



## Moral norms, moral ideals and supererogation

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## Moral norms, moral ideals and supererogation

The aim of the paper is to investigate the relations between the basic moral categories, namely those of norms, ideals and supererogation. The subject of discussion is, firstly, the ways that these categories are understood; secondly, the possible approaches towards moral acting that appear due to their use; and thirdly, their relationship within the moral system. However, what is of a special importance here is the relationship between the categories of norms and ideals (or in a wider aspect — laudable acts) and a thesis about their complementary character. For it seems that the omission of one of the elements that are analysed within a moral system must result in an essential limitation of both the possibilities of finding an adequate approach to a given moral problem (on a descriptive level), as well as defining the full set of normative guidelines. Therefore, as I shall argue, resigning from a two-level method of moral analysis may lead to the atrophy of the very idea of ethics itself.

## Moral norms as regulative orders

### The notion of a moral norm

Verging on being a truism is the statement that the notion of a moral norm, which seems to be one of the key issues of philosophical ethics, is an incredibly ambiguous and indeterminate notion. Some authors use it to designate various predicates, and even related understandings of the notions are quite often characterised by significant differences in defining the details of the content. Moreover, one can also come across the replacement of this notion with several synonyms (“moral rule,” “moral principle” and in some cases “moral pattern.”<sup>1</sup>)

Two basic meanings of this notion might be pointed out here. On the one hand, the notion defines a basic ethics principle on which a certain axiological system<sup>2</sup> is built. On the other hand, orders and prohibition directives of definite conduct are described by this term. A moral norm understood in this way will be the subject of the following consideration.

In dictionaries of terms used in philosophy and ethics, this notion is defined, for example, in the following way: “MORAL NORMS (Latin *norm* — rule; *moralis* — concerning customs) — regulations, imperatives describing a way of conduct which is appropriate in moral respect (good or right). Formulated in various grammatical form, most often in the shape of imperatives (e.g. ‘You shall not

<sup>1</sup> This notion is used by Richard Brandt in: *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics*. Prentice Hall, 1959. [Polish edition: R. Brandt: *Etyka. Zagadnienia etyki normatywnej i metaetyki*. Trans. B. Stanoz. Warszawa, 1996]. The concept of this author will be discussed in more depth in a further part of this paper; however, one must emphasise here that although this notion is used by Brandt in an unclear way and although it is rather associated with the sphere of moral ideals, it can be understood as the a of describing a moral norm.

<sup>2</sup> See T. Biesaga SD: *Spór o normę moralną*. Kraków, 1998. It seems that the notion of a “morality norm” as used in the work’s title has got a slightly different meaning from a “moral norm,” which is discussed in this paper, and this seems to render the differences in the meanings in the descriptions of these two norms well.

commit adultery!') or sentences including specific words 'should', 'ought to', 'has to', 'is obliged' (e.g. 'a doctor is obliged to respect patient's convictions')."<sup>3</sup> However, the most general definition is given by Zygmunt Ziemiński: "[...] norms — [...] utterances which are formulated in a given language to express demand so that a person or people behaves in a definite way."<sup>4</sup>

A moral norm may be generally described as a directive for acting, an order for a definite type of conduct or a restraint from performing definite actions. Such a directive refers to moral rights, and thus unwritten ones (in contrast with legal norms<sup>5</sup>), although it disposes of some kind of sanction.

However, it is important to note the fact that such an approach to a moral norm is too general, because a moral norm also comprises those directives that are combined with a kind of higher obligation that determines some moral ideal. Therefore, it seems that to set the bounds of the notion precisely, a kind of duty and universality needs to be taken into account. In this way, a moral norm would

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<sup>3</sup> E. Klimowicz: "Normy moralne." In: *Słownik pojęć filozoficznych*. Ed.: W. Krąkiewicz. Warszawa, 1996, p. 138. A similar definition is given by Antoni Podsiad: "The norm [...] l. et. Sometimes this notion is used for signifying all moral rules, including estimations [...], that is, evaluating sentences. The norm in its wider meaning is not only an order or prohibition or the rule of conduct but also what this order, prohibition or rule justifies [...]." (A. Podsiad: *Słownik terminów i pojęć filozoficznych*. Warszawa, 2000, column 570. An identical definition appears in *Maty słownik terminów i pojęć filozoficznych dla studiujących filozofię chrześcijańską*. Ed.: A. Podsiad, Z. Więckowski. Warszawa, 1983. As a kind of curiosity, one may notice that the definition of such a fundamental term is not given, among others, by: *Encyklopedia filozofii*. Vols. 1—2. Ed. T. Honderich. Trans. J. Łoziński. Poznań, 1998 and 1999; W. Pałubicki: *Antropologia-filozofia-etyka. Słownik podstawowych terminów i znaczeń*. Gdańsk—Koszalin, 1998.

Ewa Klimowicz derives the etymology of the word "norm" in the quoted definition from the Latin term "rule" while, e.g., Czesław Znamierowski gives (*Oceny i normy*. Warszawa, 1957, p. 265) the term "steel-square" as the Latin etymology, meaning a "device for checking some properties (position of lines and surface)" As the term "rule" is endowed with quite a wide range of meanings in Polish, I will use Znamierowski's definition in any instance of referring to the etymology of the word "norm."

<sup>4</sup> Z. Ziemiński: *Etyczne problemy prawoznawstwa*. Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków—Gdańsk, 1972, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the differences between a moral norm and other kinds of norms, see e.g.: M. Ossowska: *Podstawy nauki o moralności*. Warszawa, 1947, pp. 251—277; H. Janowski: "Przedmiot etyki — moralność." In: *Etyka*. Ed. H. Janowski. Warszawa, 1975, pp. 65—120.

become a directive aimed at all of the members of a group who would be obliged to observe it by the very fact of their affiliation to a given group (in a wider sense, one can treat a norm as a directive, the fulfilling of which is the duty of everyone to whom this directive applies), whereas norms that do not include such obligation and commonness would be combined with the possibly “added” laudability of a deed.

### Typology of moral norms

Two basic ways of classifying moral norms should be mentioned: formal and content-wise ones. The first approaches norms through their “exterior” characteristics: the way they are formulated, the attitude to other elements of moral system, etc. The second one, in contrast, refers to the content of an order or prohibition that has been formulated in a norm. In this way, we can approach those spheres that are regulated by a moral norm and divide the whole of such directives into norms with the meaning presented above and directives of the nature of supererogational or guidelines for improvement.

Tadeusz Czeżowski, for example, classifies moral norms in a more formal way. He distinguishes two fundamental types of norms: teleological and formal ones.<sup>6</sup> The first type is related to an evaluation of something that constitutes some good. Czeżowski calls these norms axiological ones because they constitute an obligation by referring to some good, which is contrast to the second type. Czeżowski calls second type of norms deontic ones because we can only realise moral good by acting in accordance with a duty. Therefore, in the case of formal norms (deontic ones), the category of obligation is primary and only on its basis is it possible to define moral good. In the case of teleological (axiological), norms it is quite the opposite.

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<sup>6</sup> T. Czeżowski: *Aksjologiczne i deontyczne normy moralne*. In: *Idem: Pisma z etyki i teorii wartości*. Ed. P.J. Smoczyński. Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków—Gdańsk—Łódź, 1989, pp. 150—151.

Formal norms are distinguished by Czeżowski according to the criteria of the group, the rights of which are of a crucial nature. He pinpoints egalitarianistic, elitist (among them individual or group norms) and norms that give primacy to the rights of others (though, as he remarks, this is only a theoretical possibility).<sup>7</sup>

A slightly different classification of norms is offered by Czesław Znamierowski.<sup>8</sup> He specifies three basic categories. Indicative norms belong to the first category and they indicate what is to be done in a given situation. Constructive norms belong to the second one and they define how something is to be done. And finally, competence norms that indicate the competence to evaluate the application of a given norm belong to the third one.

It seems, however, that such formal classifications, although undoubtedly valuable from a theoretical point of view, are of little use in approaching the issues that are the subject of this paper. Hence, I will discuss them only superficially and I turn to content classification that suits my aim better.

Czesław Znamierowski, when discussing moral norms, pays attention to the following types: norms of direct relation, norms of indirect relation, rules of restraint, norms of moral technique and norms of individual excellence.<sup>9</sup> Norms of direct relation “regulate direct the emotional relation and behavior of a human towards another human.”<sup>10</sup> The norms of indirect relation, called also by Znamierowski “norms of the world’s tightness,” result from the limited resources of goods that are desired by man and from the limited possibilities to satisfy his needs. They comprise such rules as the commandments in the Bible such as “you shall not steal” or “you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife nor anything that is your neighbour’s.” The third group of norms, which are similar to some extent to the previous group, are the rules of restraint. They also result from “the world’s tightness” but they influence the moral subject more than his relations with other people. They regulate

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> C. Znamierowski: *Oceny...*, pp. 501—508.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 406—409.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 406—409.

his attitude towards the world, while the norms of indirect relation belong, in accordance with the concept of the author, to the area of human relationships and are exterior to the subject.

The fourth group, according to Znamierowski's classification, consists of norms of moral technique. The directives in this group deal with the practice of mutual kindness, which constitutes the basic guideline, "the morality norm," that was mentioned above. It seems that this kind of directives belongs to the sphere of ideals rather than to the norms that are offered in the strict sense here. The norms of moral technique are the ways in which an agent realises a mode of practicing such a way of life that brings maximum happiness to others. To fulfil these guidelines is, in a way, the first step towards individual excellence, which itself is organised by the norms of individual excellence. Znamierowski defines them as secondary as they have their source in the aims that "would have a place also in isolated consciousness."<sup>11</sup> The norms of internal excellence are independent of the environment in which a certain moral subject acts. However, they usually win the approval of the group when they bring some profit.

Such a classification of norms does not divide norms in the strict sense and ideals, yet it pays attention to some of the duality of directives seen along such lines. A full distinction between these two types of directives, also in terms of terminology, was offered by Maria Ossowska in her work *Moral Norms*.<sup>12</sup> Her classification is *stricte* content-wise, as it is based on the classification of the subject of norms. Ossowska distinguishes successively: norms that protect our biological existence, our dignity, independence, privacy; norms that serve the need for trust, protecting justice, regulating social conflicts and those concerning the norms themselves. As a separate, terminologically distinguished, category of directives she points at virtues which she divides into soft virtues, those that guard peaceful coexistence (which are in fact a kind of development

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>12</sup> M. O s s o w s k a: *Moral Norms: A Tentative Systemization*. Trans. I. G u ł o w s k a. Warszawa: PWN — Polish Scientific Publishers, 1980. For a rich and detailed description of the characteristics of the different types of norms see also her *Podstawy...*

of norms dealing with social conflicts) and virtues that deal with the organisation of group life, personal virtues (decorative ones) and practical virtues.

Such a classification of moral directives shows their two-fold character, which is additionally underlined by terminological distinctions. It is clear that some common elements such as the question of human dignity or directives that serve to harmonise human coexistence might also be pointed out; however, basically, the distinctiveness of norms and virtues seems to be clear. When analysing norms concerning human dignity, Ossowska remarks that they somehow have a dual character, e.g., in the directive "Have dignity and respect others" a recommendation to possess one's own dignity is intertwined with the duty to respect that of others.<sup>13</sup> Thus, virtues (as directives) are in a sense norms; however, they do not have such a restrictive character; they are pieces of advice rather than orders. A moral sanction, in their case (when not fulfilled), is much weaker or there is none at all.

### Moral sanctions

Henryk Jankowski describes a moral sanction as a reaction of a group evoked by exceeding the norms.<sup>14</sup> It seems, also in the popular way of moral thinking, that such a point of view finds intuitional approval. In the meaning of this term offered here, the issue of moral sanction might be considered as one of distinguishing marks of a norm. As I shall argue below, one may talk about some kind of moral sanction in the case of directives of an improving and supererogating character. However, a moral sanction of *sensu stricto* is most often combined with not fulfilling a duty, which corresponds with the formulation of a moral norm here.

It seems that, basically, the forms of sanction can be divided into internal and external sanctions. Jankowski also offers an-

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<sup>13</sup> M. Ossowska: *Moral...* p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> H. Jankowski: "Przedmiot...", p. 10.



other type of division: factual sanctions and imagined sanctions. Such a division seems to appeal to the structures of mental life, to the results of the socialisation process, inculcation into a described way of thinking in individuals with its frames.<sup>15</sup> What is more — we can notice that such a typology of sanctions anticipates some settlements concerning the problem of moral obligation. One may say that an imagined form of sanction (mainly related — as it seems — to some properties of mental life) will be characteristic of a weaker type of obligation, and proper to supererogating and perfectionist directives.

In characterising the external forms of sanction, Jankowski indicates its four stages:

- 1) submitting someone's behaviour to a negative assessment (the most lenient);
- 2) depriving an individual of the rights he is entitled to because he belongs to a given group;
- 3) the group totally ignoring an individual;
- 4) exclusion from a group.<sup>16</sup>

Some concurrence with a legal sanction (particularly seen in the last point) is noticeable in this classification. Such a concurrence may, to some extent, obliterate the differences between these two areas. It seems that Jankowski's classification does not take into account the diversity in the types of societies because while in so-called pre-modern society banishing might be considered as part of morality, in a modern society this issue falls under the law. Of course, one may protect the presented classification, pointing at a specific moral understanding of the exclusion from a group by a refusal to cooperate with a given individual, breaking contact with him/her, etc. However, it seems that the type of society, its structure and internal mechanisms are determining factors in the forms and uses of the external moral sanction.

Internal sanctions, as it seems, are mainly connected with the results of the socialising process and are manifested first of all in

<sup>15</sup> For more on the forms of experiencing a moral sanction, see M. O s s o w s k a: *Motywy postępowania. Z zagadnień psychologii moralności*. Warszawa, 1959, pp. 282—304.

<sup>16</sup> H. J a n k o w s k i: "Przedmiot...", p. 14.

the form of remorse.<sup>17</sup> Ossowska refers to McDougall's definition, according to which: "*Remorse* is an emotion which has been commonly regarded by moralists as the most intense of the effects produced by the activity of that peculiar entity "the conscience." It is a complex emotional state implying the existence of a well developed self-regarding sentiment and, generally, of moral sentiments. It arises upon the recollection of some past action that one deeply regrets; [...]."<sup>18</sup>

Ossowska indicates: anger (directed to the agent himself) and shame or fear (of punishment or humiliation) as the elements of remorse.<sup>19</sup> However, she focuses on the fact that for the proper functioning of internal moral sanctions, the proper functioning of some general mental property, called "moral sense," is indispensable.<sup>20</sup> Thus, a system of moral authority appears to be not only some acquired set of features and patterns of mental processes but also a property that belongs to the nature of man and is also independent (at least partially) of him.

A moral sanction would therefore be a dual reaction for breaking the moral rules that are obligatory in a given society. Firstly, the mental mechanisms of estimation, which are developed during the socialisation process and that are acquired by an agent, would claim to speak (because this is only a general property, this "moral sense" is an instance that is independent of individual's consciousness). These mechanisms would incline an individual to compensate for doing wrong or to change their behaviour. Secondly, the moral mechanisms inside the group would be heard and they would aim at stigmatising a group member who has committed an offence and in the case of a lack of reaction — putting pressure on him that either forces the expected reaction or that limits the possibilities for his acting.

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion about the different concepts of the origin of remorse see e.g., M. Ossowska: *Motywy...*, pp. 261—273.

<sup>18</sup> W. McDougall: *Introduction to Social Psychology*. 22 ed., p. 158; quoted after M. Ossowska: *Motywy...*, p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> M. Ossowska: *Motywy...*, pp. 274—280.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246—258.

## Social character of moral norms

The definition of moral norms, understood as the order of some conduct (or restraining from acting), may be comprehended in two ways: as a way of making some purpose of life real or as regulative orders within a group. It seems that the first idea is, first of all, characteristic of theonomic ethics (as well as Ancient ethics). The second one is more general because the realisation of teleological religious ethics is also fulfilled by a certain way of life. Therefore, moral norms seem to fulfil mainly a social function, which is regulative in relation to human behaviour within a group (and in the contact of this group's members with representatives of other communities, and in some cases also in relations among different groups).

Some authors indicate the necessity of such a localization of man in the system of norms (that is *de facto* in the system of connections and relationships that create a group) that enables him/her to be provided with not only security but also with the possibility to realise his potentiality. Podsiad, who was already quoted, also gives as one of the meanings of the term "norm" its psychological meaning: "Quality and quantity level of different mental features, for example intelligence, emotionality, activity which: a) is contained within the limits around the state most often found in a given population (conditioned by cultural and social factors), b) *is of positive use of development of a certain individual in his creative adaptation to the environment.*"<sup>21</sup> It seems that moral norms, just like the psychological ones in the meaning quoted, serve not only as a protection of an individual's being and the possibility of group survival but that they are also to support the realisation of the potentialities that are dormant in an individual and provide him with the possibility for their realisation. The norms mentioned by Ossowska that protect human dignity belong to such norms — for securing the feeling of one's dignity and values is one of the basic conditions that enable free expression.

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<sup>21</sup> A. Podsiad: *Słownik...*, p. 571. emphasis mine — P.M.

Thus, norms should be understood as directives that aim to protect the basic rights that an individual in a community is entitled to, while these rights should be understood quite widely (depending on the type of community they concern). Richard Brandt uses the notion of “moral pattern” to indicate “guideposts” that are to help us make a choice.<sup>22</sup> They strengthen the kind of behaviour that is accepted in a given society, owing to which they eliminate the need to decide on every case individually. A “moral pattern” would be a kind of criterion of behaviour, in reference to which an individual should make his choices (and although the etymological notion of “norm” refers to a device serving as an indicator of a measure, one can get the sense that Brandt freely mixes the field of norms with the field of moral ideals, which also constitutes a kind of a model).

Jan Grad perceives an element of culture that is typical to a given community in a moral system as the one that cannot be considered in isolation from this culture.<sup>23</sup> Moral norms that members of a given community follow are rooted in the conditions of the life of a community and cannot be — as an element of its adaptation to given conditions but also as an element of social practice — treated as something that comes from the outside.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> R. Brandt: *Ethical Theory...*, p. 155.

<sup>23</sup> J. Grad: *Obyczaj a moralność. Próba metodologicznego uporządkowania badań dotychczasowych*. Poznań, 1993, pp. 119—121.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 143—144: “In our functional approach a determining order concerning morality is presented as follows: (1) social ‘material’ practice (of production, exchange, consumption) creates objective demands for such kind of moral convictions which in an effective way could regulate it subjectively in the range of human relationships formulating within its frames [...]; (2) demand for a definite kind of moral convictions formulates itself not only in the range of ‘material’ practice but they are revealed also by e.g. custom practice which consists in communicating (demonstrating) positive attitude to definite outlook values, first of all moral ones and communicating memberships to definite social groups, but functions [...] in socially differentiating and integrating mode; (3) these and other (formulating themselves in other spheres of social practice) demands are directed to ideologically creative cultural practice which ‘react’ with creation and approving respecting of suitable ideological messages building ideological systems and remaining ‘inside’ of these latest moral systems. Particularly intensive ‘emphasis’ of functional demands on formulating suitable moral values causes general acceptance (respecting) of ideological messages implying moral norms of ‘desired’ kind or ‘adjusting’ of the existing messages to demanded task.” T. Czeżowski perceives this issue in a similar way believing that when any assessments or norms refer to primary unit

A definition of a moral norm can now be formulated:

A moral norm is a directive demanding or forbidding some action that is directed to all agents who meet certain formal conditions (e.g. membership of certain community), which defines their commitment in terms of duty and (in the event of not fulfilling this duty) refers to a moral sanction. Such a norm regulates the behaviour of group's members towards other members or a third party, and at the same time (in the sense of reflexive relation) protects the basic rights and capabilities of the agent.

### Moral ideal

To fulfil a directive expressed in a moral norm it is not necessary, of course, to perform everything that can be done in a certain situation. Nor is it to act according to the highest standards possible. It is rather fulfilling some minimum that guarantees the survival of an individual as well as the group and also — as has been mentioned — securing the basic rights of an agent. When we go beyond this minimum, we enter the area of laudable deeds, which are of special importance and are specially estimated.

Two basic kinds of laudable deeds can be mentioned here: supererogational deeds (that is *sensu stricto* laudable) and perfectionist deeds, which aim at reaching the completeness (perfection) of some feature or, in a wider sense, to realise the ideal. Taking into account these two categories of deeds, which should not be confused with each other, I am more interested in deeds that are connected with the pursuit of a kind of ideal rather than supererogational deeds; however, the latter category will also be helpful in the conducted analysis.

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assessments, they are their hypostases and so — *implicite* — originate from moral *praxis* (T. C z e ż o w s k i: *Dwojakie normy*. In: *I d e m: Pisma...*, p. 147).

## The notion of the ideal

As Tadeusz Kotarbiński says: “The main regulator of all our daily matters, common lifestyle, is not enough for us sometimes: we are bored with it or it gets broken or is no longer suitable for changing circumstances or at last leaves without decision the issues which go beyond its range. Then the problem of conscious self-directing appears. We start to look for the rules which would unite a commune of unruly outbursts into a disciplined pack; we are looking for the primary idea of our life’s organization. In this way the systems of ethics of life wisdom are born.”<sup>25</sup>

A similar idea is expressed by Tadeusz Czeżowski in his article *Sens i wartość życia* where he writes that our life has meaning if the activities that our life consists of create an ordered integrity.<sup>26</sup> Such meaning appears along with submitting one’s life to a “system of harmonised aims”<sup>27</sup> crowned by the final aim of a life to which all smaller aims are submitted. We determine such an aim for ourselves by choosing a “reasonable” ideal to aim at.<sup>28</sup>

Both Kotarbiński and Czeżowski seem to understand the moral ideal as a kind of idea or image that organises our activity and describes the way a choice is made. Without this external (because it does not come from the obligation of a norm) directive, our moral choices (and also norms) would in fact be a form of unwritten law. For it seems that one of the elements that differentiates a legal code from morality is the existence of some higher moral instance. This instance sanctions a definite hierarchy of goods that are guarded by norms. If we reject this instance, we will bring morality and ethics

<sup>25</sup> T. Kotarbiński: *Idealy*. In: *Idem: Drogi dociekań własnych*. Warszawa, 1986, p. 343.

<sup>26</sup> T. Czeżowski: *Sens i wartość życia (1)*. In: *Idem: Pisma...*, p. 176.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere (*Sens i wartość życia (2)*). In: *Idem: Pisma...*, p. 183) Czeżowski points out that understanding the meaning of life as the pursuit of happiness — as so often happens in common thinking — is false because happiness is not an immanent feature of reality, the status quo, but a phenomenon that accompanies the reaching of some goods. Therefore, the real sense of life lies in — or rather it should — aiming at some goods, the reaching of which will evoke a feeling of happiness. This seems to be an essential argument in favour of the teleological vision of morality.

exclusively into the sphere of norms and later to their regulative functions with respect to social behaviour. Here, legal norms must appear to be more effective — as they are subject to codification and operate with more severe sanctions. Thus, the ideal determines the aim that we should follow and norms would be the first “determinant” in this process (in accordance with their etymology).<sup>29</sup>

That is why, for example, Max Scheler unambiguously emphasised the meaning of the “theory of models,” which according to him constitutes the starting point for the possibility of evaluating judgements.<sup>30</sup> It seems that the way of defining the content of moral norms in a given community, if they are to differ from moral norms, should assume some superior idea, a vision of the good or universal order which is introduced in the sphere of practice through the system of norms. Therefore, ideals are usually bound to either the unconscious heart of the culture of a given community or with its religious roots.<sup>31</sup>

Pałubicki defines the ideal in the following way: “Ideal — something or features, attributes of someone or something which satisfy requirements of the man, which were considered as expression of some perfection and to which the man aspires.”<sup>32</sup>

A similar definition is offered by Podsiad: “Ideal: [...] 1. This is what to a highest extent might satisfy man’s requirements and therefore becomes the object of his aspirations.

2. The model of perfection in a definite area of thoughts or activity.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> It seems that part of modern “open” societies is a tendency to reduce the sphere of morality to legal contracts and financial dependencies. In these societies — for example in the US — the processes of the atomisation and disintegration of traditional moral systems (as restricted only to a narrow group of people and as being an obstacle to an unfettered mixing of people and cultures) will lead to a situation in which conflicts might only be decided by appealing to a legal authority. This is the source of those trials that seem in the least strange to observers from other cultures.

<sup>30</sup> M. Scheler: *Wzory i przywódcy*. In: *Idem: Pisma wybrane z filozofii religii*. Trans. G. Sowiński. Kraków, 2004, [English edition: M. Scheler: *Exemplars of Persons and Leaders*. In: *Idem: Persons and Self-Value: Three Essays*, Dordrecht—Boston—Lancaster, 1987, pp. 127—198].

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 214, 227. Also see Ł. Trzciniński: *Mit bohaterski w perspektywie antropologii filozoficznej i kulturowej*. Kraków, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> W. Pałubicki: *Antropologia-filozofia-etyka...*, p. 157.

<sup>33</sup> A. Podsiad: *Słownik...*, column 363 (the same definition in *Mały słownik...*).



In both of these definitions, the ideal is understood as fulfilment (in the meaning of the complete realisation of the essence) of a given feature, virtue or duty (for example — as it was in the concept of Aristotle — resulting from the very fact of being a human). At the same time, it points out the direction towards which human activity should aim. The ideal perfectly defines the fulfilment of a deed and represents an “objective” view of a given duty, while a norm, as an ascertainment of imperfect human nature, would point at some minimum, the fulfilment of which would be required to fall within the category of being moral (in an evaluative sense).

As Brandt remarked,<sup>34</sup> there is still no research concerning the creation of ideals<sup>35</sup> (or more widely, “ethical models” — to use the notion that is employed by this author). However, he states that their history in Europe precedes the history of writing. One can risk a statement that the process of the creation of ideals was simultaneous with creation of the very ideal morality itself.<sup>36</sup>

Władysław Tatarkiewicz finds the etymology of the Polish (as well as English) notion of “perfection” in the Latin word *perfectio*, which derives from *perficio* — “to accomplish,” “to bring to an end.”<sup>37</sup> However, he underlines the fact that the origin of this notion is both Latin and Greek. In Ancient Greece this notion was mainly used for concrete referents, which results in the term *teliotēs* being translated as “absoluteness” (for example by the Polish translator of *Nicomachean Ethics* — Daniela Gromska).<sup>38</sup>

Among the definitions enumerated by Tatarkiewicz, two of them seem to be especially important: “2. What fulfils all functions characteristic for itself is perfect. [...] 3. What has reached its aim is perfect.”<sup>39</sup>

It seems that the notion of the moral ideal was usually connected with some vision of human nature and that this nature was mostly

<sup>34</sup> R. Brandt: *Ethical Theory...*, p. 156.

<sup>35</sup> One such theory comes from M. Scheler, see *Wzory i przywódcy...*, p. 283.

<sup>36</sup> See Ł. Trzciniński: *Mit...*, pp. 9–26.

<sup>37</sup> W. Tatarkiewicz: *O doskonałości. Wybrane eseje*. Lublin, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.



perceived as a kind of project that should be realised by a man during his life. And, although the definition of the “starting” nature of man as well as the aim of his development have had a different approach in particular centuries,<sup>40</sup> some elements were constant in this teleological pattern. Firstly, the very term “man” was used in a rather more postulative than descriptive way. The ancient understanding of man as an “animal rationale,” which comes from Philolaus, signifies not a statement of a fact but rather a recipe.<sup>41</sup> This recipe was given the shape of an ideal that should be followed by a concrete man and the realisation of which he should aim at. Owing to this, human life was given a purpose and meaning. Thus, the notion of an ideal, defined in this way, is first of all related to teleological ethics.

### The ideal and the model of behaviour

The form of representing moral ideals that are used most often are the role models that are embodied in certain characters. Jankowski notes that such personal models represent the evaluations and norms that are characteristic of a given moral system. They may, as Jankowski says, represent both a specific norm as well as constitute a representation of the whole system.<sup>42</sup> The most characteristic examples of these two types of representation might be found in the Bible. The Good Samaritan embodies only one feature, while Jesus embodies the entire system of New Testament morality.

Ossowska questions the usability of the term “ideal” and postulates replacing it with the term “the model of behaviour.”<sup>43</sup> This explorer defines a personal model as a human character that is the object of the aspirations of certain people or groups. Such a model

<sup>40</sup> See M. Ossowska: *Podstawy...*, pp. 350—351. On the history of the notion of perfection and its changes, see e.g. W. Tatarakiewicz: *O doskonałości...*, pp. 31—46.

<sup>41</sup> See J. Gajda: *Pitagorejczycy*. Warszawa, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> H. Jankowski: *Przedmiot...*, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> M. Ossowska: *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany*. Warszawa, 2000, pp. 10—11.

indicates the kind (or kinds) of personality that is particularly valuable or that receives special recognition in a given culture. In this sense, as Ossowska remarks, personal models are the keys to understanding a given culture.<sup>44</sup>

A precise definition of a personal model is given by Barbara Mejsbaum:

In the meaning of a personal model distinguished here, it will always be about some wholeness, arrangement, system, structure of elements which might be articulated at least in three ways:

- a) as disposable features or behaviour of a historical or fictitious person (Hercules, Doctor Judym, Franklin, Christ) in different situations, where both the system of features of a person as well as situations will be a description of conceptualization character;
- b) as a system of human features given as a set of virtues, a selected set of needs or attitudes, not referred to a concrete person (saint, knight, decent man);
- c) as a set of norms describing human behaviour in different situations (casuistry). Connection of definite systems of norms with sets of features and situations of a personal model seems possible to follow (logical, psychological and axiological connection).<sup>45</sup>

The model, embodied in a vision of life, functions as a leading idea that somehow allows one's life to be organised and to give it some meaning. Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* pays attention to the importance of "narrative unity of life," which is presented in the form of a story that enables the subject to identify a moral obligation.<sup>46</sup> A narrative representation of life gives the representatives of a given culture the image of life that is adequate for them (whereby according to this author, along with the change of an epoch and progressive cultural changes, the literary form in which this unity is expressed changes as well). The heroes of stories that

<sup>44</sup> M. Ossowska: *Wzór demokracji*. Lublin, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> B. Mejsbaum: "Kategoria wzoru osobowego. Szkic metodologiczny." In: *Wartości a sposób życia. Materiały Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Filozoficznego*. Ed. M. Michalik. Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków—Gdańsk, 1979, p. 127.

<sup>46</sup> A. MacIntyre: *After Virtue. A study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. Notre Dame University Press, 1984. Polish translation by A. Chmielewski: A. MacIntyre: *Dziedzictwo cnoty: studium z teorii moralności*. Warszawa, 1996.

are understood in this way become the embodiment of the basic moral postulates of a given culture and play an essential role in the moral upbringing of its representatives.

The model of behaviour is therefore not only a signpost that is useful in making moral choices and defining the ideals that give meaning to life. It is also a tool of child rearing and an element of the socialisation process. Imitation of a given ideal allows one's subjectivity to be defined and quite often one's position in a group as well. For if we consider, for example, the medieval model of knight, one can prove that it not only serves as the self-definition of a given social group (and particular individuals in its frames) but it also suggests to other members of the group the proper attitude on the part of community that is distinguished by this model (it also defines the expectations of the group in relation to this part).<sup>47</sup>

### Typology of ideals

Constructing the typology of ideals is a much more complicated activity than performing the analogous procedure for moral norms. Firstly, every culture and every society creates their own typology that is characteristic for them with their own personal models and ideals, and secondly, it would be difficult to point at the criteria, according to which such a classification could be performed.

It seems that it is impossible to create a formal classification of ideals. It is possible to distinguish some types of perfection that are characteristic of particular "norms of morality" (in the sense of Biesaga); however, a formal classification of ideals as such is confronted by various obstacles. The only solution appears to be the distinction of models that was offered by Jankowski, which depict the whole of a given moral system (which as a consequence can be called complex models) and single values (which can be called fragmentary models). This distinction enables the superiority of some

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<sup>47</sup> On imitating, see M. O s s o w s k a: *Ethos...*, pp. 16—21.

models to be defined in relation to others, though the very way in which definite ideals emerge and what their meanings are still remains unclear here.

The solution to this problem and to some degree a guideline to a possible content classification of ideals is given by Max Scheler in the quoted work. He claims that classification of a “model of patterns” should be connected with the basic values that define human ways of acting. Identifying these basic ideas with hedonistic, civilisation, vital, cultural and religious values, he distinguishes five corresponding types of models: the artist of life, the leading spirit of civilisation, the hero, the genius and the saint.<sup>48</sup> Models understood in this way should therefore be treated in accordance with the concept of Tatarkiewicz as a complement or realisation of these basic values. However, what seems to be particularly important here is their function as underlined by Scheler, which consists in suggesting the direction for the realisation of given norms. The fulfilment reached by the values in mythic characters is a point of reference for everyone who is engaged in the realisation of a particular value. Therefore, consciously or not, the evaluation of such an activity of the engaged subject always happens in relation to the model, the ideal, and not to the norm that is accepted in a given social and cultural context.

Thus, if we are to assume the optics that were offered by a German philosopher, one should accept that to become acquainted with the ethos of a given culture or community one should identify not the set of norms that are followed by its members but their set of models, which are personified in its proper community of culture and religion, and which point to the basic directions for channeling their activities.

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<sup>48</sup> M. Scheler: *Wzory i przywódcy...*, p. 216.

## Supererogation

### The origin of the problem and the Christian concept of supererogation

A separate category that describes a particular kind of morally laudable acts is supererogation. It seems that in a sense this is a category that locates a given deed between a norm and the ideal. Although the author of the only treatise on this topic in Polish literature, Andrzej Maciej Kaniowski,<sup>49</sup> seems to combine supererogation acts with the realisation of some vision of a moral ideal, this is — as I shall argue — false reasoning. The connection of the categories of laudability and voluntariness that is used to describe a supererogation act by Kaniowski, on the one hand, shows the independence of the sanction that corresponds with the obligatory moral norm and, on the other hand, shows that they do not have to mean the realisation of the ideal at all, since it is only a voluntary act that is considered in terms of laudability. I will discuss this issue in the last section of this paper. Let me start, however, with presentation of the characteristics of supererogation itself.

Kaniowski found the origin of the term “supererogation” in the Bible,<sup>50</sup> more specifically in the parable of the Good Samaritan: “[...] he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper: ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have [*quodcumque supererogaveris* — A.M.K.]’.”<sup>51</sup>

The original meaning of the term *supererogare* means, as Kaniowski states, “paying more than amount due.”<sup>52</sup> Moral Catholic theo-

<sup>49</sup> A.M. Kaniowski: *Supererogacja. Zagubiony wymiar etyki*. Warszawa, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> I mean the origin of the notion “supererogation” and not the problem of deeds surpassing a generally known duty. For this deed, which is pointed out by Kaniowski, is the object of earlier considerations. See *ibid.*, pp. 26—27. When talking about the origin, Kaniowski means the appearance of the problem in modern concepts rather than the origin *in the strict sense*.

<sup>51</sup> Luke 10, 35. *The New Holy Bible, New International Version*.

<sup>52</sup> A.M. Kaniowski: *Supererogacja...*, p. 25.

logians<sup>53</sup> considered the parable itself not to be an interpretation of the doctrine of supererogation but as an example of it because it lacks the elements that determine the laudable, voluntary character of supererogation deeds since in Catholicism<sup>54</sup> supererogation is defined as follows: “Supererogation, Works of — Virtuous acts surpassing what is required by duty or obligation. They are compared to other works not as good to evil, but as better works to good works.”<sup>55</sup>

The Christian doctrine of laudable acts is based on the fundamental distinction between “duties” and “pieces of advice.” “Duties” are the obligations that are expressed mainly in the Decalogue, which create a kind of basic law that should be respected by every Christian in order to deserve the salvation, or those that fall under a moral category in general (the term “moral” is, in this case — as one might presume — used in an evaluative aspect, not a descriptive one). Pieces of advice do not result from an obligation; they are rather an additional, “extra” fulfillment of God’s commandments, which are aimed at creating of a kind of “surplus” of grace in relation to that which will be given to the faithful who are “ordinary.”

Therefore, a supererogational act is, in fact, according to Kaniowski’s interpretation, an equivalent of a virtuous act. Considering the relation between a virtue and law, the author notes that the unequivocal separation of these two categories is in no way obvious. For, if by virtue of the law of nature every creature should follow in relation to their proper form, man should absolutely submit his life to the requirements of the mind. Then, on reaching perfection, which can be gained owing to virtuous acts, he should be considered as a subject to obligation. In this sense supererogational acts would be *de facto* identical with activities that are prescribed by obligation. However — as Kaniowski remarks — this is only one point of view. As he says: “From the point of view of virtue and

<sup>53</sup> Catholicism was the belief system in western Christianity in which the concept of supererogation was able to appear; Protestantism, due to some doctrinal differences, does not admit the possibility of the existence of a deed that goes beyond a duty. See *ibid.*, pp. 55–67.

<sup>54</sup> As a kind of convenience and bearing in mind the remarks made in the previous footnote, I will use the terms “Christianity” and “Catholicism” interchangeably.

<sup>55</sup> J. H e n n e s s y: “Supererogation, Works of.” In: *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 13. New York, 1967, p. 810. See A.M. K a n i o w s k i: *Supererogacja...*, p. 21.

aspiration for perfection fulfilling virtuous acts must be seen as something consistent with nature and therefore it should be regarded as required by natural moral law. However, as the man is not a perfect creature, and this is the other point of view, for he is not the creature purely rational, there might exist virtuous acts which fulfillment cannot be required by natural moral law, nor by the law of God. What is more, it relates to a positive human law, which, at its most can demand fulfillment of some virtuous acts, namely those which relate directly or indirectly to the common good understood as justice and peace.”<sup>56</sup>

The possibility of defending the concept of supererogation (at least in the frames of the outlined concept) is connected with establishing a kind of hierarchy of moral dignity that is achieved with regard to the level of perfection. Otherwise, supererogational acts would have no sense.

### Secular concept of supererogation

Andrzej Kaniowski, when considering the problem of supererogation from the point of view of modern deontic theories, points out three classes of moral deeds that are recognised within them: ordered, forbidden and morally indifferent. Here, the basic question arises as to the border between a supererogation act and an obligatory act. Drawing such a demarcation line would allow, according to the mentioned author, the three-part classification to be transformed into a four-part classification that would also comprise supererogation acts.

According to Kaniowski, such a border might be demarcated when we take the category of “common sense” as a criterion and consider the entirety of circumstances as a factor which might, in some situations, cause the cessation of a duty. This entirety results from the acceptance of this category (as a criterion of acting). This

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<sup>56</sup> A.M. Kaniowski: *Supererogacja...*, p. 51.

“common sense” definition of the borders of a duty signifies taking into account all of those external elements that might cause that the fulfilment of a duty or a continuation of a sequence of actions that result from it to be a threat to the subject performing a given action or in a case in which the intended effect of an activity does not compensate the losses that are borne.<sup>57</sup> Kaniowski states: “The entirety of circumstances of acting on which the attention of researches is focused, appears to be the factor demarcating the borders of a duty. From this point of view supererogation is every act which is, firstly, morally good and secondly, with regard to the entirety of circumstances it deserves a praise and not fulfilling of this will not result in moral reprimand.”<sup>58</sup>

At the basis of the concept of supererogation outlined here, there is a kind of dualism of optics, which is the same as it was in the Christian concept by which the agent is expressed. For, on the one hand, he is defined as an imperfect individual, about which we know that it is impossible to dispose of its imperfection and the evil existing in the world. On the other hand, however, there is no consent for such a status quo.<sup>59</sup> Such a disagreement, expressed in a supererogation act, takes on “moral significance,”<sup>60</sup> takes up a challenge of carrying out of a duty (or fulfilling it in exceptionally unfavourable circumstances). As Kaniowski writes, the act “deserving to be praised” is defined by him in the category of laudability.<sup>61</sup>

We should stop at this praise that Kaniowski seems to understand as something that surpasses the definition of “good.” Therefore, the praise would be a way of expressing approval of a supererogation act. However, acceptance of its definition means setting aside the distinction “good — bad” and accepting a continuity in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 148. One should pay attention to the fact that such a definition of a duty is only one of the possible ones, for if circumstances, e.g., if there is a threat to the life of the subject who is obliged to perform a given duty, one may pose the question of whether these circumstances do not *de facto* abolish this duty. For it would be difficult to show the right in sustaining the status of a duty in a life-threatening situation.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 143—146 and 160—164.



which these two terms would only be specific or characteristic elements. Also, in colloquial language, according to Kaniowski, we make estimations with regard to different degrees of shading of which pictures, for example, the fact of stating on the laudability itself of a given deed (also in the sense of every day evaluations that are deprived of a theoretical basis). Therefore, approving the existence of a category of supererogation acts means consenting to considering the distinction “good-evil” as not being enough for a full description of moral acts.<sup>62</sup> And this leads, as Kaniowski claims, to the necessity of defining of what constitutes, in fact, the object of moral assessment: the acting subject or the act itself.

Kaniowski pays attention to the fact that when considering a deed of moral acting, we can approach the task in two ways. Firstly, it may only be considered with regard to its external aspect, that is, — as the author mentioned says — “objectively.”<sup>63</sup> In the second case, when assessing the act, one also takes into account at least some moments subjectively: intentions, reasons, etc.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, Kaniowski writes, a moral subject may also be considered from two points of view: either with regard to such subjective moments or by emphasizing its permanent dispositions: features of character, virtues etc.<sup>65</sup>

In the assessment of a supererogation act — Kaniowski claims — we make an assessment of not only the act but also of the agent.<sup>66</sup> Only after considering all four aspects of a moral deed can we fully assess such a deed. One should pay attention to the fact that this author seems to join not only the axiological and deontological dimensions of a given deed but also — as a result of introducing the category of laudability — that he somehow considers this deed in three aspects.<sup>67</sup>

Such an act, according to Kaniowski, cannot be described with the help of the duty category but only with the obligation category. A supererogation act, however, cannot be ordered (it would not be

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp. 154—156.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 170—171.

a supererogation deed) but at the most it can be recommended. Its undertaking, that is the undertaking of a duty resulting from this obligation, is attributed by the author to some natural disposition that is characteristic for a narrow group, which he calls, after Kant, “moral feeling.”<sup>68</sup>

Introducing the idea of “moral feeling” and replacing duty as the source of a supererogation act along with the obligation that it entails, according to Kaniowski, makes it necessary to reformulate the basic question. This necessity results from the problem of the approach to such obligation.

In classic moral concepts, the basic issue was the question: What should I do? Or: What should I be like?<sup>69</sup> However, as Kaniowski remarks, such a formulation of a morality problem constitutes one of the main problems that are brought by grasping the essence of acts.<sup>70</sup> According to the author, formulating the question about the desired *status quo* is more accurate: “Which *status quo* should take place? or to be more precise: Which *status quo* should not take place?”<sup>71</sup> Such a change in the morality object allows Kaniowski to formulate the idea of “ontological obligation,” whose origin might be observed in Kant.<sup>72</sup> This reformulating allows, according to the author, an “alleviation” of the moral subject, who, in this way, is given the freedom needed to decide on the laudability of an act. At the same time, the duty to act in favour of the proper *status quo* is replaced with obligation that takes into account the conditions of acting and human weakness. Here, a two-fold shape of supererogation appears: “One form of supererogation is based on the fact that agent undertakes realization of ontological obligation, which does not have any specified addressee and thus, no one is forced to feel that, with his omission or acting, he is jointly responsible

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 162–165.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 395.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 394–400 and 377–378. The breaking of an “egocentric point of view,” which Kaniowski wants to see as a traditional moral scheme seems to be only apparent. For, if we reformulate the basic question of morality in accordance with this author’s recommendation, we might ask the question about the foundation on which we will base our vision of the desired *status quo* and this, on the other hand, restores this egocentric *status quo*.

for arisen and negatively perceived *status quo*, which should not have taken place. In the case of second form of supererogation we deal with realisation by the subject of explicitly addressed duty towards him in the situation when some obstacles appear to fulfil it.<sup>73</sup>

Supererogation defined in this way is, according to Kaniowski, a hybrid concept that because it is defined in a two-fold way — by referring to deontological imperatives on the one hand and the concrete conditions of acting on the other hand — cannot have the status of an autonomous category of the assessment of moral acts.<sup>74</sup>

### Between the norm and the ideal

Andrzej Kaniowski, by introducing the category of laudability into the description of supererogation acts, extends a typical deontic set of moral acts so that they now include four kinds: ordered deeds, forbidden deeds, indifferent deeds and recommended deeds (supererogational ones). However, it seems that the author does not take note of a kind of difference between two categories of deeds: supererogation deeds and deeds that surpass a duty but are directed towards the realisation of some kind of ideal (perfecting).

Kaniowski, somehow following the Thomistic approach, considers a deed that surpasses a duty as convergent with the realisation of an ideal. For surpassing a duty, as he writes,<sup>75</sup> both in religious ethics as well as in secular ethics, determines some levels of perfection, which are not possible to achieve without such a solution. One may presume that this convergence has its origin in the acceptance of a way of thinking that comes from religious ethics in which complete morality is basically connected with a defined lifestyle, which thus assumes a general moral attitude.

In this sense, the distinction between orders and pieces of advice and hence — the sphere of minimum and the sphere of maximum

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 400.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 81.

(sphere of the ideal) is, in fact, exclusively a calibration of a recommended moral type — even when remaining at only the level of norms, an individual realises some recommended ideal of life, functions — as Kaniowski calls this, thereby evoking the categories offered by J.O. Hannay<sup>76</sup> — in the frames of *lower Christian life*, as opposed to *higher Christian life*, which signifies some greater moral effort. In Christian ethics, surpassing a duty is understood in the way that is appropriate for the interpretation of the fable of the rich young man that was presented earlier.

However, with regard to secular ethics, such a unification of supererogation and the ideal is unjustified. When, for example, moving within the range of the classical moral scheme, an individual performs a deed with regard to his perfection, he realises the ideal at the same time. This is not identical with the realisation of a supererogation deed though. For one can point at deeds that do not serve for the improvement of an individual but are laudable deeds despite this (such an act, as it seems, might just be the realisation of an “ontological obligation,” that does not have any definite addressee and that does not result from mercy or any other form of directing “moral feeling” toward other individuals). And if this is so, one can introduce a fifth element into the classification of moral deeds that would consist of: ordered deeds (in a sense of some minimum, which would be required for falling within the category of being moral in a valorising sense), forbidden deeds, indifferent deeds, recommended deeds (supererogational ones) and perfectionist deeds (while this postulate is of a different power here and has a meaning other than recommendation; it is rather all about deeds the realisation of which is connected with the realisation of a form of ideal, for example, human nature understood as a project). Obviously, adding a fifth element to this classification is only possible when it is assumed that the aspiration for the realisation of an ideal (the fulfilment of human nature) is not obligatory, which might be disputable. Nevertheless, although Kaniowski pays a lot of attention to the question of demarcating a border between supererogation and duty, one should also define the difference between the understand-

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

ing of supererogation that is presented here and a moral ideal. And if my reasoning is correct, supererogation is situated between a norm understood as some minimum and an ideal.

### Types of obligations connected with norms and ideals

A three-part classification of moral deeds in a normative sense results from considerations carried out here. At first, we deal with ordered deeds, obligatory ones. Fulfilling a deed that is prescribed with a norm that is understood as a criterion of being moral (in an evaluative sense) constitutes, for a group, a signal for the possibility of “cooperation” with a given individual, and it is a guarantee of respecting the rights that are indispensable for the existence of the group itself. As it seems, only the moral nature of man allows the proper functioning of a community. “Proper” would mean here: securing basic rights and allowing one’s own potentialities to be realized, and with Scheler’s interpretation added, it would also mean: in accordance with the fundamental dimension of human acting.

The realisation of a directive prescribed by a norm does not fulfil an ontological obligation though. Some theoreticians, for example, Moore, who represent non-naturalism, define a duty as a deed that brings more good to the universe than any other possible act in a given situation. Therefore, using quite a radical approach, one may think that only the fulfilment of an ontological obligation (understood as achieving the desired *status quo*) is the performance of a good deed.

However, as Kaniowski stressed, one should pay attention to the limitation, the imperfection of human nature as not everyone is able to cope with such a widely understood duty. An attempt to maintain an ontological obligation as the only binding one would risk an accusation of excessive rigour and breaking with realities of life. Maria Ossowska, following Moore’s distinction, distinguishes two meanings of the notion of “ought,” and consequently, two types of norms. On the one hand, one may point at “rules of duty” and on the other hand — “ideal rules”: “In one case the man ‘should’ be such and such

or should behave in such and such way only when he can, the second ‘should’ does not take this possibility into account at all.”<sup>77</sup>

It is symptomatic that Ossowska does not mention two different types of obligations but rather a kind of “grading” of obligation as such. With reference to Kaniowski, one can suggest an ontological obligation as the proper object of obligation, while a distinction norm — an ideal — would only be a description of these grades. A similar standpoint is presented by Richard Brandt. He pays attention to a kind of objectivity in defining a moral obligation, and at the same time states that this is the basis on which to talk about moral obligations with different levels of intensity. Even in the colloquial use of language, we often, according to the author, talk about different powers of duty. This, on the other hand, as Brandt writes, somehow constitutes a “double” instance of moral duty — we are obliged to do something when the sense of duty finds its objective justification and also when claiming that the attitude of others towards us is objectively justified as well.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, we cannot talk about the kinds of obligations that are connected with norms or ideals as about something different in an objective and substantial way. It is rather all about the amount of distinction, a gradation of power. In this view, there are not two different (objectively) kinds of moral sanctions that are connected with a distinction norm — the ideal. Only a deed that is performed within the power of a certain individual might be required and obligatory. Its omission is first of all connected with the external dimension of a sanction. In the case of the omission of a laudable deed, a moral sanction might only have an internal character (often imagined).

What is more, if we assume the view that is appropriate to the ethics of virtues, the difference between the concept of a perfectionist deed and a supererogation deed becomes much clearer as it seems that concentration on the idea of ontological obligation, that is on a metaphysical element, which is independent of the agent himself, introduces some confusion in distinction between supererogation deeds

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<sup>77</sup> M. Ossowska: *Podstawy...*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> R. Brandt: *Ethical Theory...*, pp. 602—603.

and perfectionist deeds because in this case perfection would have to deal with some ideal *status quo* and the ways of reaching it would have to remain unknown. Contrary to this concentration on the subject, which is appropriate to the virtue ethics, directly leads to the idea of the perfection of a person and so consists of a vision of imperfection of the man, as well as an educational element, a description of the path on which man should travel, thus aiming at perfection (one might give reasons that Ancient ethics are practically to a large extent only descriptions of such a transformation). Only on this basis does the distinction that is offered become clear. Man, by performing a laudable deed, may follow either a perfectionist premise, a willingness to keep highest standards that are preserved in the appropriate virtue of character (so an intention of preservation of this virtue) or an intention of an essential change in the *status quo* that is independent of main directions of his activity.<sup>79</sup>

### Conclusion: norms and ideals

The basic criterion that is used to separate ideals and norms is the function that they fulfil in a moral system (one should understand the term “moral system” not as an ordered set of sentences concerning the morality that is appropriate to philosophical ethics, but all such sets and thus the entirety of norms, ideals and methods of evaluation that are characteristic for a given community). Norms are immanent element of community life; they already appeared at the lowest levels of the development of human culture and their basic task

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<sup>79</sup> Obviously, these arguments may be questioned for it could be pointed out that by performing such a supererogation deed, an agent shows a virtue of character. However, it seems that this feature is somehow mediated here and the virtue of character only constitutes the context of taking up an activity, whereas on the ground of the ethics of virtues, an activity, according to Aristotle's approach, is just taken up with regard to the virtue. See Aristotle: *Nicomachean ethics* II, 4, 1105 a.

is to regulate interpersonal relationships by defining obligatory and forbidden duties. Ideals constitute a kind of “superstructure” of the sphere of norms. Their task is to provide a model, a point of reference for norms and formulated assessments. Broadly speaking — they provide a model of the desired personal types and behaviour for a given community; they define the “character” of a community and (at least partially) its attitude towards other groups.

The second criterion that differentiates the sphere of norms from the sphere of ideals constitutes the range of their operation. While all group members are obliged to obey norms, the realisation of ideals is proper for elite, who will manage to rise above particularism on the one hand and on the other hand above the regulative character of the sphere of norms. At the same time, the elite define the direction at which the moral activity of other group members should aim. The hierarchy of moral dignity has to, necessarily, be connected with some inequality in the status of particular individuals, for as it seems, some persuasive power results from the concept of elitism.

The element that is common for both norms and ideals is their complementary character within a moral system. For it appears that these categories are not only markers of some spectrum of obligations but also guidelines that concern the existence of the very fact that a moral obligation is different from an obligation that is burdened with a legal or moral sanction. Even if we treat the sphere of ideals as the superstructure of norms, one should note that this “added” character is connected with practical optics. In the meantime, if one considers the matter in accordance with Scheler’s attitude, the sphere of ideals, and therefore the “complements” of norms, appears to be source of the possibilities that define the content of norms. Otherwise, it would be necessary, as it seems, to assume that moral norms only have the character of convention.

Therefore, the connection between sphere of norms and sphere of ideals (somehow mediated by supererogation deeds) determines, in fact, the possibility of the logical coherence of a moral system and the possibilities to refer it to a wider vision of man.



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## Moral norms, moral ideals and supererogation

**Keywords:** moral norm, moral ideal, moral example, supererogation

### S u m m a r y

The aim of the paper is to investigate the relations between basic moral categories, namely those of norms, ideals and supererogation. I discuss, firstly, the ways of understanding these categories, secondly, how moral acting can be described using them and thirdly, how they relate within certain moral system. Yet, what is of a special importance is the relation between norms and ideals and their complementary character. For it might be argued that omission of one of these categories may lead to posing important limitations on the possibilities of grasping certain moral issue adequately (on a descriptive level) and setting the full range of possible solutions (on normative level). Hence, I argue that to resign from two-level form of moral analysis may lead to the atrophy of the very idea of ethics itself.

Piotr Machura

## Moralische Normen, Ideale und Supererogation

**Schlüsselwörter:** moralische Norm, Ideal, moralisches Vorbild, Supererogation

### Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g

Das Ziel des vorliegenden Artikels ist, die Wechselbeziehung zwischen den Grundkategorien der Moralpostulate: Normen, Idealen und Supererogationsempfehlungen zu untersuchen. Es wird untersucht: auf welche Weise werden diese Kategorien verstanden, welche moralische Handlungen sind dank der Anwendung von diesen Kategorien möglich und wie sind die gegenseitigen Relationen zwischen den Kategorien im Bereich des Moralsystems. Von besonderer Bedeutung ist aber die Relation zwischen den Normen und Idealen und die These von deren komplementären Charakter. Wenn man zwar im Bereich des Moralsystems eins von den untersuchten

Elementen auslässt, wird man sowohl bei adäquater Beurteilung eines bestimmten moralischen Problems (auf deskriptiver Ebene), wie auch bei Bestimmung eines vollen Spektrums von normativen Empfehlungen wesentlich begrenzt. Infolgedessen kann das Verzichten auf zweiflächige Weise der Untersuchung von moralischen Problemen sogar zur Atrophie der ethischen Idee selbst führen.