

Struggling with God according to Sartre

The world that we happened to live in, its entire history exemplify the everlasting struggle of human thought and particularly of man himself, who ceaselessly searches for the truth about human existence, good and life, which comprise the truth about God, whether it be his affirmation or negation.

Man continuously processes certain ideas, which have become a *principium movens* or in other words a driving force of everyday life. Among these ideas, there is man's innate issue of God, which is a problem of each thinking individual. God 'died', or maybe we experience times of some kind of deep transformations, an epoch of a new history, new Europe, new world and new tomorrow, an unknown tomorrow. Or perhaps we have an epoch of *Homo sapiens* that tussles with drastic experiences between the delusion and reality, while the mankind struggles with the creation of a new cybernetic era, 'anchored' in the dimension of 'novum'. Or maybe the formation of historical consciousness, which helps us to understand more of it in all the possible critical degenerations of the entire western culture, is such an unprecedented, crucial moment in today's philosophy. Indeed, man in his history of being a human being has never oscillated so much within the intensified time range between the past and the future. The present and the related future have never been at the same time a global promise of an imposed task, which necessarily has to be confronted with. In the history of mankind the past has never had such a complete meaning for the human consciousness. In this dimension between what is past and what is future, the idea of God's death arises.

Nietzsche's statement that 'God died', over-interpreted by Heidegger has circulated around the world even though it is completely absurd. On the other hand, it may not be such a total absurd, now that the Pope John Paul II used to say in his teachings (observing everything around) that 'people live as if God

didn't exist'. However, a question should be asked about the significance this opinion might have: 'God died'. In fact, in this absurd, in this nonsense, there is the heart of the issue we are interested in and it would be a right thing to reflect on it and think it over more thoroughly. What ought to be done to get closer to the proper answer? According to Plato, the condition of such successful dealing with a discourse of dialectics is 'rich experience', 'anchored' in the dimension of our everyday life. It would probably lead to nothing, if the problem was closed in itself. Without a doubt, good intentions of all those who wish to reason with their opponents using strong, irrefutable arguments, are dissatisfactory because the question here is not about a particular problem that might be surmounted with the use of irrefutable logic and its rules in such a manner, as if everything was likely to be determined unambiguously in the narrow frames of a philosophical discipline alone. Enumerating evidence for the existence of God himself, does not give solution to the problem we are interested in. The main reason for this is that the question here is not even about God.

Furthermore, philosophy has no monopoly on such self-sufficiency¹. While the third argument against it, to put it mildly, is that this sentence comprises broader and more serious issues. Therefore, what are the problems hidden in the depths of this statement about God's death? The death of God, mentioned by Nietzsche, is supposed to become the condition of the evolution of a human being and the whole mankind: 'The biggest of our events-that God died, that the faith in Christian God has become unbelievable- already begins to 'cast first shadows over Europe [...] - at last, a free horizon heaves into sight again, even if it was not bright [...] a sea, our sea stands wide open again, there has never been yet 'an open sea'².

For Nietzsche, such disposal of God and his rejection was a proof of some kind of internal human power, a proof of the capability of living without God; to quote the words of the above mentioned Pope: 'living as if God didn't exist'.

Nietzsche's statement which we are so interested in, reveals the situation of man, who, being left on his own, becomes a slave of his own subjectivity, concentrated on the ultimate dimension of metaphysics and its consequences, one of which, in this case, is the subjectivity with all its effects: where the souls are solitary and abandoned, because there is nothing in them beside their loneliness and themselves. The soul incorporated in this desert space of solitude,

¹ Compare: Possenti Vittorio, *Nihilizm teoretyczny i „śmierć metafizyki”*, translated by J. Meredecki SDS, Lublin 1998.

² *Wiedza radosna*, translated by L. Staff, Warsaw 1910-11, p. 287-288, quotation from: Z. Zdybicka, *Bóg czy Sacrum?* in: *Zadania współczesnej metafizyki. Poznanie bytu czy ustalenie sensów?*, Lublin 1999, p.210.

remains in this emptiness of human nothingness, facing the approaching death like a specific agony of the world. The greatness of the soul emerges from this discourse as well: because somewhere in the distance it perceives the sense and the entirety of the significance, reaches it, but it is all dead, the whole is lifeless as if in a state of inertness. In such a way, also contemporary man, our today, our now, inhibit the said break, the space, the distance either in time between events or in the space between certain defined points, between: a) the past, which disappears irretrievably-like a 'vanishing point' (thus becoming unique due to being transitory) and is somehow impossible to be stopped and b) the future, which continues to be the unknown – a huge question mark.

The future and its degenerations of all sorts and kinds, its examples, its excellence and glamour as well as what is a semiotic question mark, which, in other words, is a sign (the general theory of a sign comprising semantics, syntactics and pragmatics, which all deal with the above concept using the typology of various forms and modifications of signs, their essence and the role they play in the process of communication between people); such future anchored in the philosophical discourse cannot be after all described by one sign or another, by such and such idea. Why? Because an idea cannot seek comfort in such a thing as hope, which never 'disappoints', which always explains, which will somehow solve everything or cope with it? Allowing such a way of speaking or chaotic writing, such verbosity, straying from the point, in short, such lengthy considerations, leads in reality to the abdication of an idea and makes the problems obfuscated, creating a certain veil, while these problems should become exposed and thought over thoroughly. If the future is what shall come, if it is a reflection on what should be built, then it acquires every possible force of justification, is simply justified, only when it is really combined with action. At this point, it would be worth articulating that the living should take care of the other living people among whom they happen to live, among whom also we are the source of the living, to whom we naturally belong due to the issue of life. Thus, in such a way, also we, the living, are the future, because we constitute our own our possibilities, the source of our potential. In this way, we become both, the past and the future. We are the future only to such an extent to which we managed at the same time to be the past in our simultaneousness, that is to say, how much we managed to be in historicity, to be a part of history, because our freedom really fulfills itself only when it is formed by the conditionality of the time surpassing our temporariness. In our 'here and now' there are, among others, such published items that pick up solely the thread directing our orientation towards the future, at the same time with a complete oblivion of the condition of our basic historicity, forgetting the fact that we

are still a part of history, whether we like it or not, and that actually there is no escaping our historicity; yet this condition happens so often to be ignored. Such an anamnesis of the past, its notorious forgetting, becomes a peculiar kind of vendetta, its historical degeneration, as 'a fortune, which is fickle', as if it entered the process of reconstruction: 1. mistakes in establishing the time of events, in chronology 2. attributing features inconsistent with the spirit of an epoch 3. a relic inconsistent with the present living conditions, outdated views or customs. Meanwhile, while warning against such a specific kind of 'vendetta of the dead', even Marx used to say that the tradition of all generations of the dead oppresses like a bane the minds of the living. It even happens when they try to change not only themselves but also all the things around them and when they try to create something unprecedented; that is exactly when, in an epoch of such a crisis, the spirits of the past are summoned in anxiety; their names, mottos and attitudes are adopted, so as to use this oldness, this disguise and borrowed language to play a new scene in the world history³. Thus, speaking in a similar or perhaps in a slightly different- more evangelical way: 'let the dead bury their dead', because the past is of no importance here, let the dead bury themselves; it would be probably recommended to add that as much as we are the future, we also belong to the dead, being at the same time the past. This entrance into the future, rushing into the time to come should not discourage us here in the fact that those who passed away determine our way of thinking.

Sartre's statement reminds us here about the past and his existentialism is in an obvious way the past as well; it is a touch of a soul or rather it is its death in every respect. Sartre's existentialism is contained in this break, in this space, which I have already mentioned, to such a degree, that as nobody ever before it takes along with it all the consequences of the ultimate metaphysical past, which is spread all over the West, and even more, it enters this associative-dissociative discourse, assimilating a complete submissiveness in itself. In this very dimension, Sartre⁴ becomes the otherness of Heidegger⁵, the latter is a fierce critic of the history of metaphysics. In '*Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*' he openly argues that in the Plato-created allegory of a cave, the truth stops being 'blurred', and under the pressure of the term 'idea', which is a form, it becomes 'correctness'. This way the deformation of the way of thinking about

³ Compare: Marks Karol, *18 Brumaire Ludwika Bonaparte* and *Rękopisy ekonomiczno-filozoficzne*, in : Karol Marks, Fryderyk Engels, *Dziela*, Warsaw 1962 – 1977, vol.1.

⁴ Compare: Sartre's paper: *Question de méthode (1957)* and *Critique de la raison dialectique [Krytyka rozumu dialektycznego]* (1960).

⁵ This Heidegger's view is clearly expressed in his lectures from 1935 *Einführung in die Metaphysik [Wprowadzenie do metafizyki]*.

the being⁶ begins in the metaphysics of the West, in which man is placed in the center of the world, as a result of which the history of western philosophy is a history of defeat. Heidegger is a great critic of the history of metaphysics. He is a thinking man, who explores the historicity of this history, giving 'the past' a careful consideration, he is interested in its internal relations and connections. He tries to extract its most various regularities adjusting to the content of the expressed words, to the tactful transitions from one dimension to another, tries to explore the whole process based on a transformation, on a change from one form to another. He indicates directions that bring closer to the expansion of thought, opening at the same time the whole dimension of a new perspective, which despite being connected with the past, becoming the past, is something much more than the past. Even if somebody even managed to state, that the *meher* (more) is small, or maybe even invisible in comparison to what it really should be in its complex essence or, in other words, in what is important, owing to which something is what the ontology of the finiteness of human being or existence is, in which in a way the being itself is revealing; it is this limitation (*Beschränkung*) that exposes the atmosphere of deep, consciously initiated historicity, an atmosphere in which its work turns into body. In the antithesis to that, Sartre's existentialism does not show such openness towards the past; he does not turn to it to deliver himself from his inhibitions. As every philosophy, also existentialism is without any doubt historical⁷ despite being unaware of it. Therefore, Sartre is undoubtedly the past. However, the essence, the crux of the traditional metaphysics influences existentialism in a passive way. At this point, one could attempt to say that metaphysics annihilates itself in the genius of Sartre's reflective work. The most essential and conclusive moment here is the transition that does not omit what has been penetrated or in other words crossed, and in this sense, it is being solved on a different level. And in exactly this respect Sartre somehow solves Platonism by *aufheben* that is suspension: he remains in the field of metaphysics bringing it to the final consequences of the ultimate dimension, to its truth in Hegel's conception⁸. One might say that Sartre's existentialism has in principle Plato's outline in its basis with this characteristic difference, that it contains a series of inversions of Plato's philosophy,

⁶ Compare: Heidegger Martin, *Bycie i czas*, translated by B. Baran, Warsaw 1994.

⁷ Compare: Sartre, Jean-Paul, *L'Être et le Néant [Byt i nicomość] (Being and Nothingness)*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Routledge, London 2001.

⁸ For Hegel, historical events are only a material, which has to be given a meaning. He thought that the history contains in itself a process of rational development only by discovering which do we begin to gradually understand our own nature and place in the world. See more about this in: G.W.F. Hegel, *Wykłady z filozofii dziejów*, translated by J. Grabowski, A. Landman, 2 volumes, Warsaw 1958.

in other words: from the foundation which in principle remains unequivocally metaphysical or platonic, that is when ontology, which is the elementary field of philosophy dealing with the theory of being, the character and structure of the reality or a general theory of things, is converted into a desideratum insisting on the ontology of nothingness – absence of being – that is to say: existence has to initiate the essence from now on.

There is no time and place in this passage to analyse the whole historical aspect with all the metaphysical premises, to which existentialism remains faithful till the very end. However, let us try to focus on the consequences that were passed from the metaphysical tradition and which in comparison to the overall views, statements and assumptions from the specified field of philosophical knowledge characteristic of the doctrinal genius of Sartre, are usually defined as: nihilism, atheism, individualism and subjectivism. Indeed, Sartre's theses give a foundation to use here such an attribute, i.e. a word added in order to emphasize some kind of particular feature or property. It is sufficient to go through some of his works such as: *Being and Nothingness*, *Nausea*, *Existentialism and Humanism*, *Existential Philosophy*⁹ and others. In the history of philosophical thought there are such publicists or authors, who consider the issue, or as one may wish, the phenomenon of Sartre to be definitely solved¹⁰. In practice, however, we do not so much aim in this way at the final result as at the outset from where everything begins. Only in the presence of such terms as: subjectivism, individualism, nihilism, atheism and after penetrating their dimension, does the reflection on these terms, which is ceaselessly recurring to the source of its own anxiety, arise and begin again. That is when the philosophical sensibility of our times, of our days, of our now appears and starts to work, giving our intelligence inspiration to perceive and understand the signs of the time that we happen to live in.

At this point, it would be good to say that Sartre is something infinitely more than Sartre, and that to some extent, we are all 'Sartres'. The sense of independence and individuality; unconventional behaviour other than within the generally accepted standards, widespread opinions or practices, sometimes

⁹ Compare: Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Byt i Nicość*, translated by Krzysztof Nalik, edited by Władysław Stróżowski, *Od Husserla do Lewinasa, Wybór tekstów z ontologii fenomenologicznej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow 1989; *Młodości*, Warsaw, 1963; *Egzystencjalizm jest humanizmem*, Warsaw, Biblioteka Wprost, 1956; *Filozofia egzystencjalna*, edited by Leszek Kołakowski and Krzysztof Pomian, PWN, Warsaw, 1963.

¹⁰ Compare: P. Caws, *Sartre*, London 1979; F. Zimmermann, *Einführung in die Existenzphilosophie*, Darmstadt 1977; M. Kowalska, article about *L'Être et le Néant w Przewodniku po literaturze filozoficznej XX wieku*, vol.1. Warsaw 1994, and others.

ignoring the social norms, in short, the broadly defined individualism does not indicate solely the individual side of this 'problem', does not refer only to the specificity of an individual's behaviour, distinguishable from other subjects by distinctly unique features; it is something more, it has an unambiguous definition: *definiendum* (defined element) and *definiens* (defining element), it is mainly a concise explanation of the social atmosphere of contemporary man. Undoubtedly, man is able to oppose any individualism. However, this is achievable only by resisting all kinds of fashions or trends of today's society. The necessary key to do it is to begin with individualism for the simple reason that nobody can entirely get over the features of their epoch, which play a significant part in the formation of their individual existence, becoming a systemic base, on which everything grows, from which everything arises, like a natural habitat. Nihilism¹¹ represents a similar situation. It does not merely describe the situation of my neighbour or of other people who have a problem with *epistrephein*- i.e. with changing the way, with turning back from the course, with *metanoite*- i.e. with inner and spiritual transformation, with a new personal attitude, which can be again interpreted as: 1. a turn from disbelief to complete recognition of God; 2. a conversion from one religion to another; 3. a change from living in sin to the amity with God in case of a believing person; 4. a transition in the inner life to a higher degree of perfection (i.e. described here in the sense of a 'second conversion'); 5. a conversion to Christianity in the missionary countries, in case of those who did not emigrate or who did not anchor in a certain political standpoint or political party. Therefore, nihilism, which is in question here, is either a matter of everyone and everything or it is meaningless, or maybe it is us who constitute this nihilism in three possible ways of its interpretation: 1. by becoming practical nihilism- that is an attitude or a feeling (sometimes turning into a standpoint or a way of life), in which everything in man's life seems to be meaningless or worthless, and the fundamental principles defining the style of life and its direction have just lost their value; 2. by becoming theoretical nihilism (and in particular ethical or moral sceptical nihilism) having different forms here: from a view which questions the possibility of a rational reasoning of any moral norm to the rejection of the difference between good and bad actions as a principle (colloquially named as cynicism or amoralism); 3. finally, by becoming a particular form of nihilism, both practical and theoretical, that is becoming anarchism (especially the socio-political nihilism). For these kinds of nihilism, it is essential that they reject a certain specified political or social order with the conviction that it illegally restricts the free existence of an individual. It may be worth adding that anarchism in its extreme form denies not only these values, which are the foundation of social life, but also all the values giving sense to

human life – at the same time choosing actions caused by very subjective motives, which provide very changeable needs for one's own self, in which there is only action for action. Some aspects of such nihilism are visible in mafia or terrorists' activities. Nihilism, which is being discussed here, is a matter of everyone and everything because otherwise the history itself would lose its sense here. If the matter under consideration, the problems that we discuss here were in the exclusivity of only Sartre or some other group, then they would not deserve attention at all; as a matter of fact, they would not have much importance. The direct consequence of such an approach, in which the problems are being 'broken down', analysed in particular units (reduced for example to the issues of morality, while a considerable number of people behave inconsistently with moral norms which are said to be binding, or a socio-cultural differentiation of morality, spuriously proving the relativity of moral norms, or hidden motives compromising the officially accepted morals, or inability to logically justify the evaluative or normative statements with an assumption of a restrictive theory of a rational cognition) is a nonsense of history.¹¹

The most important issue in the presented discourse is not necessarily to know how much Sartre is wrong or reasonably right in this or other point of his philosophy, in the system of his theory, in his views as a whole, statements and philosophical assumptions, in short, in his whole doctrine. Maybe he is wrong in expressing this or that. The most essential of these things is to try to comprehend, or maybe this is even too little – just trying may be insufficient; it is simply necessary to understand how his existentialism happened to be possible, why his book became a priority of a particular title *Being and Nothingness (L'être et le néant)*, and in general how his philosophy happened to fall into nihilism?¹² Asking

¹¹ An attitude or an opinion, which denies certain moments, or dimensions of the reality (calling it fiction): existence of values, purpose, order and sense. In the contemporary philosophical language we deal with a dimension: of non-existent substantial reality of the metaphysical nihilism; with the inability of cognition of the truth of epistemological nihilism (agnosticism), with a negative attitude of the practical nihilism and a negative standpoint towards the value of the theoretical nihilism See: M. Heidegger, *Der europäische Nihilismus*, Pfullingen 1967, W. Weier, *Nihilismus*, Paderborn 1980, *Maski nihilizmu. Dylematy romantycznego dziedzictwa*, Znak, 46(1994) no. 6.

¹² The most famous of Sartre's philosophical works, *L'être et le néant*, was published for the first time in 1943. Sartre described this book on its front page as „an essay about the phenomenological ontology”. To define it in short, phenomenology is a study of the way things appear or are present in consciousness. It deals with contents of consciousness, purely as they appear to us, without reference to their possible aspects, for example physical things existing irrespective of our consciousness. However, phenomenology according to Sartre is not only a simple recording of the contents of consciousness, but it also analyses its structures. On the other hand, ontology tries

such questions leads in fact to the negation of the entirety of the western culture alongside with all instances of human behaviour, actions and their material and mental consequences alike¹³. There are even such people, who relish that kind of theory, according to which deviation, a kind of diversion or departure from history, is responsible for this entire regress and as a consequence, for the disintegration of the contemporary world. In fact, this decline did not happen before the modern times. This sort of exemplification does not have a sufficiently fixed foundation, because we have already known since Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)¹⁴ that this issue refers to the entire western world, where in a reaction to *bonjour* itself the premises undergo a crisis. Philosophy questions them in its common-sensical and scientific knowledge as well as in its wisdom, giving their basis a critical reflection. These premises are also called into question by the natural and spiritual sciences, as well as the fine arts, in their own creative act. It is a fact that it would be difficult to tease, that it would be difficult to make no mention of and that should, by no means, be ignored. As a consequence, the western man, travelling through his discourse of development, the civilization of progress and all the ways of its modernity, gave rise to Sartre's doctrine and to his nihilism.

first of all to answer a question: what kind of things combine to create a universe? Also in this case a simple enumeration of things is not the point. Ontology tries to find a type or types of beings that the world we happened to live in is composed of. The phenomenological ontology looks for relationships between the facts in the world and our consciousness of them. See also in this matter: H. Arendt (editor), *Nihilismus. Die Anfänge von Jacobi bis Nietzsche*, Köln 1970, W. Weier, *Nihilismus*, Paderborn 1980, M. Kowalska, *W poszukiwaniu straconej syntezy. Jean-Paul Sartre i paradygmaty filozoficznego myślenia*, Warsaw 1997, Jean-Paul Sartre's significant novel, *Rozpacz* (1949), translated by J. Rogoziński, PIW, Warsaw 1958.

¹³ The process of questioning and disintegration of the hitherto accepted (traditional) positive values is called a regress or a decline of the western culture. See: H. Levrier, *La culture et l'homme*, Paris 1980; E.E. Boesch, *Kultur und Handlung*, Bern 1980, A.L. White, *The Concept of Cultural System*, New York 1975, M. Czerwiński, *Kultura i jej badanie*, Warsaw 1971.

¹⁴ He became interested in hermeneutics again and used Kant's method in the Arts (*Geisteswissenschaften*), the specificity of which is based on the personal experience (*Erlebnis*), expression and understanding (*Verstehen*). A deep and vivid experience of one's own culture is necessary, while life (*Leben*), which is the factor determining the fundamental unity of all cultures, allows us to experience the past again (*nacherleben*) and to understand it in exactly this way. See: Z. Krasnodębski, *Upadek idei postępu*, Warsaw 1991.

ZMAGANIA Z BOGIEM WEDŁUG SARTRE' A

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje problem Boga w życiu człowieka i świata w oparciu o myśl filozoficzną Sartra. W tym, co przeszłe i tym, co przyszłe wyłania się koncepcja o śmierci Boga. Autor zainspirowany myślą Sartra pokazuje, że w absurdzie o „śmierci Boga” jest sedno prezentowanego zagadnienia, które stara się gruntowniej przemyśleć. Sponuje, że samo filozoficzne mnożenie dowodów na istnienie Boga nie rozwiązuje problemu Boga, gdyż filozofia nie ma monopolu takiej samowystarczalności. Zaś owo pozbycie się Boga i Jego odrzucenie było dla wielu filozofów dowodem jakiejś wewnętrznej siły człowieka, dowodem zdolności do życia bez Boga. W historii dziejów ludzkiej egzystencji znajdują się publicyści, którzy uważają, że sprawa Sartre'a została nawet definitywnie rozwiązana. W praktyce jednak okazuje się, że zmierzamy nie tyle do finalnego rezultatu, ile do miejsca startowego, od którego się wszystko rozpoczyna. Dopiero wobec takich określeń jak: subiektywizm, indywidualizm, nihilizm, ateizm rodzi się i zaczyna od nowa nawracające nieustannie do źródła własnego niepokoju myślenie wokół tych określeń, jeśli wejdzie się w ich wymiar gatunkowy. Kursuje wtedy wrażliwość filozoficzna naszego czasu, inspirując naszą inteligencję do pochwycenia znaków czasu, w którym przyszło nam żyć.