apostle noticed in it that: "For what we know is incomplete" [1 Corinthians 13.9]. Cognition partially means assuming the attitude of 'the seeker of truth' which requires a constant intellectual effort. 'Truth seeker' is not its 'owner' because absolutist idea of the truth on the grounds of scientific cognition does not mean an absolute certainty which can only be delivered by ideology or also by religion understood in ideological categories [13].

## **5. The significance of a dialogue in Science**

The method which leads to truth but does not force it is a dialogue. Karol Wojtyła is regarded as one of the leading representatives of the philosophy of dialogue [14]. He presented a dialogue as a personal value, necessary for a mutual cognition of people [15]. He emphasized that our task is to promote the culture of dialogue.

The great achievement of John Paul II is to establish the dialogue between religion and theological vision of the world with science. He believed that: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" [John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, Introduction]. However, he stated that "religion is not based on Science, and Science does not constitute the extension of religion" [16].

In the Letter of the Pope on the occasion of VI Congress of Polish Theologians on 4th September 2004 we can read that: "Facing the new tasks imposed by complex civilisational and religious situations, the Church along with theology is facing challenges concerning not only the protection of Christian heritage but also active approach to the places of everyday life and contemporary civilization so that by means of a dialogue and evangelization propagate the truth about God and His plan to redeem through Jesus Christ" [Jan Paweł II, *List z okazji VII Kongresu Teologów Polskich, Castel Gandolfo*

4 września 2004, available at [http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan\\_pawel\\_ii/listy/kongres\\_teologowpl\\_04092004.html](http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/kongres_teologowpl_04092004.html)].

The philosophy of dialogue pointed at a dialogue in which it can be observed that it is not the similarities that bring religions, political systems and people closer but differences. The world of dialogue is not the world of similarities but the world of differences. A dialogue is not an answer to the question about truth, values but it is a form of participation in them, in which the most essential is the wish to give and accept. Dialogue also postulates universality and unity (*logos*) [17].

In the apostolic constitution on Catholic universities *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, John Paul II pointed that theology plays an important role in searching for the synthesis of knowledge and also in a dialogue between faith and reason. All disciplines take from theology because theology „serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning, not only by helping them to investigate how their discoveries will affect individuals and society but also by bringing a perspective and an orientation not contained within their own methodologies. In turn, interaction with these other disciplines and their discoveries enriches theology, offering it a better understanding of the world today.” [*Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities*, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_15081990\\_ex-corde-ecclesiae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html), no. 19]

John Paul II as a scholar and Church hierarch pronounced for including the clergy in the process of evangelisation of the world of science. Despite the differences of charismas he observed practical benefits connected with permeating evangelical values into academic and scientific circles. He believed that clergy, especially bishops "have a duty to use their knowledge to serve the truth and by doing this multiply common good" [18].

At the same time he gave an example of establishing the dialogue with scientists. It is worth noting his initiative concerning the organization of special symposia in Castel Gandolfo. He invited the most outstanding intellectualists from all over the world, such as: a Protestant activist Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), a Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), a Catholic priest Jozef Tischner (1931-2000). Most of guests were not Catholics and among them there were non-believers, Protestants, Muslims, Jewish. During the meetings they discussed the most important problems of contemporary civilization.

Moreover, on 20 May 1982 John Paul II established the Pontifical Council for Culture. This department ensures that Gospel reaches contemporary scientific institutions favouring their openness to Christian faith, develops research on the issues of unbelief and religious indifference occurring in various cultures and act for the benefit of establishing a dialogue "between faith and cultures" and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue [3, p.122].



## 6. University as a meeting point of the scientific world

In his contemplations John Paul II seems to follow the principle: *veritas una sed doctrina multiplex*. In the encyclical *Fides et ratio* he stated directly that: "Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human." [John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, no. 3]. Such attitude was the basis for the universities established in medieval Europe where besides 7 liberal arts theology was lectured. University in John Paul II's contemplations on science constitutes another aspect of its universalism. This universalism has been known since dawn of time of universities. As an outstanding French historian Jaques LeGoff remarked medieval university was an international organization: such was the character of its personnel because professors and students were from various countries and the subject of its activity because science has no borders as well as its scope which follows the principle *licentia ubique docendi*, the right to teach everywhere which is the right that everyone who gained the university degree at the biggest universities is entitled to teaching everywhere [19]. The Pope completed this ascertainment by his words directed to the university society in Padua: "Since dawn of time University was regarded as an institution open to everybody and prepared to cultivate all forms of knowledge and study truth in all its forms: scientific, philosophical and theological" [3, p. 161-162]. University should be open, as John Paul II said in Louvain, "to every truth" [3, p. 297].

John Paul II was in favour of traditional model of complementary cognition in academic centres. This model involves cultivating every science in the spirit of universality, that is with the awareness that each of them is different, but it is connected with the others so that it cannot be taught outside the context – at least in the intentional sphere – of the res [3, p. 122]. Knowledge gained at universities, as opposed to other centres of study and research, should form the holistic picture of the world. Therefore, it is useful to teach variety of disciplines, which means departing from a very narrow specialization. He appealed to the scientists to urge them "to continue their efforts without ever abandoning the *sapiential* horizon within which scientific and technological achievements are wedded to the philosophical and ethical values which are the distinctive and indelible mark of the human person" [John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, no. 106].

John Paul II opined that because mind can perceive a unity connecting the world and truth with their beginning only by means of partial methods of cognition, each of the sciences – together with Philosophy and Theology – remains a certain limited trial able to perceive a complex unity of truth only in variety, which means in entanglement of various branches of science, open and mutually complimentary [3, p. 122]. Such solution assumes the form of 'community of search', which is a place of intellectual meetings and confrontations.

## 7. Conclusions

To sum up all the contemplations, it must be stated that Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II in his reflection on Science is seen as a thinker brought up in the spirit of universalism. This universalism is implied by his intellectual, i.e. philosophical and theological formation. Favouring Thomistic and phenomenological notions connected with faith in the existence of universal values resulted in accepting the universalistic vision of civilization, and also science which constitutes a significant element of civilisational system.

The universality of science in the thought of Karol Wojtyła results from:

- Common aspiration for the cognition of truth which the only form is scientific cognition
- Connecting science with truth. The universality of truth, which is the basic aim of Science, determines a universal character of scientific cognition.
- The universality of scientific community whose aim is to create a peaceful and just order of the world.
- A universal institution of science, namely a university which in a twofold can be defined as universal. Firstly, as an open place of intercultural meetings. Secondly as a place of conducting research and teaching variety of disciplines of Science, which is expressed in the etymology of the word ‘university’.

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