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Review: Chantal Delsol *Kamienie węgielne. Na czym nam zależy?* (Cornerstones: What do we care about?) translated by Małgorzata Kowalska, Znak, Krakow 2018, pp. 320

Cornerstones. *What do we care about?* is another book by Chantal Delsol translated into Polish. Chantal Delsol (born in 1947 in Paris) specializes in political philosophy, history of ideas and philosophical anthropology. She wrote over a dozen philosophical books and several novels, some of which have been translated into Polish: *Essay on the man of late modernity* (Znak, Krakow 2003), *What is man? The anthropology course for the uninitiated* (Znak, Krakow 2011), *Hatred of the world. Totalitarianisms and post-modernity* (PAX, Warsaw 2017) and *Cornertones* discussed in this article. As a columnist, Delsol cooperates with Le Figaro and the magazine Valeurs actuelles. She is a member of the French Academy, a professor at the University of Marne-le-Vallée and the founder of the Hannah Arendt Institut. She is also considered to be the heiress to this thinker. Among the Western European authors, she is distinguished by her sensitivity to the situation of the Central and Eastern Europe, her knowledge of its history and her attempt to use the tragic experiences of this region (especially the Soviet regime) as a warning to the rest of the Old Continent.

The book entitled *Cornerstones. What do we care about?* analyses the European culture and its growing similarity to the 20th-century totalitarianisms, which the author observes in an attempt to indicate the direction of repair. Delsol traces those elements of the Old Continent's culture without which Europe will no longer be itself, and then puts them to the cohesion test because, as she writes, "all cultures are respectable and in all cultures people can live happily, but none can survive without a minimum of cohesion" (p. 9). Each chapter of the book

explains the different cornerstones of the European culture: understanding of the human being as a person and the values associated with it, such as freedom of conscience and the imperfect character of the person; the joy of following values; the promise that brings hope; the primacy of truth.

In the first chapter, entitled *Choosing a person*, Delsol focuses on describing the human being as a person. It is the starting point and the basis of the author's entire worldview. Describing the human being as a person is a matter of faith, or choice, claims the French philosopher. In other cultures, a different choice has been made, something has been lost and something gained at the same time. Delsol points out that European culture traditionally treats the human being as a person. However, that kind of treatment has been degenerated these days. The anthropology of post-modern culture is falling into schizophrenia, writes Delsol, because, on the one hand, it sees the human being as something sacred (never again the Holocaust), and on the other hand, in the light of discoveries in neuroscience and biology, treats him as a higher level animal. Therefore, in order to speak of the human being as a person, it is necessary today, first and foremost, to firmly embed the person's inviolable dignity, and secondly, to review and adjust the status of the person.

Human dignity, in order to be inviolable, cannot be attributed to the human being from the outside. This is the case in cultures that lack the notion of the human being as a person, where society or some of its elements have the primary role. For example, in ancient Greece or ancient Rome, eugenics was a normal thing. Children with developmental delays or those considered unnecessary for the society were killed and no one considered it unethical. Similarly, for the Nazis, human dignity was given from the outside by ideology: it was granted only to the Germans, while the Jews or Poles were regarded as sub-human. Delsol emphasizes that today's liberal individualism, which also decides who is human and who is not (for example as regards abortion), fits into the logic of the 20th-century totalitarianisms. At the same time, it tries to avoid returning to those criminal systems, constantly fuelling the outrageous atmosphere by reminding about the crimes of the Holocaust in schools or television programmes. According to the French philosopher, that is not enough. In such a case, human dignity is granted to him from the outside by creating a certain mood, and the mood can change at any time, whereas dignity must be an internal human category, independent of current social moods, and must therefore be based on the dogmatic faith derived from Christianity. For any dignity that is not based on transcendence is not unconditional.

Besides, for human dignity to be unconditional, it must be without definition, according to Delsol. This is because it stems from a mystery. We human are mysterious beings and no science can describe us in a comprehensive manner.

If we assume that science can determine what a human being is, we could reduce him to neurons or to biology or chemistry, and then he will cease to be a respectable being. In order for unconditionality to appear, it is necessary to acknowledge spirituality. For spirituality introduces the fear of violating something divine and mysterious in a human being. Only such an attitude can make him inviolable.

Having clarified the foundations of unconditional human dignity, Delsol shows how to review and adjust the status of a person. According to the French philosopher, the subject has been degenerated and must be distinguished from the notion of a person. In fact, the Enlightenment has led to a distortion of humanism, since the rule of human-king over the world, present in Judeo-Christian culture, has been transformed into an unlimited power of human-god. The human being began to be treated as an independent subject. This independence, in turn, meant power without responsibility and brought tragic consequences for the world entrusted to him. For he ruled the world without taking into account its rights. In response to this approach, "anti-humanism" was born. Freud, for example, argued that the man in the Bible granted himself an immortal soul and divine origin, and lost the sense of solidarity with the animal world. A further consequence of such an attitude was the blurring of the boundaries between the animal world and the human world. The values ceased to be the source of the creature's this ability, and were replaced by the ability to feel. Since animals also had this ability, they deserved the same respect as humans. This is how the morality of compassion based on emotions, which is still valid today, was born. Emotions, however, are not permanent and it is impossible to build unconditional human dignity on them.

In Western European culture, according to Delsol, the criticism of an entirely independent subject has been expressed in ecological trends. The French philosopher perceives them as a source of hope, as they indicate the existence of some external laws that are independent of the subject – the laws of Nature. Ecologists point out that the humans have violated the sacred order and they have to re-establish respect for it, if they wish to save themselves and take care of their children's future. Such thinking may be the beginning of the path towards restoring the notion of a person. For as a person, the human being is not the creator of the world, but a creature chosen and loved by God, who has entrusted the world to him, and he has to take care of that world. He must, therefore, respect the rights vested in him by the Creator, whereas the Renaissance and the Enlightenment have fictitiously separated God and creation, faith and reason, which has led to a distortion of the subject's autonomy.

Delsol notes that the philosophy of the person assumes both internal dignity and the subject's autonomy. These two values are difficult to reconcile, since an autonomous subject will seek to absolutise its independence, and internal dignity requires respect and imposes restraints. This clash generates tension that is complex and tiring. Freedom is tiring, stresses the French philosopher. This has largely contributed to the emergence of totalitarianism in the 20th century. They took away the burden of freedom and responsibility from the individual. A similar phenomenon occurs in today's Western European countries, which are becoming welfare states. Citizens are increasingly being treated as children who do not themselves know how to use their freedom and take responsibility for their own choices, but instead they must be cared for.

However, according to Delsol, man as a person must be treated as an adult, which in turn leads to granting him freedom of conscience and the resulting *personal* responsibility for his own actions. In Christianity, responsibility is personal and not collective; not because the individual is not bound by the group, but because he can shape his own fate. It is, therefore, not a question of getting rid of an autonomous subject, but of shaping a responsible person. To be responsible is to be dependent – to assume that you are not a master, but a debtor, and that you are subject to what you are responsible for. Delsol writes that to call a man a person is to burden him with a debt that cannot be repaid. Man as a person is born into a certain order that he did not choose, but still he perceives it as a debt, not a fate. This means he is not subject to such order, but he accepts it with full responsibility – yet, he has to recognize it first.

Following a certain order gives rise to responsibility that gives man an identity without which his life is empty. This means that responsible being is the fullest of all – for example, a man is fully realised when he protects his wife and takes care of children as a father and husband, or as a patriot when he is concerned about the welfare, security and development of his country. According to Delsol, the proposal of postmodern culture to liberate man from all affiliations, such as nationality, skin colour, being a man or woman, or family ties, creates an individual without a name, that is, an empty person. Hence, the French philosopher advocates the restoration of the concept of a world that is an atmosphere which an individual breathes and without which he would be nothing, and not just a theatre decoration which he could do without.

On the other hand, the human being should not just imitate a group identity, because then he would dissolve in society. Nowadays, in Delsol's opinion, this is apparent in political correctness, where one repeats without any reflection anything that is received well by others. In this way, however, an extraordinary phenomenon of Christian culture is lost, the one contained in the notion of

a person, which distinguishes a person from the others – education that prepares to take initiatives. Such education is reflected, for example, in the idea of a university, which is characteristic of Europe, where education means not only having some knowledge, but also being prepared to approach it in a creative manner and criticise it. Universities cannot be compared to Muslim madrasas or Jewish rabbinical schools that prepare students exclusively to assimilate a certain amount of knowledge and cultivate tradition. For Christians, knowledge is less important than a student who, in his freedom, can go beyond it and undermine it.

The proper status of a person, therefore, means that a balance must be struck between the subject's autonomy and the blurring of the boundaries between an individual and the world. According to Delsol, such a balance is possible only under the protection of transcendence. God's recognition saves the human being from two extremes: the arbitrary use of his freedom and perceiving the world as sacred (once the Creator's idea is accepted, the world is not sacred itself, but is as God's creation). Only Christianity maintains this balance. On the one hand, man does not blend in with Nature, which allows him to be the subject; on the other hand, he does not rule over the Nature, as he is not its owner (God is), but rather a leaseholder – a gardener cultivating the garden entrusted to him.

In the second chapter, entitled *Happiness or joy*, Delsol discusses the basic fruit that can be enjoyed by the human being who exists in the world as a person – joy. Joy comes from the realisation of specific values and ideals in life. It is not an end in itself. This is why the French philosopher distinguishes between joy and happiness. This last she defines as a feeling of peace and comfort (lack of suffering). Man as a person values joy more than happiness. Happiness, according to the French philosopher, is the product of the Enlightenment. The concept of happiness stems from three factors: materialism, individualism and equality. The 17th century Europe, tired of numerous conflicts and the pursuit of demanding, fanatical ideas, develops trade and industry, and comfort becomes available to many. The search for ideals is thus replaced by the search for prosperity. This in turn leads to individualism. Previously, the individual, feeling he is a part of a larger whole, devoted himself to big things. Now, nothing is worth more of his energy than taking care of himself. Health takes the place of salvation. The 17th century was also a time when the bourgeoisie became more prominent and the differences between social groups were reduced. This gave rise to the idea of social equality and the categories of compassion and gentleness associated with it, which resulted in the attitude of tolerance.

Delsol asks a question: what is the price of happiness understood in this way? And she answers that it is mediocrity. For man, by his very nature, is insatiable. Its insatiability is intensified by philosophy and religion, posing existential

questions. This insatiability breeds anxiety and the need of searching, which is an obstacle to the Enlightenment's ideal of happiness. That is why contemporary European culture, in which this model is still valid, tries to get rid of religion and philosophy and to introduce the Pascal's ideal of entertainment: to forget about evil, as we cannot do anything about it, and to place our desires where they can be satisfied. A similar approach, according to Delsol, is recommended by the Eastern wisdom, which has been gaining an increase in popularity among today's Europeans. It imposes curbing one's desires. Unfortunately, the comfort achieved by limiting or eradicating great ideas kills joy. Man, having no reference to the reality that transcends him, loses the awareness of finiteness and creaturehood and is no longer able to experience the world and everyday life as a gift from the Creator.

In the third chapter, entitled *Hope as the principle of the world*, Delsol focuses on the next cornerstone which is hope, resulting from the promise and combined with mystery. The author emphasizes that hope is not limited to this reality, but directs man towards transcendence. That is what distinguishes hope from progress. To characterise the Judeo-Christian hope, the French philosopher compares two journeys made by Ulysses and Abraham. Ulysses sets out on a journey that involves returning to a home that he had to leave because of the Trojan War. Therefore, Ulysses has his place on Earth. Abraham's journey, on the other hand, involves breaking away from the land to which he has become accustomed, not in the hope that he will return to it, but knowing that it is not his land. His journey focuses on entering the unknown. Abraham has been in a foreign land since the day he set out. The Promised Land, to which he is heading, is a symbol of the spiritual home of man, the one located beyond this world. The hope of man as a person is Abraham's hope – the longing for the unknown land.

This approach to the world is also different from rational thinking, which suggests that man should be satisfied only with what he has. Nevertheless, in Delsol's opinion, there is a fallacy in the calmness and sense of completeness of a wise man, since man cannot be satisfied with himself. At most, he forces himself to avoid suffering. Hope, in this sense, is the opposite of wisdom, as it is humility: it involves acknowledging that one does not have everything. This lack of self-sufficiency is life-giving, because it shows reality and the future as open to novelty and otherness. This corresponds to the natural condition of human beings who find the greatest joy in overcoming their own nature (for example, in the sacrifices of love). Thus, hope concretises the ontological deficit in an individual and the fact that he is oriented towards transcendence.

In today's world, man is afraid of hope because it is connected with waiting for the unknown, with uncertainty. Contemporary man chooses knowledge that is proven. Such an attitude, however, paralyses him in making life decisions (e.g. about getting married). Today, everyone wants to have knowledge instead of trust and hope. But in this way, we deprive ourselves of the joy that is born in an open and uncertain world. Delsol quotes the words of Søren Kierkegaard, who said that the measure for cows is set by a shepherd, while man grows when his measure becomes infinite God.

In chapter four, entitled *How truth guarantees freedom*, Delsol presents the last of the European tradition cornerstones, that is building on truth. Contemporary man, according to the French philosopher, believes that without the idea of truth he will be free and tolerant. Meanwhile, it is the truth that makes him free. The reservation being that this is not about some particular truth, but about the conviction that truth exists. The discovery of the idea of truth in the Judaeo-Christian culture leads to the belief that things exist and can be expressed. Man can speak out about the world and distinguish between what is true and what is false in it. This in turn gives rise to the idea of scientific objectivity.

This category, which is extremely valued by Europeans, stems from believing in the idea of a created world in which there is a universal order. In such a system, the laws of Nature reflect universal laws. Therefore, there must be a heavenly legislator for the laws of Nature to exist. In addition, there must be a belief that the truth exists and that it is possible to get closer to it. Only then can there be a healthy scientific cognition. It is theology that enables such cognition and sets its limits. Only through theology does one not fall into the extremes of modernity and postmodernity: The Enlightenment worshipped science and usurped the ability to grasp the whole and achieve the omnipotence; while postmodernity, disappointed by the failures of modernity, began to negate its own ideas. However, one should always remember that truth is an uncertain reality – it is searching. Our finite intelligence cannot fully penetrate the Creator's knowledge. In this way, truth is associated with hope and mystery. You should seek the truth, just as theology seeks and explores God, knowing that He will always transcend it. The search for truth is consent to the unknown – to human finiteness, to the fact that man will never know and never possess the whole truth.

Moreover, the search for truth must be an end in itself. Man seeks the truth because it brings him closer to the Creator. Thus, the love of truth has a theological foundation. Philosophy and theology reach the truth, they do not invent it. The Greek word *theorein* means contemplation – truth comes

from transcendence, it imposes itself, overwhelms man and transforms him. Whoever recognises the truth is not the master of the world, but adjusts to the truth and recognises his finiteness. On the other hand, truth is not just a mechanical acceptance of a proven knowledge, but it teaches us to look at the world and interpret it. A man can be free for he has been raised to seek the truth. His development does not consist in adopting norms imposed on him, but in being prepared for an independent searching of a life path.

Universality of truth is a condition necessary for the existence of truth itself. The truth is either universal or non-existent. If two plus two is four, it's always true. There can only be one truth. The fact that cognition is always put in a situational context does not mean that there is no truth at all. The truth exists, although it is not fully reachable. Such a view, however, is based on the concept of the Creator, and requires humility and recognising the finiteness of man.

Chapter Five, entitled *The abyss exists*, is a summary of the current situation in the Western Europe, which has lost – as has been mentioned above – the concept of the Creator and the reference to transcendence. Delsol compares the Western Europe to an orphan whose illegitimate mother died in childbirth and took the secret of her origin to her grave. This is where we should seek it. This is where hope is, at least that there is a mysterious source that gives a completely new beginning. According to the author, European culture can confirm its right to exist only through discovering its roots, i.e. the concept of the Divine Creator.

To sum up, Chantal Delsol's book is an insightful and interesting analysis of the Western Europe's situation. The philosophical analysis of the Old Continent's culture has been illustrated by numerous examples and comparisons to other cultures of the world, showing the author's erudition and leaving the reader with food for thought. The book is written in a lightweight style, which makes reading pleasant and the content more accessible. As for the disadvantages of this publication, it seems that the arguments have been presented in a slightly chaotic manner, so that they need to be reorganised after reading. In each chapter, the author focuses on one of the values (a cornerstone), but then she interferes with numerous digressions and shows connections with other values to be discuss only later. Nevertheless, the book is worth recommending. For lecturers, it can be a source of valid examples and gives a lot of interesting insights, which may allow to diversify and to enrich the classes. In summary, it can be treated as a kind of apologetics of Christianity. For anyone who is interested in culture, theology or philosophy, the book will broaden the horizons and be a material for reflection on the situation of today's Europe.