

A brief discussion of the suffering of ill people

(Krótkie rozważania na temat cierpienia człowieka chorego)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Abstract – The paper briefly discusses the problem of the suffering of the ill. Several definitions of suffering have been brought to attention. References have been made to both encyclopaedic definitions and John Paul II's views on suffering.

Key words - suffering, ill people.

Streszczenie – W pracy przedstawiono krótkie rozważania na temat cierpienia człowieka chorego. Zwrócono uwagę na różne definicje cierpienia. Odwołano się m.in. do definicji encyklopedycznych, czy poglądów Jana Pawła II na temat cierpienia..

Słowa kluczowe - cierpienie, człowiek chory.

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- A. The idea and the planning of the study
- B. Gathering and listing data
- C. The data analysis and interpretation
- D. Writing the article
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Suffering is one of the most difficult existential problems of mankind. *Homo-sapiens* (Latin: wise man) is also *homo-patiens*, a suffering man [1]. Suffering is a broad issue rooted deep in being human, which can be studied from medical, psychological, sociological, philosophical and theological perspective.

The concept of suffering (Greek: *algeón*, Latin: *dolor, passio*) as defined in Encyclopaedia of Moral Teachings (Encyklopedia Nauczania Moralnego) means conscious feeling of unpleasantness or pain caused by experiencing something wrong. That human condition consists of experiencing negative emotions and volitional, active cognitive response to that experience [2]. According to the Encyclopaedia of Bioethics (Encyklopedia Bioetyki), suffering is a negative human experience in the mental, physical or spiritual dimension caused by external (accidents, illnesses, pain of someone close to us) or internal factors (insecurity, doubts, mental depression, seeing no meaning to life) [3]. The terms *suffering* and *pain* are often used interchangeably, depending on the field in which a study is conducted.

II. SUFFERING IN GREATER DETAIL

While in sciences, pain and illness are more likely to be mentioned, humanities tend to refer more to suffering. As John Paul II emphasized in his letter, "Salvifici doloris", "*man can suffer in different ways, which cannot always be considered by medicine even in its furthest branches. Suffering is something more basic than an illness, something more repetitive and rooted deeper in humanity.*" [4] Therefore, the experience of suffering should be treated as inseparable feature of being human and also in terms of human destiny [5].

At the foundations of suffering lies the infringement of personal rights, which allows one to make a distinction between physical suffering (e.g. illnesses and their somatic symptoms), mental suffering (e.g. depression, nervous breakdown) and

spiritual suffering (e.g. losing the meaning to one's life). Different kinds of suffering can be experienced simultaneously by one person and even can be dependent on one another [1,6,7]. Other distinctions that are made include:

- *guilty vs. guiltless suffering*;
- *purposeful vs. purposeless*;
- *short-lived vs. chronic*;
- *minor vs. severe*;
- *existential vs. normal*;
- *neurotic vs. normal*.

Experiencing suffering is dependent on the structure of one's personality and one's values. Approaching the attitudes to suffering calls for defining what an attitude is in psychology in the first place.

One of the meanings of the word "attitude" is the position of one's body, an understanding that is closely related to physicality and motion. Also, attitude is associated with the emotional aspect of human beings and identified with the significance of one's opinion, one's siding with a given value, approving or disapproving of an idea [8]. What is more, attitude is also a structure of one's consciousness which motivates one to assume a position in relation to the reality, forming a relatively sustainable structure of cognitive processes and emotional tendencies to behave in such a manner so as to express one's ideas about a given object. [8,9]. Thus, attitude encapsulates one's intellectual, emotional and behavioural relation to reality with reference to an object, that is anything that exists for the benefit of people or plays a part in satisfying their needs, thereby representing positive or negative value. The subjective content of an attitude may be provided by individuals, social groups, religions or institutions. Apart from subject, also the *sign* and *strength* of attitude are worthy of attention. There are three attitude signs: plus, minus and zero.

„+“ indicates behaviour that is positive and favourable towards the subject (suffering).

„-“ suggests a negative approach to the subject.

The neutral attitude to the subject can be expressed by "0". The attitude signs are visible in each element. In terms of beliefs, it is related to the evaluation of the subject of an attitude, whereas in terms of behaviour it can have the form of proximity, avoidance or hostility. As far as emotions are concerned, an attitude can be positive or negative. Another significant dimension of attitude is *strength*. Attitudes may have similar signs and yet be completely different with regard to how favourable or unfavourable towards the subject one is. In this reading, the strength of attitude is expressed by all of its components: evaluation of a subject, emotions and behaviour [1,6,8,9].

Various typologies of human attitudes towards suffering have been employed in the studies of affliction. The more popular ones include the following attitudes:

defensive – miserable – on trial – punished – submissive to nature – resigned for the belief in "God's will" – accepting human fate – of personal growth – minimalizing God's perspective – aimed at redemption.

The last one may take a form of offering, unifying, participation, altruism, sacrifice, penance, reward or intercession. Also, the approaches of acceptance, illusoriness and hope have been defined [10].

A fundamental issue related to suffering is the question about its purpose, asked by people on every stage of their lives.

Mental and moral kind of suffering is much more severe than physical pain and it still remains a sad mystery, especially in cases when the suffering is long-standing. The suffering as restricted to the mental and spiritual aspects of human lives usually has positive consequences. The phenomenon of pain is the natural reaction of the organism to the breach of its integrity. It does not take away one's meaning of life or prevent people from reaching their primary existential goals; nor does it deprive one of one's humanity or pose a threat to one's survival. It plays the part of a warning signal, forcing one to focus so as to protect one's biological and bodily elements of personality more effectively [11].

Physical suffering has an objective point, i.e. forms a biological fence which protects the organism from sudden annihilation. Mental suffering is related to experiencing difficult personal, family or social situations. Those include the feeling of being harmed, envy, jealousy, misery or despair.

Personalistic anthropology provides a basis for analysing the psychological and ethical sense of suffering. By accepting the fact that men are naturally of moral and spiritual dimensions, one can discover a personal meaning to suffering. Human beings, through experiencing mental or physical suffering, can obtain maturity and be more involved in their being human. It is precisely suffering, as the oldest school of ethical self-development, that facilitates the process of broadening one's spiritual and moral perception. A man who experiences suffering learns the elementary virtues: self-control, endurance, patience. More often than not, suffering makes one re-examine one's value system and make radical changes to it. Suffering urges people to organize their lives around sustainable spiritual values. The significant prospective product of suffering is being open to the problems and fate of other people, as it teaches solidarity. It is precisely suffering that reaches deep into people's souls, uncovering long-suspended values such as altruism. Suffering is experiencing the fragility of biological existence, which teaches humility to people and makes them ponder their own vulnerability.

The religious sense of suffering can be defined on multiple levels: it may be a consequence of one's evil deeds, serve as a penance or play the role of spiritual purification. What is more, it can always be considered participation in the Passion of the Christ for our sins. Therefore suffering is always purposeful from the religious point of view [5,9]. Despite the development of sciences and engagement into philosophy throughout ages, man is still a mystery. No wonder suffering is yet to be fully explored too, in spite of all the past attempts to define it. What is important is the practical attitude to those who suffer. It is an obligation every human being to take care not to intensify suffering in any way and assume an attitude of sensitivity towards the fate and well-being of suffering people [12,13].

III. REFERENCES

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