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ISSUE OF THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL  
IN THEOLOGICAL-MORAL DISCOURSE

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of the boundaries between good and evil in contemporary theological-moral discourse logically affects the principle level of logical thinking as well as rational argumentation in moral theology, where specifically biotechnological and biomedical progress represents a permanent challenge for re-verification of general theological and ethical criteria for the evaluation of human action, especially in the biomedical sphere. It is surely also a challenge for the verification of special bioethical criteria. It is an adequate distinction in the field of fundamental ethical and specific bioethical concepts in the terminological level of moral theology, where it is necessary to reflect the general theological and ethical principles of distinguishing between good and evil, as well as special bioethical norms that are derived from general ones.

This perspective of the application of fundamental theological and ethical criteria in bioethical discourse (within moral theology) is essential, as attention is also paid to the special meta-bioethical justification of theological and ethical solutions to specific (bio)ethical problems that can be encountered in biomedical clinical practice through reflection in the spirit of ontological personalism<sup>1</sup>. This study will purposefully examine whether the general theological and ethical criteria for the bioethical evaluation of human interference in biomedicine, together with the principle of double effect, are an adequate reference point for human conscience in determining the boundaries between good and evil.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Russo, *La bioetica in Italia. Le origini e le istituzioni*, in: G. Russo (ed.), *Bioetica fondamentale e generale*. Torino: SEI 1995, p. 409.

## 2. IMPOSTATIO OF THE SITUATION

The context, which reflects the problem of finding a universal reference criterion for theological distinction between good and evil of human acting in bioethics, is in its essence interdisciplinary. Usually, the emphasis is on the biomedical, bioethical and legal level of discussion, where the boundaries between good and evil diverge depending on the point of view of a particular discipline. Related to this is the difference in the methodological epistemological approaches of individual sciences to the issue, as well as the terminological differences of individual scientific disciplines, what logically and causally evoke difficulties within interdisciplinary scientific dialogue.

In today's theological-moral discourse on the distinction between good and evil, which is to some extent infected by the specific pluralism of various theological and philosophical views, which are paradoxically ideologically claimed to have the same value, truthfulness and validity, the question of adequate justification of general and also specific theological-moral norms (principles) are the subject of various epistemological theological concepts<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore a legitimate theological question as to how an objectively true reference criterion in this theological-moral discourse can be reached, according to which it will be rationally distinguished in conscience whether they are still present or even already absent, and especially where are the boundaries between good and evil in the era of biotechnology of contemporary biomedicine?

Scientific opinions in the field of philosophical bioethical discourse range from deontological through personalistic, relativistic, consequentialist to utilitarian conception<sup>3</sup>, varying from mild to intense shades within individual epistemological starting points and final positions. Theological and ethical norms are rationally recognized in the hermeneutic process of understanding existence, implemented on an empirical and philosophical level, which also applies to the current theological-moral discourse. However, in the context of looking for universal reference criterion for determining what is good and evil in human action in biomedicine, this becomes even more important, as it is essential to emphasize the rational level of examination.

It is in the context of the ongoing ideological conflict<sup>4</sup> in theological-moral discourse that it is necessary to examine whether the essence of theological-ethical principles and special bioethical norms does not change under the influence of

<sup>2</sup> R. Balák, *Neverending History of the Use of Vaccines Derived from Aborted Infants. Part I: Critique of Teleological Proportionalism and Consequentialism from the Perspective of Moral Theology*, "Roczniki Teologiczne" 64 (2017), H. 3, pp. 93–109.

<sup>3</sup> W. Bołoz, *Życie w ludzkich rękach*, Warszawa: WAT 1997, pp. 35–49.

<sup>4</sup> M. Reichlin, *Bioetika v Taliansku: dva dôvody nespokojnosti*, „Filozofia“ 62 (2009), H. 3, p. 258.

ideological trends or even new biotechnological discoveries that fascinate biomedical scientists. From a general theological point of view of reflection, however, it is important to point out that their increasingly precise theological formulation (of bio-ethical principles) and more adequate theological-moral application over time, which should meet complex but legitimate requirements of every historical time period of theological-moral discourse, are subject to dynamic change.

However, in theological-moral explanation and in the epistemological interpretation of the process of knowing theological-ethical principles (and special bioethical norms) and the boundaries between good and evil, there is often an increasingly individualistic and voluntaristic approach in theological-moral discourse, which disperses from biotechnological to the theological-moral spheres. This often causally erases or even causes the boundaries between good and evil in moral theology to disappear, as each individual scientific research subject voluntarily approves and subsequently applies his own reference point for distinguishing such boundaries. This arbitrary subjective reference point for distinguishing is subsequently logically elevated by a person above scientific truth known in the empirical biomedical, as well as in the theological-moral level of discourse. At the same time, there are theological attempts emerging that completely redefine biomedical truth, based on this new methodological approach to any theological-moral issue.

Reflection on the question of whether the application of the general criteria of theological-moral analysis of a human act and the application of the principle of double effect can distinguish between good and evil does not concern merely a more adequate formulation of general theological-moral criteria for the evaluation of human action, or only a more rigorous application of the principle of double effect. Primarily, consideration should be given to taking into account the even deeper and broader scientific knowledge of human reason in the field of moral theology and biomedical sciences with an emphasis on the approbation of these moral norms as the universal reference criterion for theological-moral distinction, assuming its existence.

It is necessary to take into consideration that the reflected boundaries between good and evil are blurred by the fascinating influence of new biotechnologies, which directly affect the biological nature of human life and undoubtedly have paradigmatic significance in the field of human genetic modification<sup>5</sup>. At this point contemporary theological-moral discourse acquires anthropological and essential importance in terms of necessity, especially in light of respecting and preserving the biological species *homo sapiens* in the context of the theology of creation. Theological-moral reflection on the problem of reference criteria for distinguishing between good and evil in the current discourse is gaining paradigmatic significance today, as nanotechnologies and biotechnologies in the field of molecular genetics,

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<sup>5</sup> V. Mele, *Biotechnologie (Parte etica)*, in: E. Sgreccia, A. Tarantino (eds.), *Enciclopedia di bioetica e scienza giuridica*, Bd. II, Napoli: ESI 2009, pp. 309–317.

promoted for the purpose of therapeutic elimination of current or potential pathologies or transhumanistic refinement of human, may have cataclysmic impact. Interdisciplinary scientific knowledge in the field of nanomedicine and the application of new gene biotechnologies, which must be taken into account in the reflection on the reference criterion for distinguishing the boundaries between good and evil, in theological-moral discourse are currently the subject of not only methodological but especially fundamental epistemological disputes.

In fact, the theological-moral interpretation of the historicity of the immutable general theological-ethical, as well as the specific special moral norm, forming the basis of rational distinction between good and evil for the conscience of a human subject, is based mainly on a truer and better understanding and more adequate application of this moral norm. The boundaries between good and evil, due to the rapidly changing historical elements of scientific knowledge in the biomedical sciences, taking into account the latest products of synthetic biology or new nanotechnologies and biotechnologies, are not as easily and quickly recognizable as in the past. Therefore, within the theological-moral aspect of bioethical discourse, it is essential that a human subject constantly bioethically (and therefore interdisciplinarily) reflects the biomedical reality in which a human subject decides freely and acts responsibly, thus updating the gift of freedom through the light of natural human reason.

Another specific feature in today's theological-moral discourse is a responsible scientific distinction between general theological-ethical norms relating to the moral essence of human action in the field of biomedical sciences, which is to the innermost theological-ethical core of biomedical interference, and specific applied special theological-moral norms (derived from general theological-ethical standards) that take into account everything that is subject to natural historical change in the context of applying molecular gene biotechnologies, nanotechnologies or products from synthetic biology.

The personally focused theological-moral discourse takes into account the immutability and permanence of human nature and natural moral order – that is, the metaphysical dimension of morality in connection with true anthropological conception of man. In some theological currents of contemporary theological-moral discourse (eg, teleologism, utilitarianism, relativism, consequentialism, proportionalism), natural moral order, as well as human nature, is not understood as something immutable and static, but as fluidly variable, which can be subject to evolutionary change that can be implemented by man himself using biotechnology. This has an undeniable impact on the understanding of human dignity as one of the anthropological and theological-moral criteria for reflecting on biomedical problems, as well as on argumentation.

Questioning the existence of universal theological-ethical criteria for distinguishing between good and evil in conscience is in particular implied by adherents of the epistemology of ethical relativism, which is the starting philosophical platform

for teleological, consequentialist and utilitarian methodology of theological-moral discourse, as well as for the demarcation of the boundaries between good and evil in human action. This relativism can be characterized as deontology of a human act in which, negating the general theological-ethical norm relating to the given act, where the opinion is approved that the act is to be performed when relying on an assessment of an action in a situation accomplished through a currently acting subject<sup>6</sup>, if one individually agrees with it, especially on the basis of an assessment of situational elements of human action.

As indicated in other contexts, this starting point presupposes such an attitude of an acting human subject to ideas and theological-moral concepts, based on the subjective belief, that all ideas and theological-ethical concepts are equally valuable. However, this often leads a person to existential indifference to all ideas and theological-ethical systems, even to those that contain objective truth and good. This results in a divergent escape from the general or special theological-ethical moral norm and an exclusive inclination towards the legislative or biomedical level of the assessment of a human act in terms of its permissibility. However, legal positivism is notoriously insufficient, because even if a legislator can legitimately act from a theological-ethical point of view only within the limits given by the dignity of a human person and by service to the development what is authentically human and not contrary to human dignity, still cannot avoid a lack of legal positivism. Today, it is a standard phenomenon that there is an insurmountable divergence between the legislative and theological-ethical plains.

### 3. MORAL NORM AND CONSCIENCE

In the current historical age of modern and postmodern theological-moral discourse (the last two centuries of development of philosophical thinking), in which a person longed to liberate freedom and individual conscience of an acting human subject from objective truth, a person experiences existential drama of the discontinuity of his own existence and the logical inconsistency of a human action. An existential spiritual illness that rivals the cult of preference for vital and material values, as well as ideological hypersensitivity to the philosophy of difference, along with an uncritical affirmation of distinction of others, in the world of theological-moral thinking seems to cause something akin to forgetfulness of universal theological-ethical theory and deviation from the search for objective moral truth. The current theological-moral discourse is connected with the biotechnological

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<sup>6</sup> S. Privitera, *Relativismo etico, oggettività e pluralismo*, in: G. Russo (ed.), *Bioetica fondamentale e generale*. Torino: SEI, 1995, p. 58.

dominance of local practical and empirical biomedical science, which is a consequence of postmodern anthropology that dismantled the subjectivity of a human person in the biomedical field.

Such a cultural climate, weakening the significance and binding nature of universal moral law, especially its dimension of universality and objectivity, in theological-moral discourse erases to some extent the boundaries between good and evil, what is in some initial theological conceptions understood as an attack on human freedom<sup>7</sup>. In several theological-moral systems only a specific theological-ethical situation in its unique and unrepeatable nature is emphasized as the only criterion for choosing between good and evil in the acting of a human subject. In theological-moral situationism, which is terminologically named as situational ethics, it is clear that a theological-ethical situation for each human person represents a specific ethical challenge, certainly different for each individual, as well as differently understood and differently interpreted.

Based on Kant's inspirational tendencies, contained in the discussion about moral law immanently present in man, the current theological-moral discourse has been directed to a state that discusses the adequacy of the relation of morality of prohibitions (orders) to autothelial<sup>8</sup> morality (in an original way internalized or identified in each human subject). It is clear that this theological-moral discourse addresses the problem of the relationship between the theological-ethical norm and the freedom of a human subject, what later can become a derivation point for finding a final solution for demarcation of the boundaries between good and evil for the individual conscience of a human subject.

It is here, in the theological-moral discourse about boundaries between good and evil, that we can naturally reflect upon the relatively wide range of theoretical and theological ideas as well as application of postulates magnificently announcing new directions of development in moral theology, as well as the need to abandon the morality of natural law (morality of the norm in the context of *lex naturalis* and *lex aeterna*) and refocus on the morality of subjective, individual and arbitrary conscience. The result is a rejection of morality based on external theological-ethical transcendent Authority and a subsequent transition to the morality of individualized love as to why a non-demarcated human subject decides arbitrarily.

The established need to free oneself from external sources of morality (even transcendent ones) and the transition to morality arising only from inner subjective beliefs logically leads to overcoming social, cultural and religious conditions in today's theological-moral discourse on the boundaries between good and evil. The current paradigmatic liberation of man from natural anthropological and ontological predispositions has promoted the absolute autonomous freedom of the individual,

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<sup>7</sup> VS 35–53.

<sup>8</sup> From Greek *autós* (self), *telós* (purpose).

which is said to be enough to regulate through the ever-changing legislative or biotechnological demarcations in biomedicine.

A retrospective look at the history of theological-moral discourse on the boundaries between good and evil in connection with the problem of conscience shows that the justification of general theological-ethical, as well as special theological-moral norms, by classical exclusion of contradiction (logical discrepancy) is methodologically connected with a classical philosophical (more precisely logical) form of reflection on the issue. In the spirit of moral law (*lex naturalis*), a man, as a rational being, seeks not only to escape from discrepancy (contradiction) between his human act and his inner conviction, but by the power of spiritual and psychic energy a human subject opposes this contradiction (discrepancy), what ethically disrupts its consistent existence.

Specifically a human act, which is an expression of the inner unification of the personal essence, expresses the moral personality and greatness of a human subject (in the context of the noble Imago Dei seal), and for this reason such a moral discrepancy (contradiction) interferes with a person's intimate interior far more than a similar discrepancy in other dimensions of a person's life. The current problem in theological-moral discourse in particular is that even if the existential and logical coherence between an act and belief in the individual conscience of a human subject is present, nonetheless there is no coherence with the external theological-ethical (based on *lex naturalis*) and special theological-moral norm, while there is a presence of theological tendencies, which talk about the absence of such an external norm or need for a new social change, through which it will be agreed what will be the new norm. However, from the Thomistic philosophical point of view and theological tradition<sup>9</sup> a person should act in accordance with his own personal conviction, which is in accordance with his conscience<sup>10</sup>, but at the same time in accordance with the objective moral norm for it is unreasonable for moral theology to refer only to the subjective beliefs of a human subject, and subsequently for moral relativism to be illogically accepted.

The phenomenological way of justifying the theological-ethical norm on the basis of empirical confirmation of conscience in man rationally comes to the fact of moral obligation, pointing towards a moral subject, i.e., a free human person. In every human subject, regardless of the epoch in which he lived, or from the achieved civilizational and cultural stage of development, there is a moral conscience present, imperatively inspiring man to realize moral values serving the integral development of a person, whereby it is essentially connected with human nature. Reflection on

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<sup>9</sup> The Thomistic tradition in the Catholic Church is seen as an affirmed concept of methodological, as well as meritorious way of philosophical-ethical and theological-moral thinking and evaluation in the field of morality, taking into account the work of Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I, II, and also his writings *De conscientia* and *De Synderesi*, which are a part of *De veritate*.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De conscientia*.

moral conscience makes it possible to discover a natural ability, an innate cognitive quality of reason, formulating primary and universal moral principles and norms, called fundamental conscience<sup>11</sup>.

It is evident that a human person is not able to theologially and morally evaluate any reality in his conscience unless it at least theoretically presupposes the existence of a universal measure or a reference criterion of theological-ethical evaluation, which is external in relation to the norm formulated through *synderesis*. In search of an ultimate justification for the norm of conscience, it is necessary to answer the question: what is the universal norm of this subjective norm of conscience, what is the ontological foundation, which is the ultimate measure of moral good and evil, that is, what is the ultimate source of morality?

In today's theological-moral discourse and on the basis of the analysis of the constitutive elements of human nature, it is possible to justify an objective, definitive and immanent theological-ethical norm contained in the existing natural order, which also has an external transcendent character. Natural reason, called fundamental conscience, is a reflection of the fundamental requirements of rational human nature, which is the basis for the norms of human reason<sup>12</sup>. In contemporary theological-moral discourse is it possible to accept that the relation between the norm of human reason and its transcendent basis is an ontological connection that causes the objectivity of the theological-ethical norm? In this way, the fundamental theological-ethical norm, in its anthropological sense, would also be based on universal human nature as on reality, having an objective (independence from subjective factors) and at the same time internal (contains essential elements of human nature) character towards the moral action of a human subject.

The finalist way of justifying moral norm in theological-moral discourse points to perfection that is the achievement of a true goal of a human person through his free and responsible acting. The anthropological aspect of theological-moral discourse on the boundaries of good and evil, as well as the boundaries between them, must adequately take into account the fact that a man has human nature, that man as a free and rational being has at the same time an intended transcendent goal of his existence, that is, the one for which the very ontological essence of man exists. The essential direction of a human person to perfection is of an internal character, meaning that the finality of the theological-ethical norm is encoded in human nature. This implies what is objectively good for a human person in its essence within the biomedical dimension of human acts.

The objective character of the moral challenge in theological-moral discourse on the boundaries of good and evil, inspired by the Thomistic philosophical-theological tradition, is methodologically addressed by the presentation of the foundation and source of the objective norm, pointing to its universality and immutability, while

<sup>11</sup> In Thomistic terminology this fundamental conscience is called *synderesis*.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Synderesi*.



adequately emphasizing the relation of the moral norm<sup>13</sup> to a human subject. However, it is questionable whether the current theological-moral discourse accepts the fact that an objective moral norm and conscience are interrelated, forasmuch as the norm directs and binds, and conscience responds to this challenge?

According to the Thomistic tradition, human reason, as a constitutive disposition of moral evaluation, is the factor at the heart of the issue of clarifying the nature and source of the moral norm, which is necessary for theological demarcation of the boundaries between good and evil. The logical reasoning for the objective theological-ethical norm is clearly connected in theological-moral discourse to the anthropological conception of man, since human reason arrives at the concepts of good and evil in an abstract way on a practical level.

Here it is worth noting that in this discourse on the boundaries of good and evil in human action, it is human reason that recognizes that for every being the true value and real good is what theologically corresponds to its nature. From this it can logically be derived that it is appropriate to seek a universal measure or a reference point for the boundaries of good and evil in a human act within human (rational) nature itself, which is actually contained in the natural order of creation. Within the relationship between theological-ethical norm and individual conscience of a human person this would establish an objective and accessible to all people knowledge of the universal theological-moral criterion of human acts, containing sufficient rational justification, necessary to define what is objectively good or bad for a human person. Here, the current theological-moral discourse on the boundaries of good and evil faces an essential challenge regarding the dominance of the biotechnological mentality in special moral theology and biomedical sciences.

#### 4. PROPOSITIO FOR CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL-MORAL DISCOURSE

In connection with the search for, and demarcation of, the boundaries between good and evil in human action, as well as in the context of their questioning or disappearing under the influence of moral relativism and biotechnological mentality, it is appropriate to critically examine whether the classical theological-ethical analysis of a human act in the Thomistic perspective can be a universal and reference criterion nowadays? Therefore, it is justifiable to present the fundamental theoretical issue of classical theological-moral evaluation of human actions in the field of biomedicine, namely biotherapy of various kinds as well as experimental

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<sup>13</sup> S. Rosik, *Wezwania i wybory moralne. Refleksje teologicznomoralne*, Lublin: RW KUL 1992, pp. 101–140.

interference in the psychosomatic structure of a human body in terms of transhumanist interference in the genetic patrimony of *homo sapiens*.

Here it is necessary to emphasize that special moral theology is immanently connected with general moral theology, its theological-ethical norms, because it reflects the free action of man in the wide area of human life and health, as well as the fundamental moral attitude of man to the phenomenon of life. If a universal theological-ethical criterion and a reference point for distinguishing the boundaries between good and evil are sought and verified, then the freedom and responsibility of every human subject in the biomedical dimension is immanently connected with this.

In this theological-moral discourse on the boundaries of good and evil in bioethics we cannot accept methodological reductionism of legal or scientific positivism, which often reduces this issue merely to the legal level of the relationship between medical or research staff and a patient or examined subject. Thus, it is not enough just to legally or scientifically codify this relationship within biotherapy or biomanipulation in the context of free informed consent or legal demarcation of freedom of conscience and moral responsibility for realized decisions of medical staff and a patient. Within the theological reflection it is necessary to properly examine the fundamental relationship between freedom and the moral responsibility of an acting human subject for everything that takes place specifically humanely, that is, freely and voluntarily. It is a thorough examination of the moral quality of human acts, which can be categorically assessed in moral theology according to the classical way of qualifying what man has done in updating his freedom in the spirit of responsibility.

In this way, is it still possible to apply the general principles of theological-ethical analysis of a free human act in the Thomistic perspective<sup>14</sup> in today's biotechnological age and what is its essence? The Thomistic theological conception of moral classification from the perspective of distinguishing between good and evil primarily takes into account the subject of human act<sup>15</sup>, intention and goal of an acting human subject, and ultimately consider the circumstances of a human act.

An object of a human act in the field of biomedicine is direct and indirect therapeutic, as well as non-therapeutic, but also experimental research interventions in the psychosomatic structure of a human body at any level of biomedicine. From the theological-moral point of view, and also in terms of logic, an object of a human act is to be an objective moral good to which the will of an acting subject is directed, whereas this good is the matter of a human act. Based on the principle of opposition, as well as on general theological-ethical principles, what is moral evil *ex genere suo* cannot be the subject of *actus humanus*, which implies the

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 18.

<sup>15</sup> VS 76–82.

preliminary theological question of the nature of good and evil, as well as where the boundaries of good and evil lie.

In the contemporary theological-moral discourse, for epistemological reasons, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that a freely and responsibly chosen object of a human act ethically designates an act of human will automatically, and human reason ethically evaluates it either as identical or inconsistent with true good, assuming that objective theological-ethical norms express the rational and natural order of good and evil, which is known through the conscience of a person. From the theoretical Thomistic theological perspective, a human act (*actus humanus*) with regard to its object may be morally good (dignified) or morally evil, or in some cases morally indifferent. From the epistemological perspective, it is appropriate to recall that when theological-moral discourse deals with human acts in the biomedical dimension, then they are always only such acts, which a human subject has rationally, freely and voluntarily chosen in his conscience and in full awareness, aware of his theological and ethical responsibility for his actions and its predictable consequences.

Thomistic theological-ethical analysis of human actions, as the second essential element of the classification of good and evil, always takes into account the motive (intention) of an acting human subject, which, just as an object of a human act, is a fundamental element of theological-moral evaluation of a human act in the biomedical perspective. It is intention itself in certain specific cases that can be an important reference criterion for determining the boundaries of good and evil in human actions. In particular, the intention of an acting human subject, directly leading to a specific optional wanted goal (for example, intervene on behalf of saving a human life or health) is not only an essential element in the specific theological-moral assessment of a human act, but in some cases has a decisive influence on the theological-moral classification of human actions.

It is appropriate to emphasize that a good intention should be instantly directed towards a good goal (eg. therapeutic correction of a health anomaly, health restoration, saving human life), so that a human act can be classified from the moral objective point of view as ethically good in its nature (*ex genere suo*). It is important to note here that the evil intention of an acting human subject will substantially change the ethical quality of a human act that is good in itself (from the prospective of an object) to an act that is ethically bad, which manifests itself in practice as an important reference point for setting the boundaries between good and evil. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that in demarcating the boundaries of good and evil in human conscience the logical rule holds that a good intention of a human subject cannot substantially change the ethical quality of an evil deed (from the prospective of an object) to an act that would be ethically good *ex genere suo*. This rule, which is also present in many non-European philosophical ethical concepts in circumstances of finding the boundary between good and evil, is expressed in the simple formulation that the end does not justify the means.

The importance of the influence of the intention of an acting human subject is manifested not only in the contemporary theological-moral discourse, but especially in practical applications in the biomedical sphere, where it is important to determine with certainty what is good and evil, which can be complicated precisely because of intention. The Thomistic theological concept of theological-moral evaluation presents the fact that a particular human act is objectively ethically good does not always automatically imply that it is also formally good. Namely, the intention of an acting human subject in certain cases significantly determines that human action that is objectively indifferent can become ethically good or, paradoxically, ethically bad, within the ethical quality of a person's intention itself.

In searching and demarcation of the boundaries of good and evil for theological-moral assessment, intention is precisely what sometimes complicates determination of the theological-ethical quality of human acts, which can change qualitatively. A certain complexity of the epistemological Thomistic approach shows that a good intention of an acting human subject can increase the ethical good of a good human act, whereas a bad intention of an acting human being can causally and logically evoke an objectively good human act (from the perspective of an object) to become ethically less good or in some cases completely bad *ex genere suo*. Based on empirical experience in biomedical practice, this theoretical theological concept for biomedical sciences can be a fundamental reference point of distinguishing in the conscience of a human subject.

According to the Thomistic concept of theological-ethical analysis of a human act, the conscience of man in the individual demarcation of the boundaries of good and evil also takes into account the circumstances (*circumscientiae*) that are always present in human actions. In this conception circumstances, in terms of their influence and significance for ethical classification, are secondary elements of a human act, whereas there are usually seven circumstances – namely who, what, where, when, how, why and with what. With regard to the influence of circumstances on the ethical quality of a human act, they only either increase or decrease the ethical good or the ethical evil of a human act. It logically follows that, on the basis of circumstances alone, it is not possible to demarcate the boundaries of good and evil in human action, which means that their function is only subsidiary. At the same time, however, the circumstances of a human act either increase or decrease the ethical responsibility of an acting human subject, but it must be emphasized that they can never substantially change the theological-ethical quality of a human act so that a human act that is inherently evil becomes good.

In this theological concept, however, every human act is clearly given an additional ethical quality without a substantial change in the ethical nature of human action in the field of biomedical sciences. From the perspective of the theological-ethical dimension, which is primary, it is appropriate to note that in the demarcation of the boundaries of good and evil, circumstances have a subsidiary significance for ethical classification and therefore are not a reference point

for determining these boundaries. At the same time, it cannot be overlooked that objectively there are human acts which, regardless of the intention of an acting human subject and regardless of the circumstances of the human action, are always morally evil by their very nature (*ex toto genere suo*).

##### 5. *PRINCIPIUM DUPLICIS EFFECTUS* – THE SUBSIDIARY CRITERION FOR GOOD AND EVIL

In more complicated circumstances of theological demarcation of the boundaries between good and evil, the principle of double effect, which is derived from a general ethical analysis of a human act, is often applied as a special bioethical principle. Theological-moral evaluation of a human act according to the principle of double effect – *principium duplicis effectus* delicately regulates human action, especially in more complex biomedical situations, which in their nature are complicated in such a way that if one of the achieved effects of a human act (medical interference) conflicts with ethical principles, it is necessary to apply this principle.

This special theological-moral principle contains rules for practical theological-ethical distinguishing and determining in applying general moral principles for making a correct moral decision by medical, health and scientific research teams. Thus, if a human subject wants to act according to a moral law in cases where the achievement of the desired good effect in order to protect and support the basic good of a person is accompanied by negative side effects<sup>16</sup> he applies these practical moral principles. However, it is important to point out that such human action can be realized only if the following conditions are met, without which it is not ethically permissible to do so in searching and demarcating what is good and evil. In this context it is worth noting that there are several interpretations of actions according to the principle of double effect, not only in terms of conditions<sup>17</sup>, but also in terms of its application in biomedical practice, whether within biotherapy or research.

The first necessary condition of human action is that a human act itself must be ethically good, which means that the object, intention, goal, as well as the circumstances are ethically good according to the general ethical principles of moral order. The second condition is that the intention and goal of an acting human subject must be good in a human act, which means that an acting human subject

<sup>16</sup> G.M. Miglietta, G. Russo, *Duplici effetto*, in: E. Sgreccia, A. Tarantino (eds.), *Enciclopedia di bioetica e scienza giuridica*, Bd. IV, Napoli: ESI 2011, p. 915.

<sup>17</sup> The conditions for application have been formulated by several authors, e.g. S. Privitera, *Duplici effetto*, in: S. Leone, S. Privitera (eds.), *Dizionario di Bioetica*, Palermo: EDB 1994, pp. 307–309; W.E. May, *Double Effect*, in: W.T. Reich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Bd. I, New York–London: Macmillan 1978, p. 316. Here it is possible to reflect different content formulations.

wants to intentionally achieve only an ethically good effect, while the bad effect is not selectively desired, but only tolerated, because it cannot be avoided, whereby an acting human subject knows in advance that a bad effect will occur. The third condition is the requirement that the desired good effect is not achieved through the bad effect, in other words, both effects either occur temporarily at the same time or the bad effect is a later consequence of the good effect. The last condition requires the presence of a sufficiently compelling reason to justify such an action, that is, such an action can be applied only for very serious reasons, such as saving the life or health of a human subject, when another possibility of resolving this borderline situation has been excluded.

The above implies that in the event of a situation, which, by its complexity, makes it difficult for a human subject to recognize and demarcate the boundary of good and evil in his actions, the effect of which is good and evil, an acting human subject may, for very serious reasons, follow this principle to satisfy human dignity.

## 6. CONCLUSIONES PRO FUTURO

From the presented and proposed philosophical concept, which has its origin in the Thomistic tradition of European theological-ethical thinking, it is possible to derive, taking into account the introduction to this reflection, that there is a real necessity to apply final ethical criteria, besides biomedical, biological or biotechnological, to evaluate human intervention in the psychosomatic structure of a human body and life. At this point, an expert opinion can be raised that the search, examination and demarcation of the boundaries between good and evil in the theological-moral discourse of the third millennium logically and necessarily requires a transcendent and universal reference point for distinguishing between good and evil from the perspective of theological thinking (Decalogue, *lex aeterna*, *lex naturalis*).

This need for an objective reference point is evident, not only because of the rapidly changing biotechnological reality in biomedical sciences, representing a moral challenge to moral theology, but especially because it is necessary today to demarcate the boundaries of good and evil within a wide range of different types of biomedical interference, and to preserve them for the good of a human subject. As it turns out empirically, these are not some pragmatic physical or positivist legal boundaries of these biomedical interventions, but universal boundaries, i.e. theological-ethical boundaries, which means that it regards the objective moral boundaries of good and evil in human acts.

The presented *propositio* for current theological-moral discourse of the third millennium thus reflects the transcendent foundations on which the demarcation of the objective boundaries of good and evil is based, whereas these foundations

are like a retrospective rebirth of a previously discovered reference point, which is theologically and logically verified by theological tradition in the history of the Church. At this point of the reflection, it is adequate to draw attention to the immanent connection of this theological conception with the anthropological aspect of distinguishing and demarcating these boundaries. It is therefore possible to express a theological view that without an adequate anthropological concept in theological-moral discourse, which utterly respects the objective truth about man, as well as without affirmation of general moral principles based on the Thomistic tradition *lex naturalis*, it will probably be impossible to find any other theological-ethical reference point of distinction, according to which it will be possible to objectively theologically and morally evaluate a human act, realized in the biomedical and biotechnological perspective of the third millennium.

The point is that there is a natural law in the foundations of the moral dimension of human nature, in the light of which it is possible to characterize universal criteria of ethical behavior of a human subject, which implies the natural dimension of anthropocentric ethics (which can be interpreted in different ways)<sup>18</sup>, and also for the current theological-moral discourse where we search and demarcate the boundaries of good and evil. In today's theological-moral discourse one can observe a partial renaissance of the anthropocentric-creationist impostatio of the philosophical concept of ethics<sup>19</sup>, which is epistemologically based on the original Thomistic philosophical and theological tradition, but in the field of biomedicine it focuses mainly on personalistic neothomistic interpretation enriched by phenomenological inspirations.

Reflected *propositio* is primarily a challenge to theological dialogue, even though there are several divergent interpretations of this concept. It is a personalistic theological concept in theological-moral discourse, although considered a natural diffusion point that harmonizes several aspects of opinions about theological-ethical principles and human personality, and so needs to rely on the original initial transcendental point.

In the reflection on the boundaries between good and evil in human conscience the immanent connection between the anthropological concept of man and general theological-ethical principles is evident. Therefore, adequate interpretation and application of theological-ethical principles is not possible without affirmation of the true anthropological foundation. Since man is the subject of conscience and its initial and at the same time convergent point, which is, he is existentially endowed with conscience<sup>20</sup>, then it is logical that he primarily respects the voice

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<sup>18</sup> E. Sgreccia, *Manuale di Bioetica*, Bd. I: *Fondamenti ed etica biomedica*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero 2007, p. 119, 124.

<sup>19</sup> E. Sgreccia, *Manuale di Bioetica*, Bd. I: *Fondamenti ed etica biomedica*, p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> I. Kútňy, *Svedomie v jeho špecifickosti*, in: *Špecifické aspekty svedomia v perspektíve rozvoja osoby a spoločnosti*, Bratislava–Nitra: RKCMF UK 2007, p. 4.

of conscience and at the same time verifies its judgment in the context of taking into account theological-ethical principles, initially of transcendent origin. That is, a human behavior should be an expression of mutual coherence with natural theological-ethical principles in the context of a transcendent Authority. We see here the need for necessary essential harmony and coherence between personal conviction of a person, his personal worldview, human conscience and the theological-ethical norm.

## 7. CONCLUSION

For the reasons mentioned above, it follows that in demarcating the boundaries between good and evil it is necessary to examine whether the intended goals are theologically and ethically approvable, as well as to check the means applied for achievement of these goals. The proposed method of theological-moral evaluation of human acts therefore consistently verifies the way in which these goals are to be achieved, together with the verification of the effects of an intended action, while respecting the principle of human dignity, which enshrines the inviolability of his psychophysical existence. God at all times remains the highest and primary fundamental value in determining the boundaries between good and evil, revealing Himself to a person through the Decalogue, *lex aeterna* and *lex naturalis*, a person himself is the anthropological criterion of verification, more precisely his *natura humana*. In conclusion, it is appropriate to point out the complementary function of individual special theological-moral principles in their mutual relationship, but especially to their convergent point, which is a human life. By applying them in human actions in the biomedical sphere, one would like to better capture what is to be the goal of every human act, that is, the objective good of a person. Consequently, theological-moral analysis of a human act, together with the principle of double effect, can be considered as a criterion for good and evil in human action.

## ABBREVIATIONS

VS – John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Veritatis splendor*



KWESTIA GRANIC MIĘDZY DOBREM A ZŁEM  
W DYSKURSIE TEOLOGICZNMORALNYM

## Streszczenie

Obserwacja aktualnych tendencji w teologii moralnej, zwłaszcza w dziedzinie bioetyki, od dawna ujawnia zarówno metodologiczny, jak i merytoryczny problem zaciemniania czy wręcz zanikania granic między dobrem a złem. Rozbieżność i sprzeczność stały się dziwnym standardem naukowym w dyskursie teologicznomoralnym w nawiązaniu do syntezy Hegla na temat fundamentalnych kwestii moralnych. *Depositum fidei morale*, oparte na Dekalogu, *lex aeterna* i *lex naturalis*, zdaje się ustępować miejsca postchrześcijańskim Wittgensteinowskiemu grom językowym, w których jasna granica między dobrem i złem (w tym prawdą i fałszem) wyznaczona przez transcendentny autorytet Boga została zrelatywizowana. Refleksja nad relacją między normą a sumieniem oraz między dobrem a złem, w świetle tomistycznego dziedzictwa filozoficzno-teologicznego, ma na celu wskazanie na konieczność przyjęcia adekwatnego logicznego przewartościowania analizy etycznej ludzkiego czynu. Bez tego nie jest możliwa kontynuacja nie tylko *Traditio*, ale także znalezienie uniwersalnego punktu odniesienia dla rozróżnienia dobra i zła w skomplikowanym świecie współczesnej bioetyki, która ma stanowić odpowiedź na rewolucyjne technologie w dziedzinie biomedycyny.

Słowa kluczowe: dobro, zło, granice, sumienie, norma etyczna, teologia moralna, bioetyka.

ISSUE OF THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL  
IN THEOLOGICAL-MORAL DISCOURSE

## Summary

Observing current trends in moral theology, especially in the field of bioethics, has long raised both the methodological and meritorious problem of obscuring or even removing the boundaries between good and evil. Divergence and contradiction have become a strange scientific standard in theological-moral discourse in the derivation of Hegel's synthesis on fundamental moral questions. *Depositum fidei morale*, which is based on the Decalogue, *Lex aeterna*, and *lex naturalis*, seems to be giving way to post-Christian Wittgenstein language-games, in which the clear line between good and evil (including truth and falsehood), determined by the transcendent Authority of God, has been relativized. The reflection of the relationship between the norm and conscience, as well as the relationship between good and evil, in the light of the Thomistic philosophical-theological patrimony, seeks to point to the need of accepting an adequate logical re-examination of the ethical analysis of a human act. Without this, it is impossible to continue not only in *Traditio*, but also in finding a universal reference point for distinguishing between good and evil in the complicated world of contemporary bioethics, which responds to revolutionary biotechnologies in the field of biomedicine.

Keywords: good, evil, boundaries, conscience, ethical norm, moral theology, bioethics.

## DIE FRAGE NACH DEN GRENZEN ZWISCHEN GUT UND BÖSE IM MORALTHEOLOGISCHEN DISKURS

### Zusammenfassung

Die Beobachtung aktueller Trends in der Moraltheologie, insbesondere im Bereich der Bioethik, wirft seit langem sowohl das methodologische als auch das meritorische Problem der Verwischung oder gar des Verschwindens der Grenzen zwischen Gut und Böse auf. Divergenz und Widerspruch sind in der Strömung der Hegelschen Synthese zu moralischen Grundfragen und zu einem seltsamen wissenschaftlichen Standard im moraltheologischen Diskurs geworden. Das *Depositum fidei morale*, das auf dem Dekalog, der *Lex aeterna* und der *Lex naturalis* beruht, scheint den postchristlichen Wittgensteinschen Sprachspielen zu weichen, in denen die klare Linie zwischen Gut und Böse (einschließlich Wahrheit und Falschheit), die durch die transzendente Autorität Gottes bestimmt wird, relativiert worden ist. Die Reflexion des Verhältnisses zwischen Norm und Gewissen sowie zwischen Gut und Böse im Lichte des philosophisch-theologischen Erbes des hl. Thomas von Aquin soll auf die Notwendigkeit hinweisen, eine adäquate logische Neuprüfung der ethischen Analyse der menschlichen Handlung anzunehmen. Ohne dies ist es unmöglich, nicht nur in *Traditio* fortzufahren, sondern auch einen universellen Bezugspunkt für die Unterscheidung zwischen Gut und Böse in der komplizierten Welt der zeitgenössischen Bioethik zu finden, die auf die revolutionären Technologien und Entwicklungen im Bereich der Biomedizin reagiert.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Gut, Böse, Grenzen, Gewissen, ethische Norm, Moraltheologie, Bioethik.

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