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Metaphysical and Cultural Nature of Sacrifice in the Life and Death of E. Stein and S. Weil

ABSTRACT

The article explains the metaphysical, culture-making and creative act sacrificing one's own life in the name of higher values. At the beginning we discuss the causes of a contemporary cultural crisis and the disappearance of metaphysical attitudes. We have formulated a thesis that the revival of metaphysics in contemporary culture can be grounded in the experience of metaphysical qualities that are present in heroic acts of offering one's own life for another. The next step in our analysis was to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for self-sacrifice, and then, on the examples of E. Stein and S. Weil, we show what the ultimate sacrifice of one's own life is. Using the method of humanistic interpretation, we have reconstructed the descriptive and normative reasons which motivated the two women to their acts of self-sacrifice. And although Weil and Stein do not meet the criteria to be categorized as self-sacrifices, we have found that they indeed were ultimate sacrifices because they were directed towards the realization of the highest moral and religious ideals. Using the category of "metaphysical qualities" developed by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden, we proposed an interpretation in which the sacrificial act was interpreted as supererogation in which metaphysical qualities such as holiness, sublimity, etc. are phenomenologically present. Such an act also has

a cultural-creative dimension, consisting in building a culture and civilization of life in which the value of the existence of another human being is a correlate of a metaphysical desire rather than biological and psychological needs. The thesis is that, contrary to the contemporary crisis in metaphysics and axiology, they are essential and irremovable elements of culture, without which it cannot grow properly.

KEY WORDS: philosophy of humanities, sacrifice, gift, Simone Weil, Edith Stein, humanistic interpretation, supererogation

STRESZCZENIE

Metafizyczno-kulturotwórczy charakter ofiary na przykładzie życia i śmierci E. Stein i S. Weil

W artykule objaśniamy, na czym polega metafizyczny i kulturotwórczy sens aktu ofiary dokonanego z własnego życia w imię wyższych wartości. Na początku omówiliśmy przyczyny współczesnego kryzysu kultury i zaniku postaw metafizycznych. Sformułowaliśmy tezę, że odrodzenie metafizyki we współczesnej kulturze może być ugruntowane w doświadczeniu jakości metafizycznych, które uobecniają się w czynach heroicznych polegających na złożeniu ofiary z własnego życia za drugiego człowieka. Następnym krokiem w naszych analizach było określenie koniecznych i wystarczających warunków do bycia ofiarą, a dalej na przykładzie E. Stein oraz S. Weil pokazaliśmy, czym jest ofiara absolutna z własnego życia. Przy pomocy metody interpretacji humanistycznej zrekonstruowaliśmy przesłanki opisowe i normatywne, które zmotywowały owe kobiety do podjęcia czynu ofiarniczego. I choć ofiary Weil i Stein nie spełniają podanych kryteriów umożliwiających zaliczenie ich czynu do kategorii ofiary, to jednak uznaliśmy, że są to ofiary absolutne ze względu na to, że były skierowane na realizację najwyższych ideałów moralnych i religijnych. Wykorzystując opracowaną przez polskiego fenomenologa Romana Ingardena kategorię „jakości metafizycznych”, zaproponowaliśmy interpretację, w której czyn ofiarny został zinterpretowany jako czyn supererogacyjny; fenomenologicznie uobecniają się w nim jakości metafizyczne, takie jak świętość, wzniosłość itp. Taki czyn ma również wymiar kulturotwórczy, polega na budowaniu kultury i cywilizacji życia, w których wartość istnienia drugiego człowieka jest korelatem pragnienia metafizycznego, a nie potrzeb o charakterze

biologicznym i psychologicznym. W artykule wykazano, że aksjologia i metafizyka mają do odegrania ważną rolę w przewyciężeniu współczesnego kryzysu kulturowego.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: filozofia humanistyki, ofiara, dar, Edyta Stein, Simone Weil, interpretacja humanistyczna, supererogacja

Is there an idea of such an importance and greatness today at all to be worth to devote all your strength to in order to make it a reality?

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*¹

1. Culture and metaphysics at a crossroads

The question asked by Robert Musil nearly a hundred years ago has not lost its relevance. Despite the progressing historical and cultural changes, we can still ask: is it worth sacrificing one's life for lofty ideas? Is there anything that makes a person not only give up the greatest gift that is life but also see it as their duty? Referring to the words of the Austrian writer, we will focus here on contemporary culture, where we can and even should ask about the existence of great ideas, especially those derived from the metaphysical reflection that shaped Western culture. Surely, we can say that modern culture is not conducive to the development of metaphysical reflection, leaving man facing the crisis, which has already begun in the nineteenth century thanks to the masters of suspicion (Marx, Freud, or Nietzsche) and continued in the twentieth century brought about by postmodernists and poststructuralists.² Using the term “contemporary

1 R. Musil, *Człowiek bez właściwości*, transl. by K. Radziwił, K. Truchanowski, J. Zeltert, Vol. I, Warszawa 1971, p. 35.

2 “Because metaphysics is passing, it is gone. The past does not exclude, but it does include the fact that it is only now that metaphysics takes absolute power in the very being and as such in the untruthful shape of the real and the objects. Experienced at the beginning of the beginning, metaphysics is also past in the sense that it has entered into its running-out. The running-out *lasts* longer than the last previous history of metaphysics ... Since man is the most important raw material, one can reckon with the fact that on the basis of today's chemical research factories will be built in the future to artificially produce human material ... (One should not resort to differences that no longer exist out of outdated prudery. The demand for human material is subject to the same rules of ordering as the demand for entertainment books and poetry, for the production of which the poet is no more important than a bookbinding apprentice who

culture,” we can speak of a multitude of meanings of this term, in which they are conditioned by the assumptions and concepts adopted. We will not cite all definitions of contemporary culture, nor will we attempt to demonstrate its negative assessment, or try to highlight its positive aspects, but we will focus on answering the question: or in contemporary culture, there may be opportunities cheating metaphysical value, which should be ready to bear the sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of his own life? Talking about contemporary culture and the potential of a metaphysics of sacrifice therein, we may ask whether the human being is willing to accept a metaphysical attitude which expresses itself in the readiness to make sacrifices?³ Or otherwise, can we sadly conclude that contemporary culture has focused solely on consumerism, in which there is no place for sacrifice? Thinking about the presence of metaphysical idea in modern culture we have in mind the cultural phenomenon that sacrifice is and its metaphysical justification. The term “culture” has about one hundred fifty different definitions, which covers a wide range of phenomena and meanings.⁴ The multiplicity of meanings and possibilities of interpretation results in the fact that we do not have a transparent definition of culture. A similar problem is posed by attempts to analyze the subject matter of sacrifice. The use of this concept in different cultural contexts proves to be ambiguous. Using the term “sacrifice” we refer to the definitions⁵ that primarily emphasize

helps to bind them for some company library, for example by carrying a cardboard box for covers from a magazine). M. Heidegger, *Overcoming Metaphysics*, in: idem, *Odczyty i rozprawy*, transl. J. Mizera, Warszawa 2007, pp. 65, 89.

- 3 Such authors as Karol Tarnowski have asked about the contemporary crisis of metaphysics: “Is metaphysics capable of surviving the criticism to which it has been subjected today, both by Heidegger and by Anglo-Saxon philosophers? To survive not in the sense of the sclerotic tenacity of certain forms of thinking envisaged by Heidegger, but to somehow prove the legitimacy of questions and experiences on which metaphysics is based?”, in: *Człowiek i transcendencja*, Kraków 1995, p. 125.
- 4 Cf. A. Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa. Krytyka i obrona*, Warszawa 1964; A. Kłoskowska, *Sociologia kultury*, Warszawa 2007; Z. Bauman, *Kultura jako praxis*, Warszawa 2012; G. Simmel, *Filozofia kultury*, Kraków 2007; R. Benedict, *Wzory kultury*, Warszawa 2002; M. Gruchola, *Kultura w ujęciu socjologicznym*, “Roczniki Kulturoznawcze,” Vol. 10, 2010.
- 5 Józef Tischner believes that sacrifice in Christianity was most fully revealed in Christ’s death on the cross: “sacrifice is more than just cruelty. It shines with additional splendor and sheds light on dedication, which has become a great human possibility. Sacrifice means pain and meaningful death. It makes sense that the victim grows out the cruelty. Man is capable of being a sacrifice. Actually, only man,” in: J. Tischner, *Myslenie w żywiole piękna*, Kraków 2013, p. 307. According to the philosopher, the idea of sacrifice confronts us with drastic situation. As an example, Tischner gives making a sacrifice to buy out a slave. “A slave is not able to redeem himself from the bondage; there must be a person who will have such opportunities. By making the sacrifice, they becomes a savior, but the act of redemption, in a sense, becomes an act directed against one’s self. Redemption of a slave is not a purchase, but liberation. This dramatic

its voluntary nature, pointing to the basic conditions that must be met so that we can consider an act as such. Our attention should focus on the meaning of sacrifice as an act of supreme dedication of giving one's own life with an indication of its metaphysical character. The act of sacrificing one's life in the name of ideals and values places many questions about our existence in the world before us. Indeed, we may ask: why would sacrifice make metaphysical values emerge? By asking these types of questions we refer directly to the human being and its metaphysical desires. Although the term metaphysics itself is loaded with ambiguity, the question about it and its presence in contemporary culture becomes indispensable in the context of human existence, which today lost its orientation in reality and is lost in the world indeed. We can formulate questions not only about the possibility of the existence of metaphysics, but also about its form, which has changed throughout history, and also about its role in contemporary culture.⁶ Our considerations herein focus on the disappearance of the sense of metaphysical desire which is associated with technological progress and the cultural changes that result from it.⁷ Contemporary culture, despite the dynamic development of consumerism and the introduction of new technologies, is trying to exclude all manifestations of metaphysical reflection.⁸ One that focuses only on the search for new experiences, drawn into the consumer chain of culture, loses themselves, and ceases to ask about the final overall sense of their existence and whatever will happen next. The present day has somehow imprisoned man in its narrow frames, which only seemingly seem to be wide. In fact, it offers narrow confines of consumerism, which is about the exchange of material goods. The result of such a state of human consciousness is the confession of an ephemeral attitude to life as the here and now. The lack of reflection on one's own existence is not, however, a common phenomenon, but rather,

understanding of sacrifice directs the thought of the philosopher into the core of the philosophy of Emmanuel Lévinas. Thus understood, sacrifice becomes responsibility for another who is in captivity. Responsibility will always imply facing a choice, because it chooses me calling in the face of the Other. Taking responsibility for the Other will always eventually become a sacrifice." Ibidem.

6 Cf. J. Jusiak, *Myslenie metafizyczne i niemetafizyczne*, "Przegląd Filozoficzny," Iss. 2, 1994.

7 Cf. J. Breczko, *Zanik uczuć metafizycznych jako przyczyna kryzysu kultury*, "Kultura i Wartości," Iss. 13, 2005.

8 Metaphysics, despite its diverse understanding and interpretation in the history of philosophy and its currents, asks basic questions about being and its existence. We can say that metaphysical questions should be permanent elements of human being in the world and their role should be to reflect on what has not been directly given to us. As stressed by W. Stróżewski: "the task of metaphysics is therefore to search for the ultimate justification of reality, which particular sciences are not able to satisfy." W. Stróżewski, *Ontologia*, Kraków 2004, p. 39.

we can define it as dormant or partially marginalized. The dormant metaphysical desire does not condemn metaphysics to exclusion, as evidenced by the willingness of some people to sacrifice their lives in the name of higher values that the tradition of the Western culture, strongly shaped by Christianity, has always defended. The question about metaphysics and its influence on culture also includes an attempt to see the conditions of the possibility of sacrificing one's own life. The possibility of a renewal of metaphysics is connected with asking the human person about the sense and ultimate destiny of their life.⁹ The question of metaphysics that we put forward raises another, on the metaphysical desire for higher values in the name of which man is willing to make a sacrifice of their life. Such a sacrifice is an absolute testament a human being makes in the name of higher values. The example of sacrificing one's own life to which we refer herein was motivated by a sense of solidarity with other people and an act of moral obligation addressed to them.

In addressing the issue of the possibility of making a sacrifice of one's life, we must pay attention to the problem of the crisis of contemporary culture, in which metaphysical thinking is often rejected and replaced by scientific thinking. In a way, Transcendence has been ostracized from the world. Man, in a world without metaphysics easily forgets the existence of another man who often requires our help. So, we may ask: is there space in our times, for the highest kind of sacrifice, which is giving up one's own life? We shall refer to two examples—Edith Stein and Simone Weil, who gave a positive answer to this question with their heroic attitudes, thus confirming their faithfulness to their own beliefs by making a voluntary sacrifice. The selection of these two women was justified not only by their similar life attitudes but also by other numerous analogies between them. The lives of both of them went on in the shadow of two world wars. They were both philosophers and both had Jewish roots. The biography of each one of them shows the desire to seek the ultimate truth that they found in Christianity without completely separating themselves from the religion of their ancestors.¹⁰ However, the most important shared characteristic by both women was their full awareness of their chosen attitude and the voluntariness of their sacrifice. One made hers in the Auschwitz concentration camp, and the other, who was suffering far from her homeland, died as a result of exhaustion and deliberate starvation. By discussing the most important events in the lives of the two heroines and then juxtaposing

9 K. Śnieżyński, *Filozofia sensu jako odpowiedź na kryzys metafizyki. W stronę nowej „filozofii pierwszej”*, „Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne,” Vol. 22, 2008, p. 215.

10 This issue is debatable in the case of talking about the attitude of Simone Weil. Cf. E. Levinas, *Trudna wolność. Eseje o judaizmie*, Warszawa 1991.

them with each other, we shall attempt to point out the events in their lives which may indicate a voluntary martyr's journey, which may be interpreted in the category of sacrifice in the name of higher values.¹¹ The question about the possibility of making a conscious self-sacrifice is supplemented by another: how can we understand the "metaphysics of sacrifice"? The same difficulty is to name and describe something that transcends human thinking. We can say that metaphysics is a philosophical attempt to grasp what is the first and most important in reality; metaphysics is thinking in which the question about *arche* emerges.¹² We will try to demonstrate that the metaphysics of sacrifice has a cultural aspect. It builds a culture and civilization of love for another human being, which stands in stark contrast to the culture and civilization of death, in which terms such as sacrifice lose their meaning in favor of very often selfishly understood purpose of human life.

In our analyses, we will basically use the method of a broadly understood humanistic interpretation,¹³ in which we take into account the values we experience, on top of the metaphysical and religious beliefs that co-determinate the choice of our heroines' life paths. This interpretation is given here to certain human activities, which on the one hand have

11 Speaking about the biography of Stein and Weil, it is impossible not to draw attention to their work, in which we can also find analysis on the issue of sacrifice. Cf. S. Weil, *Świadomość nadprzyrodzona*, Warszawa 1956; E. Stein, *Wiedza krzyża*, Kraków 2004.

12 Cf. K. Tarnowski, *Metafizyka w człowieku*, "Znak," Iss. 741, 2017.

13 Humanistic interpretation method was developed by Jerzy Kmita in his book *Z metodologicznych problemów interpretacji humanistycznej* [From the methodological problems of humanistic interpretation]. The book develops a project on the methodology of the humanities. In this project, Jerzy Kmita wanted to indicate what type of reasoning is used in the humanities. In his early works Kmita showed how humanistic interpretation takes place on examples taken from literature (e.g. the attitude of Antigone or the poetry of Leopold Staff). That humanistic interpretation would be consistent with our everyday intuitions which concern the interpretation of human behavior. It is common for each of us to assume that in order to understand the meaning of the other person's behavior, one must take into account his or her knowledge and axiological preferences. The scheme of humanistic interpretation takes up our colloquial intuitions, which we associate with the understanding of the meaning of human behavior. The humanistic interpretation, which is a certain type of reasoning, includes three conditions: a premise that says that a given entity has knowledge; a premise that says that the objectives and values preferred by the entity are achievable; and a premise that assumes the rationality of a given entity. Humanistic interpretation underwent a kind of an evolution in the Poznan school of philosophy. This has been done not only by Jerzy Kmita but also by his students. Some of them, such as Prof. Pałubicka continued and developed the epistemological variant of the humanistic interpretation. In contrast, Prof. Moraczewski and Prof. A. Grzegorzczak chose the phenomenological and hermeneutic variant. We can therefore see that humanistic interpretation was extended with newer components, which included various cultural, humanistic facts. In our interpretation we take the broad understanding which assimilates the phenomenology.

a culturally creative character, while on the other hand they present high moral values.¹⁴

2. Sacrifice as a supreme act of devotion

The category of “sacrifice” has numerous defining characteristics. We shall not recall them here, because that would take us away from the substance of the matter. Despite the differences in the understanding of sacrifice, it is undeniably a kind of death. There is a consensus among different theorists who differ in detail in their understanding of what sacrifice is. Many theories have been developed on the subject of death and attempts to understand it. In our discussion we will focus on discussing sacrifice as an act of giving one’s own life in the name of values. Let us therefore refer to the definition of sacrifice developed by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, who claimed that sacrifice for the other cannot be understood and explained in a rational way. He wrote:

To explain, we are looking for a goal, yet it is not possible to justify the sacrifice of life with a goal we would like to achieve. It is in the nature of sacrifice ... to be unable to give an account of oneself. In a purely human sense, it is madness, but at the same time the human being feels a moral compulsion not to retreat from it; he or she knows that if they had not made sacrifices, they would have humiliated themselves, so she or he has no choice. But sacrifice is not self-cancellation (like suicide), but the fullest affirmation and salvation of one’s existence.¹⁵

We must pay attention not only to the difficulty of talking about sacrifice due to the lack of clear definitions, but also to the fact of experiencing death which we have not been able to know empirically. Dedication of one’s own life is a deeply personal act. It is difficult to argue with such a free decision. The act of giving one’s own life in which another person was not saved may raise many doubts about the rightness of such behavior. In our analysis, we want to draw attention to the conditions that should be met by an act that could be classified as a sacrifice. These are:

1. in human nature there is a constant desire to stay alive, which does not mean that man is unable to sacrifice life in the name of ideas and values that they consider absolute. The who sacrifices

14 Cf. J. Kmita, *Z metodologicznych problemów interpretacji humanistycznej*, Warszawa 1971; cf. A. Grzegorzcyk, *Źródła sensu w humanistyce*, Kęty 2018.

15 I. Ziemiński, *Metafizyka śmierci*, Kraków 2010, p. 267.

themselves does not make it because of hating life or because of a death wish.¹⁶ Someone who offers their life may even hate death and desire to continue to live, but when put in a situation where they have to make a choice, they prefer to die voluntarily.

2. death which takes the form of sacrifice involves not only the love and respect for life but also self-love.¹⁷ As pointed out by Ireneusz Ziemiński a person who has a problem with accepting themselves will not be able to commit the absolute act of self-sacrifice. Their death would be a contradiction rather than a voluntary sacrifice. Self-hate and the desire for death would become a self-destructive act, which does not defend any value but denies their existence. Sacrifice is not an act which aims to destroy this life but an affirmation of the infinite meaning, in a way expressed fully by metaphysics.
3. it is also the most complete act of self-affirmation of a person who dedicates themselves in an absolute way, confirming their value. We can therefore conclude that death as a sacrifice is only possible if the person sees the value of themselves and their existence. Death, in which nothing is sacrificed, cannot be called a sacrifice.¹⁸
4. death, which takes the form of a sacrifice although it is related to altruism, can only become its false form, in which the only good and purpose of action is that of others.
5. also, when we consider an act of sacrifice that aims to externally manifest contempt for death, it becomes merely a caricature of sacrifice.¹⁹

We pointed out above that there are many examples that fit into the category of sacrifice, but in our discussion, we shall focus on its ultimate form that is sacrificing one's own life. We can reflect and seek answers to the question: what are the motives to take such action? Certainly, we are not able to point to a single transparent answer. We can assume that one of the factors is a metaphysical desire, which is always present in human nature. Human beings as finite creatures ask questions about their duties, the power of striving for good, which causes constant tension between absolutely finite experiences and infinite aspirations, and makes them search for ultimate meaning. This internal conflict cannot be resolved by itself. This forces man to constantly strive for something that is unexplored, to go

16 Such accusations are made towards the death of Simone Weil, recognizing her hunger for ritual suicide based on the model of the Cathars. Cf. M. Barber, *Katarzy*, Warszawa 2005.

17 Ana Rand argues with this view, showing that ethical selfishness and self-respect preclude an act of sacrifice. Cf. A. Rand, *Cnota egoizmu. Nowa koncepcja egoizmu*, Poznań 2000.

18 I. Ziemiński, *Metafizyka śmierci*, op. cit., p. 241.

19 Ibidem.

beyond what is earthly, sensual, and finished.²⁰ But this is not a death wish, which would help thus achieve the coveted infinity. The desire to realize the highest value, which is made present in the act of sacrifice is entered into the human nature, becoming the testimony of man striving to achieve a level of moral heroism. Absolute sacrifice has its own special character. It is not just giving up or dedication of a total of some parts, but the ending of one's own life. Such an act is of highest value. As a result of it, the person is not able to pursue other values, because their earthly life is radically ended. Human resignation from one value for another is also a kind of sacrifice, but sacrificing one's own life is total, absolute and final.²¹ As stated by I. Ziemiński:

The sacrifice of life is also individual, acting act of free and mature person. A person who sacrifices themselves cannot only be part of a collective but must be an autonomous and morally responsible entity. They only give up theirs in the name of absolute values or people they want to remain faithful to.²²

Sacrifice is an individual decision which is characterized by a voluntary act.²³ We cannot talk about sacrifice in the case of those who give up their lives only because of the influence of a group, or falsely understood

20 K. Śnieżyński, *Metafizyka dla człowieka a nie człowiek dla metafizyki: kilka uwag o potrzebie myślenia metafizycznego we współczesności*, in: *Wobec metafizyki: filozofia – sztuka – film*, Kraków 2012, p. 17

21 I. Ziemiński, *Metafizyka śmierci*, op. cit., p. 242.

22 Ibidem.

23 When talking about sacrifice, our greatest attention should be focused on its ethical aspect, which emphasizes that it is a conscious and motivated act. It should also be distinguished from the notion of renunciation or resignation, which may indirectly be associated with it. A sacrifice consists in refraining from realizing some possibility that man is able to realize. A person is only able to renounce what lies in his or her disposable abilities. Resignation, in turn, takes place when a person forced by external circumstances to renounce certain values, tendencies or desires, etc. Sacrifice is more than just renunciation or resignation. Sacrifice is associated with moral activity, or with restoring something that was previously neglected. It is characterized by deliberate action that goes beyond individual human dimension of the person making the sacrifice. When a person renounces an opportunity, gives up an important cause, sacrifices some goods for the benefit of others, and sometimes even their own life; all such actions, which are intended to benefit an individual or society, whether they are realized or not, can be called a sacrifice. A person making sacrifice sets out an aim to make a difference in the given reality, and in a broader context and also for the future. Sacrificial acts open up for individual or social purposes; without sacrifice, they would not be possible. Sacrifice results in a loss to the subject who undertakes it, but at the same time it is a benefit, a value, a higher purpose, which is realized by the sacrificial act. Cf. P. Schuttplez, *O kilku aspektach ofiary jako zjawisku moralnym*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Philosophica," Iss. 1, Łódź 1981, pp. 44-45.

responsibility that arose as a consequence of social pressure. To make the absolute sacrifice, one cannot be forced by a warrant, law or moral obligation. Speaking of sacrifice, we must stress its other objective, which is the realization of the good that will be realized in this way. A person's death will only make sense if they die consciously and voluntarily gives their life up for someone, that is, for another person who is always "someone" and never "something." If someone gave his or her life for "something" it would be a misunderstanding resulting from wrongly selected values. It is also difficult to speak of a voluntary act of death that would not confirm faith in values without trying to defend them, without taking the side of the right cause or of the person who requires such sacrifice. It would be a rather absurd act of giving up one's life, which finds no lofty justification. The sacrifice of life has its justification not so much in the act of sacrifice itself, but phenomenologically it is most present in the idea of the cause which it defends with a certain amount of radicalism. This may not, however be a trivial matter. The cause should be worthy and deserving of the highest sacrifice. Otherwise giving one's life for a hybrid of a great cause is not only worthless, but a tragic mistake.²⁴

The sacrifice of one's own life, which is guided by certain values, must be subject to the condition of realizing something good, such as saving somebody, and not only by choosing sacrifice, which is not backed by the realization of a specific value. We recognize that sacrifice makes sense only when it is given for another. Even dying in the name of patriotism, for one's country, always implies dying for one's brothers or sisters.²⁵ The reason why someone decides to make a sacrifice cannot be a negative value, such as avoiding evil. Self-sacrifice cannot be justified in a sense of pride, rebellion, honor, audacity or selfishness that takes on a negative form. It must be based on respect for the value of every human existence.²⁶ According to Ziemiński, "the act of sacrifice is therefore only possible on the grounds of metaphysical optimism, expressed through trust in the meaning of human life—one's own and others."²⁷ Another condition that is required for the category of sacrifice is seeing one's life as a value. The type of existence that is the realization of values gives the possibility and motivation to sacrifice oneself. Such a choice of death becomes an ultimate act and a complement to our life so far.²⁸ Voluntary death in an act of sacrifice

24 I. Ziemiński, *Metafizyka śmierci*, op. cit., p. 242.

25 Ibidem, p. 267.

26 Ibidem, p. 243.

27 Ibidem.

28 Sartre compares life to a series and sees death as its element, and each of the elements thus is always present in all the parts of this series. However, this way of recovering death does not

is being faithful to oneself and the professed values. It is certainly not an instrumental treatment of a person. By dying to save someone else's life, we become fully ourselves, and we deepen our humanity by responding to the momentous values that make a certain appeal to us to make them real in the real world. Such a sacrifice, in our opinion, does not expected to be repaid, recognized, or rewarded, even in the next life.²⁹ The self-sacrifice of one's own life in the hope of continued existence after death cannot fulfill the conditions for the existence of a sacrifice, since in this form it is only a manifestation of selfishness. By drawing attention to the conditions of sacrifice, we can pose the question: does every human death deserve to be called a sacrifice, even if it does not result in the evaluation of any human being? We will try to recall the most important events in the life of Edith Stein and Simone Weil and answer the question.

3. Edith Stein and Simone Weil—victims 20th century totalitarianisms?

Edith Stein and Simone Weil lived in the difficult times and witnessed the outbreaks of two World Wars. This experience left a stigma on their lives and influenced the moral stance they adopted. Both philosophers became heroines whose lives were marked by the stigma of the atrocity of war. Everyone has come a difficult way in search of the truth, which

make death something only human, it exists as something individually related to mankind, it becomes something mine. Through the externalized understanding of death, it gains its individual and personal dimension, and is no longer just a great unknown. Death becomes an inseparable phenomenon from a person's personal life, which means that both life and death are events assigned to a particular individual and cannot be repeated. Man thus also becomes fully responsible for their life as well as for death. However, this is not a responsibility for one's own death in an empirical sense, but it is a responsibility for a feature of finiteness and organicity that makes life and death one's own. Cf. J.P. Sartre, *Byt i nicosć*, Kraków 2007, pp. 650-652.

- 29 No prospect of eternal life allows for full dedication. Man who rejects eternal life does not calculate or expect that his act will be compensated. An example of such behavior is Simone Weil, who rejected the Christian understanding of eternal life. Weil criticized Christianity, which itself urged one to make to selfless self-sacrifice in imitation of Christ, which excluded the desire to preserve one's life. The thinker understands the cross as an acceptance of voluntary suffering without the prospect of eternal life. Cf. I. Ziemiński, *Życie wieczne. Przyczynek do eschatologii filozoficznej*, Kraków 2013, p. 76. As she herself stressed in her writings, her encounter with the Christian religion was hampered by her dogmas, which she radically rejected, as well as her faith in eternal life. The philosopher thought that the Passion and death of Jesus on the Cross would be enough for her in understanding and accepting Christianity; as in them and through them she would find the truth of Christ. Cf. S. Weil, *Lettre a un religieux*, Paris 1999.

was not only a philosophical construct, but an existential matter. Despite their Judaic roots, each of them comes out of agnosticism and then turns to a philosophy that opens the way to a more complete experience of the truth of Christianity. However, their lives were not only a search for truth. They were also filled with the experience of pain, suffering and despair,³⁰ which they accepted in their voluntary act and even treated them as their moral duty: Weil feeling obliged for the working class and France, Stein for Jews, Christians and Germany. Talking about them, we may experience both admiration and resentment and formulate questions about the desirability of their behavior. In our analysis, we will try to present only those factors that influenced the act of self-sacrifice by both women. We shall reconstruct certain conditions regarding their knowledge of the world and shared values. We will take into account the experience of existential philosophy and the impact of conversion to Christianity, which made them adopt the attitude the realization of which was sacrificing their lives. Then we point to analogies and differences in the type of sacrifice that each philosopher adopted, and we discuss the rightness of their actions. A widely applied humanistic interpretation that takes into account phenomenological and hermeneutical issues allows for a more complete picture of the sacrifice of their lives and the axiological quality that has been made present in their deeds.³¹

30 “Simone Weil et Edith Stein, toutes deux en des voies différentes, ont connu dans leur chair et leur esprit la morsure de la souffrance. Edith Stein reste discrète et ne parlera jamais directement de sa propre souffrance. Simone Weil se confie plus volontiers dans les pages de son journal, ou dans sa correspondance” (Both Simone Weil and Edith Stein experienced suffering in different ways. Edith Stein remains discreet and never talks about her suffering in a direct way. Simone Weil voluntarily opens about her experience in her notes or correspondence), own translation. Cf. J.F. Thomas, *Simone Weil et Edith Stein. Malheur et souffrance*, Namur 1992, p. 8.

31 In our work, we have assumed that what Simone Weil and Edith Stein did making a sacrifice of her own lives were rational acts, i.e., it was consistently carried out on the basis of their knowledge and values held. Of course, one has to remember that people are not so much rational as they have a certain tendency to act rationally. Actually, you could say that Simone Weil and E. Stein showed a certain tendency to act in a real way, realizing the goals they preferred the most. It can be said that both women were subjects of their culture, and their decisions were determined by the history and culture in which they lived. In this article, we assume that their actions showed a tendency to rational behavior, but then someone else might interpret it differently. After all, based on e.g. on the biography of S. Weil and the available facts, one could have come to the conclusion that she behaved in an irrational way, e.g. by refusing to accept meals, going to war in Spain despite her poor health or by taking up the hardest physical work. Her act could not be classified as an act of sacrifice, but as a suicide. It seems that in order to grasp the specificity of human rationality we need not only formal criteria but we also need to broaden the humanistic interpretation with the components of hermeneutical and phenomenological methods. In the article we propose such an extended concept of interpretation showing that the

3.1. Edith Stein

Edith Stein, one of the twentieth century women thinkers has fascinated many. The life and scientific work of this Husserl disciple are a testimony to her consistent decisions guided by the search for truth. This unusual woman was characterized by Roman Ingarden:

Edith Stein was a very gifted person, serious and responsible. I have always seen her as a pure person, with inner wealth and seriousness, who can be trusted in everything. She chose her philosophical and scientific path, and then her religious path consciously and felt truly happy about it, although in her private life she did not experience what she deserved.³²

Edith Stein (12.10.1891 – ca. 9.08.1942) grew up in a Jewish family, where she was brought up in the spirit of Judaism. Despite this, at the age of fourteen he suffered a deep existential crisis and adopted an atheistic attitude. Since early childhood, she showed great interest in science and an unusual disposition. She writes about it in her diary:

in my dreams I always saw a bright future. I dreamed of happiness and fame, because I was convinced that I was made for great things, and that the close relations between the small bourgeoisie among whom I was born, did not concern me at all ...³³

After completing her studies at the University of Wrocław she went to Göttingen to take up studies in philosophy under the supervision of Edmund Husserl. During these studies, in addition to learning phenomenology, she also experienced an encounter with the Christian religion. During this time, many students of phenomenology experienced acts of conversion, which certainly affected Stein as well.³⁴ Her studies in Göttingen

Weil and Stein's deed manifested, in the phenomenological sense, metaphysical qualities, being a correlate of human metaphysical desire.

32 E. Stein, *Pisma*, Vol. II, transl. I. Adamska, Kraków 1982, p. 10

33 E. Stein, *Dzieje pewnej żydowskiej rodziny*, transl. I. Adamska, Kraków 2005, p. 91.

34 We can at this point talk about a significant influence of Max Scheller on the future attitude of Stein: "he spoke about [Stein writes] life's issues which are important for every man and which move the hearts of young people ... I do not know in what year he returned to the Catholic Church. Probably, it was not very long ago. In any case, it was the time in which he dealt mainly with Catholic thought. He was able to convince her with the light of his spirit and the power of his persuasion," W. Herbstrith, *Edyta Stein. Żydówka i chrześcijanka*, Kraków 2008, p. 48. Another person who had a great influence on Stein was Adolf Reinach, Husserl's assistant, who converted to Evangelism during World War I. At that time, the young philosopher fell into a crisis caused by problems with selecting material for her doctoral thesis. Stein's mental

were interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. Consequently, Stein was forced to return to Wrocław. Most of her male friends go to the front and she also enrolls to serve in the Red Cross to join the fight on the war front. Because of illness, however, she is discharged from her duties and forced to return to Göttingen. The time spent on the front affects her understanding and sheds new insights into the Christian faith. As she wrote “sometimes with my friends go to the Protestant church. But I have not yet found my way to God.”³⁵

In 1915, guided by a sense of solidarity with her friends fighting in the war, she decides to stop her resumed studies and goes back to the front as a nurse. Her attitude is recalled by Roman Ingarden:

she went through the whole war with the attitude of someone who is ready to start a one-man campaign at any time ... She sent me letter after letter asking if I had the right to waste my time on philosophy and other such nonsense when people who I could help were dying there.³⁶

In 1917, Reinach died, whose death led Stein to a breakdown. In this period, she also had the first religious experience, which then directed her towards conversion. In 1920 she visited her friends Theodora and Hedwig Conrad-Marius. During this stay, Edith accidentally comes across the *Life of Teresa of Jesus* by St. Teresa of Ávila. The reading of the autobiography of the saint finally influenced her decision to move towards Christianity. She wrote: “I reached for the book at random. It was titled: *The Life of Teresa of Jesus written by herself*. I began to read. I was fascinated! I read it in one breath to the end. When I closed it, I told myself: this is the truth,”³⁷ we read in the memoirs of Edith Stein. The influence of reading the Spanish mystic led Stein to experiencing a new truth. Hedwig Conrad-Martius mentions that her friend was an internally closed person and that the matter of her conversion was defined by the words *Secretum meum mihi*.³⁸ After this event, Edith studied the Catechism and the Roman Missal avidly. After getting acquainted with the elements of the doctrine of the Christian faith, she attended mass for the first time and asked for a baptism. After the preparations, Edith was given the sacrament of Baptism on 1 January 1922

state was so serious that in moments of doubt she thought of death and even suicide attempts. Reinach led her out of this existential crisis. Cf. E. Stein, *Światłość w ciemności*, Kraków 1977, p. 137.

35 W. Herbstrith, *Edyta Stein. Żydówka i chrześcijanka*, op. cit., p. 56.

36 F.M. Oben, *Życie i dzieło św. Edyty Stein*, Gdańsk 2006, p. 21.

37 E. Stein, *Światłość w ciemności*, op. cit., pp. 202-203.

38 H. Conrad-Martius, *Moja przyjaciółka Edyta Stein*, in: *Edyta Stein albo filozofia i krzyż*, Kraków 1989, p. 3.

in Bergzabern. The godmother was her friend Hedwig. On the same day the future Carmelite received the sacrament of Holy Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation on February 2nd.

The conversion not only changed Stein's view of faith and religion, but also led to her a new understanding of philosophy.³⁹ The adoption of Christianity had an impact on Stein's further life as she abandoned her university career and decided to join the Carmelite Order in Cologne taking the name of Teresa Benedict of the Cross. The Carmelite's religious life was again interrupted with the outbreak of World War II, when mass persecution and extermination of Jews began. Aware of the situation in Germany, in self-reflection Stein compared herself to the Old Testament's Queen Esther. Like Esther, she wanted to sacrifice herself for her nation. She experienced her vision of future of martyrdom in solidarity with the people of Israel. She expressed this premonition of this future destiny: "I am convinced that God does not call anyone for himself and that is an evidence of spontaneous love, when He accepts someone's life."⁴⁰ On 9 June 1939 Sr. Teresa Benedict of the Cross wrote her will, in which she stated:

Even now I joyfully accept the death that God has predestined me, in full submission to His Most Holy Will. I ask the Lord to accept my life and death in His honor and glory, in all the intentions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, for the holy Church, and especially for the preservation, sanctification and perfection of our holy Order, in particular the Cologne Carmel and the Carmel in Echt, to the satisfaction of the unbelief of the Jewish people, that the Lord may be accepted by His own and His Kingdom come in glory, for saving Germany and for peace in the world, and finally for my loved ones, living and dead, and for all whom God has given me: that none of them may perish.⁴¹

In these words, Edith Stein predicts her death, which will later take the form of the sacrifice of her life of the Jewish people and Germany. In a way,

39 Cf. A. Grzegorzczak, *Wpływ myśli E. Stein na filozofię przelomu wieków*, in: *Bóg i Auschwitz. O Edycie Stein, wizycie Benedykta XVI i Bogu w mrokach dziejów*, eds. M. Deselaers, L. Łysiń, J. Nowak, Kraków 2007. Cf. R. Guilead, *De la phenomenologie a la science de la croix*, Paris 1974, p. 231. The author emphasizes the fact that Stein goes beyond the thought systems of Husserl or Heidegger in her philosophical concept. She stresses the existence of God in human thought, which would displace some philosophers. The thinker claims that human thought without reference to God is not able to answer questions related to the concept of nothingness or elusiveness.

40 M. Titaniec, *Pobłogosławiona przez krzyż*, in: *Szukając mistrza. Lubinieckie ślady św. Teresy Benedykty od Krzyża Edyty Stein*, Vol. I, ed. A. Pytlik, Lubliniec 2008, p. 47.

41 E. Stein, *Dzieje pewnej żydowskiej rodziny*, op. cit., p. 578.

she takes the sin of the Jews' disbelief in Jesus on herself while showing that Christianity is a complement to Judaism:

Your people, Lord, thy Israel
I take deep into my own heart.
Praying in secret and burning as sacrifice,
I desire to bring it to the Heart of the Savior.⁴²

In 1938, faced with increasing persecution of the Jewish population, Stein was transferred to the Dutch convent at Echt. There, in 1942, she was arrested by the Gestapo, together with her sister Rosa. It was then that she is believed to have said the significant words: "Come, let's die for our people."⁴³ The alleged likelihood of saving her life by fleeing to Switzerland remains a contentious issue to this day. During his lecture in Krakow in 1968, Roman Ingarden mentioned this incident: "Don't you know? She was a Prussian woman, she reported herself when the order came out how the German subjects should surrender."⁴⁴ However, some researchers point out that Ingarden did not have accurate information on the last months of Stein's life, so it is important to exercise due restraint in evaluating the information he provides. Death of Edith Stein and her sister Rosa probably occurred on 9 August 1942 in a gas chamber of Auschwitz.

3.2. Simone Weil

Simone Weil appears to us primarily as a philosopher and social activist. Her philosophical thought was a thorough analysis of the events of the twentieth century, in which she felt the inevitability of war and its future effects. She has always aroused controversy and disputes. Some believe that her views are heretical in nature, others that they express the attitude of holiness. Without a doubt, Weil was full of contrasts. Certainly, with her thought and attitude she was ahead of her times and she has left a mark on the consciousness of the next generations that are pondering her reflections. In spite of a broad and in-depth analysis of reality, interpersonal relations, politics, and religion she never developed a single clear philosophical path, which, however, does not prove her intellectual negligence, but, on the contrary, in this case, it is the evidence of her huge erudition. The

42 E. Stein, *Światłość w ciemności*, op. cit., p. 282.

43 E. Stein, *Dzieje pewnej żydowskiej rodziny*, op. cit., p. 575; R. Ingarden in: E. Stein, *O zagadnieniu uczucia*, Kraków 1988, p. 165.

44 Ibidem, p. 161.

philosopher's writings do not provide clear answers, putting the reader in doubt about his or her own existence, faith and love for the neighbor, to whom the author gave herself away without any limits. Weil's life is not just about practicing philosophy, it is about political, social and spiritual engagement. Her philosophical thought does not fit in any of the academic trends. Philosophy was for Weil a life path that she consistently followed, as ancient thinkers did.

The French philosopher was born on 3 February 1909 in Paris. She came from an assimilated Jewish family and was raised in an atmosphere of agnosticism. She received a solid education in one of the best high schools in Paris and then studied philosophy with passion and commitment with her master Emil Chartier. After graduating from Ecole Normale Supérieure, she worked as a Greek language and philosophy teacher. In 1934 she abandoned her work as an educator and became employed as a factory worker in the Renault and Alsthom in Paris. In 1935 she went to Spain, to take part in the Civil War as a nurse. She did not learn about her Jewish origins until 1940, after the defeat of France, when regulations concerning repression of Jews were issued. As a Jew, she confessed Christianity but without receiving the sacrament of baptism. She always considered herself "a disciple of Christ outside the Church." The year 1940, when she first saw a procession of women praying for her dead husbands during her stay in Portugal, was the point at which she saw her religious turn. Of course, this is one of the many ways of interpretation and explanation that speaks of the motives behind S. Weil's turn to Christ. But we cannot consider this interpretation to be absolutely certain. Despite her growing fascination with Christianity she refused to accept the sacrament of baptism. As she wrote: "However, in recent years this has been denied by her close friend Simone Deitz, who at Weil's request baptized her in the last months before she died."⁴⁵ In 1942, she went through Algeria to the United States and then to London. There she made contact with the Committee of Free France. When it turned out that it was impossible to return to France, she had a breakdown and fell into despair. Due to rapidly developing tuberculosis, she was taken to the Ashford sanatorium. In 1943 she died far from home at the age of thirty-four.

The life of the French philosopher was a path of courageous decisions and consistent implementation in action. One of them was the sacrifice she made of herself, refusing to accept meals in order to join in solidarity with the hungry workers. Czesław Miłosz wrote about her:

45 J.A. Kłoczowski, *Simone Weil w sporze z personalizmem*, in: *W kręgu inspiracji personalizmu tytynego. Ślipko – Tischner – Styczeń*, ed. P. Duchliński, Kraków 2012, p. 147.

Simone Weil was one of the greatest figures which the deadly twentieth century gave to humanity. However, she was an unbelievable, unexpected and respectable character, and at the same time one that provokes opposition. Perhaps every genius imposes such contradictory feelings on people, although this is not certain. Simone Weil eludes all attempts at hagiographic embellishment, she shocks with her scandalously “deadly” behavior, makes us ask questions: why, why did she have to appear in this and not another era of Christianity?⁴⁶

4. Metaphysical and culture-making nature of sacrifice

When we consider the question of sacrifice in Simone Weil and Edith Stein, we ask a question here about the advisability of human death in the name of the values and ideas we profess, in addition to whether the death of both philosophers deserves to be called sacrifice. The biographies of both recalled philosophers show a number of facts and events that may confirm their deaths as self-sacrifice. The existence of both women also has a lasting reference in the experience of conversion, which had an impact on both life and death in both cases. Their sacrifice was the kind of dying that modeled Christ’s suffering on the Cross. We have shown many of the conditions of sacrifice-making that emphasized its voluntariness and the main condition that is the realization of a greater good. We have shown above some necessary conditions to count giving one’s life as a sacrificial act. None of the philosophers really saved the life of another person with their attitudes. Although this condition is not met, we can conclude that the women’s deaths were absolute sacrifices because of the value of the cause to which they sacrificed their young lives. Each of the women showed a strong commitment to help those in need and manifested acts of profound patriotism from their early adolescent years. The contact with Christianity not only changed the two philosophers’ perceptions of philosophy as a science, but also resulted in a profound existential experience. In her reflections, Stein points out that man is not able to lead a temporal life without “anchoring” themselves in eternity. The turn towards the Catholic faith resulted in Stein’s mystical experience, which is connected with suffering as an inseparable act. This suffering is voluntary but its experience is a way that leads one to knowledge of God. The suffering Stein writes about is also her existential experience, and it is this

46 Cz. Miłosz, in: S. Weil, *Wybór pism*, Kraków 1991, p. 6.

that guides her on the path of sacrifice. This type of sacrifice refers to the Christian message of God's love, who, crossing all boundaries, gave His life for the salvation of humanity.⁴⁷ Unlike Stein, according to the interpretation adopted here, Weil rejected the possibility of eternal life, which made her sacrifice her life for service and giving it in an act of solidarity with suffering workers without having a promise of continued existence that she considered unacceptable. In the face of the sacrifice adopted by the French philosopher we can discuss and formulate questions: was her death a ritual suicide she was aiming for or not? We believe that this interpretation is wrong not only because of her rejection of the possibility of eternal life, but also because of her biography. Analyzing the life of the thinker, we see that her desire to die was rather an expression of despair at the impossibility of continuing the fight for her homeland than a desire to die for the sake of dying, which is completely unjustified.

In order to make the metaphysical sense of sacrifice even more evident, we will refer in our further interpretation to the concept of metaphysical quality, which Roman Ingarden used in his work on the literary work. It seems that the notion of "metaphysical qualities" can play a certain heuristic role by providing us with a convenient tool for understanding the nature of sacrifice and its metaphysical sense, which constitutes a desire for transcendence. The philosopher characterizes these qualities as follows

there are particularly simple or derived qualities such as sublimity (of someone's sacrifice) or vileness (of someone's betrayal), tragedy (of someone's defeat) or horror (of someone's fate), what is shocking, incomprehensible or mysterious, demonism (of someone's act or a person's), holiness (of someone's life) or the opposite of it: sinfulness or "hellishness" (e.g. of someone's revenge), ecstasity (of the highest delight) or silence (of the ultimate relief), etc. ... These qualities are not properties of certain objects in the normal sense of the word, nor are they properties of these or these mental states, but they usually manifest themselves in complex and often different life situations or interpersonal events, as if some special atmosphere, floating above them, surrounding things and people participating in these situations, an atmosphere that permeates everything and illuminated everything with its light.⁴⁸

As Władysław Stróżewski emphasizes, metaphysical qualities rarely appear during human life. However, when it comes to their manifestation, they are able to give it a new, deeper meaning, while at the same time evoking a desire and a sense of longing for them. The revelation of

47 A. Grzegorzczak, *Wpływ myśli E. Stein na filozofię przelomu*, op. cit., p. 13.

48 R. Ingarden, *O dziele literackim*, Warszawa 1960, p. 368.

metaphysical quality is both the pinnacle of our life and reaches its depths and everything that exists.⁴⁹ Metaphysical quality is always a certain value, which refers to our everyday life, but we are not able to give it a concrete form because it escapes rational cognition. As pointed out by Ingarden: "...you can only see them directly, one would like to say, as if in ecstasy, on the basis of certain situations in which they come into being."⁵⁰

Referring to Ingarden's words, we can state that metaphysical qualities cannot be captured by empirical cognition. The Polish phenomenologist limits the experience of metaphysical quality only to works of art, i.e. to the world of intentional awareness. It seems, however, that nothing stands in the way of assuming that metaphysical qualities are also present in the conditions of the real world, namely, in the act of sacrifice. We can pose the question: how are we able to recognize these qualities? Is it only our intuition? Are we able to capture quality in a different way? Metaphysical qualities are perceptible to man, and they reveal the hidden meaning of being and life and constitute it. Ingarden emphasized that in dealing with them one enters the source of existence. The subjective correlate for metaphysical qualities is desire, from which flows the intuition that captures the presence of the qualities presented. Desire is a form of experiencing a certain lack of good that comes from the source of all existence and is made present through these metaphysical qualities, forming an axiological and normative order.

In the adopted interpretation, metaphysical qualities refer to the ultimate source of being, which is the ultimate meaning understood as the God of the Christian religion. The sacrifices of Weil and Stein also reveal the momentous metaphysical qualities of moral heroism, which is justified by reference to this ultimate meaning. Besides heroism, other qualities such as sublimity, holiness, tragedy, but also silence, which, in the face of the experience of sacrifice, takes words away and condemns us to silence, are revealed. The metaphysical quality is at the same time an axiological quality, having a momentous and obliging character. It calls for specific actions that make its sense real in the real world. Ingarden writes:

For it shows not only what is covered and mysterious for us in other conditions, and only becomes open and visible in them, but they themselves are what lies at the source of being and are one of its forms. But they can only fully reveal themselves to us if they become a reality.⁵¹

49 W. Stróżewski, *Jakości metafizyczne*, in: *Od teorii literatury do ontologii świata*, eds. A. Perzanowski, J. Pietruszczak, Toruń 2003, p. 81.

50 R. Ingarden, cited in: W. Stróżewski, *Jakości metafizyczne*, op. cit., p. 82.

51 Ibidem.

Metaphysical qualities are directly present in the sacrifice by a person who gives up their life in the name of a higher supernatural order. To perceive the metaphysical quality of sacrifice it requires, on the one hand, a certain ability to intuitively capture it, and on the other hand, a certain interpretation, which must be closely correlated with this intuition. But it is not easy to see this quality. It requires a certain openness and commitment from the subject. It demands the awakening of a metaphysical desire directed at the source of the ultimate meaning. After all, the subject must also have a certain ability to see this present quality, which is very often obscured by the various cultural ideals and stereotypes in circulation today. From the phenomenological point of view, the appearance of metaphysical quality evokes something of an initial emotion. This emotion knocks us out of the daily rhythm of life, often triggering extreme tendencies from compassion and solidarity with the victim to its radical rejection or denial. In order to experience this quality of sublimity of sacrifice, which after all is always intertwined with tragedy, which causes repulsions in us, as one needs to be prepared for everything. It can be stated that in the act of sacrifice, in fact, a source of meaningfulness of all praise opens before us. Sacrifice reveals the infinite dimension of transcendence, it makes something from outside the empirical world present, forcing us to exceed our contingent needs. It is a trampoline enabling a jump into the source of all existence. It arouses a desire for the Infinite Good in us, which by making itself present challenges the temporary symmetrical axiological order.

The question posed at the beginning of our deliberations has not only become a question of the individual conduct of each person, but also of his or her death, which is not only an inevitable act, but also permanently connected with our existence. Considering the problem of worldly life, we can notice that the value of our life is permanently connected with the moment of death. We referred to the examples of Stein and Weil's deaths, which were not only acts of heroic courage but also posed questions about the metaphysics of our death. Are we able to think today about the metaphysics of death, which is permanently connected with living our lives? We may also ask about the character and the way we should live out our temporal life: is it just a time given to us here and now, or is it followed by something else? Another question which this reflection requires is the ability of man to perceive metaphysical qualities. Can we talk about a crisis that made us lose this ability today? We can try to find answers to these questions in the technological development and an ever-stronger belief in pragmatic values that displace metaphysics. These reflections have raised a number of questions which we are not able to answer in an unambiguous way, but only to consider them as a contribution to the continuation of such reflections. The example of women who have made a conscious

sacrifice in the name of their values and their compassion and duty towards another person shows that metaphysical desire can be considered by the category of sacrifice. Both philosophers, in the attitude they adopted, have committed a superordinate act⁵² in which the metaphysical quality of heroism became a reality. This deed arose from the desire to metaphysically realize good in a world marked by different structures of evil. The example of both women shows that despite the alleged crisis of great narratives in culture, we can still talk not only about metaphysical desire but also about the existence of momentous metaphysical values. We can state that the examples of the philosophers confirm not only the need for metaphysical thinking but also the direct experience which it was expressed in absolute sacrifice. The example of absolute sacrifice leads us to conclude that the way to the renaissance of metaphysics in contemporary culture is to restore the ability to experience the metaphysical qualities that are present in various border situations, and undoubtedly the act of sacrifice is such a border situation. In this way, sacrifice as a super-supererogatory act, which is correlated with the desire to make a higher good a reality, has a culturally creative capacity; it creates a certain elite culture of heroism which, in spite of modern times, in which egoism seems to be dominant, underlines the value of sacrifice for another person. The culture of holiness of life is a culture of moral heroism to which every person is invited. This invitation is not a coercion, an order, but rather an offer and an appeal that we can use or deny without any moral consequences. We can ask whether contemporary culture is able to function without the moral values of heroism? Does the development of culture not require something more than what we can see and touch? It seems that a culture in which higher values are not present is doomed to destruction. As has been stated, man has a natural desire to be directed towards something that exceeds his natural cognitive capabilities. Man is looking for meaning, which cannot be closed in the area of the empirical. Sight and touch must be directed towards the ultimate horizon of desire, from which comes the absolute Good.

52 The category of supererogation concerns an act in which human action goes beyond one's duties. It mainly refers to the moral actions of man in which his conduct has not only an altruistic dimension but also goes beyond obligations. Trying to identify a general definition of the concept supererogation we can provide: "Supererogation is action beyond what we call duty. Fulfilling acts of supererogation is a good thing, but not required; failure to do them is not morally wrong. According to some theories, supererogation is not possible. Most utilitarians (consequentialists) maintain that it is our duty to act in the best way. Any other action is contrary with duty, and therefore it is a moral evil. Kant also recognizes the obligation in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of supererogation," A.M. Kaniowski, *Supererogacja. Zagubiony wymiar etyki*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 19-20.

5. Recapitulation

The two women's decisions to sacrifice of their lives were influenced by many factors and existential experiences. Voluntary sacrifice of one's own life may be subject to criticism. For it is always possible to ask the about the purposefulness of Weil and Stein's deeds, neither saved another person's life. However, the heroic deaths of both women direct our attention to another problem, which is the voluntary acceptance of death in the name of high moral ideals and values. Both Weil and Stein lived in a time of great value crisis caused by the disaster of two world wars. Today, we are also in crisis, although it manifests itself in a different way and is characterized by consumption and technocracy. We can reiterate the questions formulated at the beginning: is there an idea in today's culture that would be the reason for the ultimate sacrifice? We think we can answer in the affirmative, despite the alleged discussion about the crisis of axiology and metaphysics. The examples of S. Weil and E. Stein confirm our thesis about the impossibility to remove metaphysics from contemporary culture. This metaphysics is present precisely in sacrificial acts, in which life is sacrificed for the other person, who always comes to us with a face on which joy but also pain and suffering from entanglement in various structures of evil is painted. The absolute sacrifice made by the subjects of our analyses goes towards the invisible, exceeding the worldly good that calls for realization in the real world. This can only be done by a free entity that decides on its existence. We can say that the act of sacrificing one's own life is certainly a direction towards radical metaphysics that will not find easy recognition and understanding for among the contemporary audience, as we are aware. In the end, the very act of sacrifice is a mystery before which human reason must capitulate. Sometimes, however, it capitulates too early without giving a chance for a deeper understanding of the meaning that is present in the sacrifice, and this is because man is deluded by various pragmatic and utilitarian idols that divert his gaze from the absolute and direct his gaze towards the mundane and tangible, which can be easily seen and used in practice. We emphasize that such a supererogatory act is the creative ferment of the culture of moral heroism, which is the culture of life, that radically opposes contemporary Western culture, which is increasingly taking on the face of the culture of death, in which the value of the other person is not a correlate of desire but of psychological and biological needs. A human being has a value when he or she can satisfy their functional, instrumental, etc. needs. The sacrificial act has not only a culturally creative but also metaphysical-creative value. It makes the so-called metaphysical qualities present, in which we can touch the origins of all real and not merely intentional existence. These metaphysical qualities are a correlate

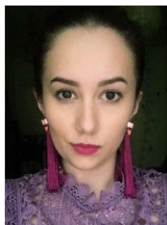
of our basic metaphysical desires, which cannot be translated into needs. It is their experience that leads them to undertake heroic acts exceeding the symmetry of the normative orders established by man. If Stein and Weil had only been driven by needs in their lives, they would probably never have been able to do such heroic things. However, they were motivated, according to our interpretation, by metaphysical qualities that come from a different order of being and open us to the infinite horizon of Good. The examples of Weil and Stein are primarily intended to stimulate our metaphysical imagination to think beyond what we can touch and see. Our point is to change our attitude towards the various sacrifices that actually happen every day. In order not only to look at them from a legal or psychological point of view, but to be able to see a much deeper meaning in them, which shapes our sensitivity to the life of another human being, as Tischner said, entangled in the maize of good and evil. The metaphysical meaning of sacrifice is that it allows us to see and, as it were, understand the meaning of our life more fully, which is not limited only to this world and to the realization of the needs resulting from its experience. Sacrifice reveals to us the perspective of the ultimate meaning, which is a correlate of our desire being born in the depths of our soul. The presented deliberations do not, of course, exhaust the outlined problem situation referring to the state of metaphysics and the condition of contemporary culture. Rather, they are a modest contribution to further research on the condition of contemporary culture and humanities, which is experiencing a hunger for the presence of high ethical and religious values. Our discussion about self-sacrifice can be concluded with a fragment of the poem by Zbigniew Herbert, *The power of taste*:

It did not require great character at all
we had a shred of necessary courage
but fundamentally it was a matter of taste
Yes taste
that commands us to get out, to make a wry face, draw out a sneer
even if for this the precious capital of the body,
the head—must fall.

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