



Philosophical Significance of the Way, Experience, and Silence in the Context of Camino de Santiago

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Abstract: The problem addressed in the article refers to an attempt to present the phenomenon of the way, experience, and silence in the context of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in modern times. The objective is to present what is popularly referred to as *Camino* as a dynamic and evolving perspective on human spirituality in relation to the challenges of modern times. The main thesis of the proposed study is that this type of pilgrimage offers an alternative to the phenomenon of increasing secularization. The key concepts related to the *Camino* were discussed and interpreted using the methods of analysis and synthesis in order to present the anthropological vision of the human being developed by Karol Wojtyła and Józef Tischner. An outline of their ideas reveals the deeper meaning of the way and experience. The main conclusion following from the analysis of the issue is that, by embarking on the *Camino* route, an individual is enabled to take a more in-depth look at his or her own condition, his or her perspective on relationships with others, contemplation, and new opportunities to organize and develop his or her own spirituality.

Keywords: the human being, way, experience, silence, secularization

The phenomena of the way, experience, and silence have a high significance in the debate about the human being. This is because they refer us back to some of the most fundamental questions about the human condition, the purpose of human life, and the human being's vocation. Philosophical anthropology, psychology, and theology do not cease to ask questions about the human being and the human being's mode of existing in the world, which, at the time of discussions about modernity, the shape of culture, and disputes over the understanding of civilization, keeps opening new research perspectives.

The attempt to describe the human being in the context of the categories listed in the title refers to traversing, directing, setting, and paving the way as a specific opportunity for the inner and spiritual development of an individual, especially in the era of a secularized culture, in which religious values are repressed, and an attempt is made to annihilate them (Mariański 2015, 41–43).

The aim of the article is to present the route, popularly called Camino de Santiago¹ in the perspective of contemporary philosophical questions concerning the human condition, the human being's spiritual development, and the purpose of human life. As contemporary authors dealing with the subject emphasize, *Camino* is not only a space of self-discovery for the individual in the psychological and social sense but it also creates a situation in which a person can explore the question of the ultimate purpose of his or her existence; "the modern routes of St. James can be perceived as a space of questions, explorations, doubts, and 'wanderings' between two poles of human life and activity: fides et ratio" (Plichta 2017, 19).

In reaching one's self and searching for answers to fundamental existential questions or finding a deep meaning of the relationship with Transcendence, entering the route to Santiago de Compostela turns out to be an inspiring Christian response to the phenomenon of secularization in its various dimensions and variants. On the way to Santiago, the human being himself becomes a question "that never ceases to be asked, an absolute amazement in the face of reality, an indestructible hope. The question, amazement, and hope make him a wanderer and a pilgrim who relentlessly pursues his destiny. The pilgrimage on the route of St. James is more than a mere external symbol. It is an expression of a particular conception of the human being and his relationship with God" (Barrio Barrio 2018, 15). On the *Camino*, the sacred and the profane intersect with one another, and at their junction, the human being-pilgrim takes the initiative not only to enter the external dimension of the world but also the internal one, which concerns the human being's own self. At the time of discussions on the shape of modern civilization, this reveals the perspective of looking at the human being as a process in which spiritual values play an important role next to various other values. Although nowadays we can observe a connection with the "desacralized sacrum of this Christian spiritual artery," pilgrims can feel the "pulse of faith" as they cover each kilometer of the Camino, as multiple external and internal, material, and spiritual roads intersect there" (Roszak 2013, 124–25).

It seems that in the multiple discussions on contemporary cultural trends and disputes over the understanding of modern civilization (Nierodka 2015, 237)

¹ In the last two decades, traveling on the route of St. James the Apostle to Santiago de Compostela became one of the most important cultural phenomena in Europe and has been experiencing revitalization not only due to its historical and religious character or tourist value but, above all, because it represents a rich human experience in terms of cultural contacts between the people of Western Europe and other continents. The phenomenon of this type of pilgrimage has gained popularity today not only among Christians but also among members of other religions or non-religious people, whose motivations to walk the *Camino* route reveal its cultural and spiritual potential. It is worth noting that the golden age of pilgrimage to Santiago was the period between the 12th and 14th centuries. Next to Rome and Jerusalem, Santiago was the third most popular destination among pilgrims and was important for spreading the cult of St. James the Apostle. In my text, I will use the commonly accepted term *Camino* both in the sense of walking on specific European routes to the tomb of St. James the Apostle and making a journey into oneself, as well as its spiritual, intellectual, sacral, and social dimensions.

the route to Santiago de Compostela occupies an increasingly prominent place, due to the dynamic development of an environment made up of people representing all nations, cultures, and races there (Seryczyńska 2019, 167). The scale of pilgrimages to Santiago clearly shows that this specific route is a place for various types of spirituality, even though it has its source in the Catholic tradition. This opens the possibility for the potential pilgrim to understand himself or herself in a broader context than before, and may even lead to a new perception of oneself in the horizon of one's own future. The pilgrimage itself becomes a field of challenges, a transition from what is known and comfortable to what is unknown, and even difficult. Thus, *Camino* can be presented as a place of discovering, developing, and even organizing of spirituality, since it appears as “an ecosystem of detachment from the noise of the post-modern world. It provides an enclave of silence, in which one can find what is truly important and significant” (Stefaniak 2018, 61–62). Not only is *Camino* currently perceived as a way open to everyone but also as a place for those who are seeking spiritual renewal in its various dimensions (Doburzyński 2021, 115). Through this, European culture, in the consolidation of its identity, has a chance to integrate as an alternative to post-modernism, nihilism, progressing secularization, laicization, and various ideological influences (Mendyk 2019, 159).

1. The Meaning-Making Character of the Way in a Secularized Culture

The various facets of the meaning of the way that function in everyday language also imply philosophical references, while the significant meanings of the way are located in the horizon of questions concerning the nature and condition of the human being. The thinking about the way and the human being crystallizes on the basis of multiple meanings and senses. They can have naturalistic, ethical, symbolic and metaphorical, philosophical, and even eschatological references. Their multiplicity reveals various meanings of the way itself and its multiple modes, which expands the directions of interpretation and deeper understanding of the human being himself. By this, we should understand a complex, non-selective, and heterogenous mix of associations, symbols, and references, which is probably inexhaustible.

The wide range of meanings of the concept of the way situates it in a problematized optic, where various contexts may overlap or exclude one another, converge in meaning, or gradually drift apart. This is due to the wide range of everyday, existential, ethical, and philosophical references, and allegorical meanings.² Their possible

² The topos of the way, the metaphor of travel, and the supra-individual character of the way are discussed in more detail by Anna Wiczorkiewicz in the article “Filozof w podróży: O dekonstrukcji pewnej metafory”

mixing, relationships, and subtle nuances emerging between them, do not necessarily have to cause a theoretical confusion. To the contrary, they may reveal its inexhaustible richness in ever new guises, without falling into interpretive traps.

[The] topos of the way as an ever-present cultural theme, a site of mythical, religious, and philosophical metaphorization, is not related in any significant ways to any system or worldview. To the same extent, it can be a carrier of meaning in the works of writers and thinkers representing various times and cultures. Viewed from this perspective, it is a universal method of encoding and transmitting meaning, a model through which individual reflection is transferred to public discourse (Lubecki 2011, 25–26).

This demonstrates not only that the motive of the way itself eludes generalization, but perhaps also that there is no tool allowing for an ideal cognitive grasp of it. The way, with all its strengths and shortcomings, reveals the logic of moving “from” something “into” something else. This concerns i.a. the change of thinking about the physical journey into thinking about the role which it may play for a person in his or her being. This transition allows an individual to look at oneself, others, fate, or relations with Transcendence in a deeper perspective and enables inner and spiritual development, which, in the face of expanding secularization, may have the benefit of consolidating and preserving or reaching Christian values.

The sources of the topos of the *homo viator* (traveler, wanderer), both ancient, philosophical, religious, and related to art and rich fiction writing, refer to the concept of a human being traversing the road in a variety of references. The earthly destiny and the manner of choosing a particular path were associated with the understanding of an individual in the context of selecting, traversing, and existing on a particular road that often led to the ultimate goal which was the afterlife. The prospect of earthly wandering, pilgrimage, or journey, bore the hallmarks of ethical choices and taking responsibility for one’s own fate. Thus, the way was associated not only with a spatio-temporal place but also with a range of existential values which were meant to lead to the interpretation of one’s fate and fulfillment of one’s humanity.

The symbolism of that way and its multiple meanings are highly contextualized. Nonetheless, it allows for a deeper reading and interpretation of the fate of the human being, who struggles and creates himself (or herself) on the way, learning, developing, experiencing, and living through things, sensing, feeling, and thinking. All that defines a person is accomplished on a certain journey on which that person travels; thus, it is necessary to constantly define that way too, though it is not always straight, and may be crisscrossed, uneven, ambiguous, and winding.

(Philosopher on a Journey. Deconstruction of a Metaphor) and in the book *Wędrowcy fikcyjnych światów: Pielgrzym, rycerz i włóczęga* (Travellers in Fictional Worlds: Pilgrim, Knight, and Vagabond).

The philosophical meaning of the human being's way and life emerges already at the level of colloquial and everyday references. The human being who is on a journey is situated in a specific space and time, and his (or her) individuality constitutes itself in free choices and taking responsibility for them. It is natural to combine the human being with a road. Men's homes are built by roads, men walk on roads, travel through life on roads, meet other people, move towards goals, and develop by traveling on their roads. An individual also can take a particular path in life as a unique opportunity to create his or her everyday life on it. However, a person may also walk off the set path, take a new direction, or completely change the course of events with the choices he or she makes. The option of returning to the chosen path or entering a new one is an important dimension too.

In a different sense, a person may complete a certain journey, or make it to the end, and thus reach a set goal in a specific time. One may look for the right road (in the ethical or topographical sense), direct someone to a wrong road (in the ethical or geographical sense), be on the right or wrong road (moral sense), get out of someone else's way or stand in someone else's way (in the psychological or physical sense), stop on one's way or set a new path (in the existential, social, and psychological sense), bar or block someone's way (in the physical sense). Finally, one may stray from one's way or take a roundabout way, be at a crossroads, go one's own way, get ready for the road, and take to the road.

The road defined as a journey can be understood in at least three ways.

The first one refers to the change of physical location, i.e. moving in space.

The second understanding of the journey can refer to the journey into oneself, analyzing one's own psyche, traveling through the meanders of one's self, and reaching the truth about oneself.

The third perspective on understanding the journey refers to the pilgrimage as a specific kind of the human being's existence on earth associated with freedom and responsibility for one's own fate and for the fate of others. Pilgrimage may be associated with a person's spiritual growth and a potential inner transformation, as well as the contemplation of beauty in relation to the Creator.

The formula "man on the journey" refers to the dynamic of the human person and to the peculiar dynamism of walking one's own path. It turns out that it is not only the person who has his or her own dynamic that gives the road a specific shape but also that the road affects the individual. A person imposes a certain dynamic on his or her path through the dynamic of his or her character, personality, and temperament. There is a certain dialectic to these different dynamics, and their influence on one another reveals a deep meaning of individual vocation and self-realization of an individual.

The concept of being "on a journey" is characterized by ambiguity and lack of precise location, which implies that it may not have an immediately crystallized destination, although it has to be assumed that the journey leads to some destination.

Of course, it is possible to travel without a set destination, however, the journey ends somewhere anyway (and thus reaches a destination that was not intended). Although the destination remains in the background of the journey, it does not mean that it is left behind. The meaning of the destination is present in making the journey as such. Embarking on the journey, and the process of making an effort on the journey, in a sense turns out to be more important than the most precisely defined destination.

Being “on a journey,” the human being appears as a being in formation (e.g. ethical), who finds fulfillment in actions, is capable of reflection, and is free. The very unpredictability of what may happen on the journey requires that the human being responds to the values that he (or she) encounters. Freedom plays a fundamental role in the individual, ultimately constituting the journey and the subject. Meanwhile, responsibility for one’s way of being on the journey reveals itself with a specific choice. The link between freedom and responsibility, and being “on a journey” is inherent in the human condition and constitutes the axis of the relationship with others, as well as with the journey itself. Both the human being and the journey are relational; although they reveal different levels, or layers, of this relationship, they can co-exist and give an original shape to a person’s life.

2. Two Perspectives on Experience in the Attempt to Understand the Phenomenon of the Journey

In the attempt to think of a “man on a journey” and to interpret the essence of the specific journey that a person makes on the *Camino*, two philosophical concepts of experience prove helpful. They not only constitute a point of departure for the understanding of the journey but also make it possible to express a more precise meaning of “being on a journey.” An outline of these two concepts can lead us to a deep knowledge and understanding of the experience of the *Camino*.

Karol Wojtyła’s adequate anthropology and Józef Tischner’s philosophy of the encounter open up questions concerning the human nature i.a. with regard to consciousness and freedom, responsibility and love, acts and morality. These concepts make the description of the *Camino* route take on a philosophical and metaphysical significance for exploring the depth of some fundamental phenomena such as silence, presence, trace, experience, freedom, relationship, and beauty.

Karol Wojtyła wrote about experience that demands to be understood. His valuable intuitions lead to the amazement at the human being as a corporeal and spiritual being that cannot be fully grasped by cognition, while the experience itself “leads us to the full concrete existence of the human being, i.e. to the reality of the conscious subject” (Wojtyła 2000b, 436). The logic of thinking about the human being leads through the experience of the self, of one’s own identity, one’s freedom, consciousness,

and responsibility, as well as one's relationship to others and God. Wojtyła's amazement at the human being and his personal beauty and value ultimately refers to questions concerning truth, beauty, and their absolute source. The very act of amazement at the human being is immersed in the optics of questions about the Creator and the fundamentals of existence. As a gift and mystery, the human being and his existence are ontically and ontologically inscribed in the metaphysics of God's activity in the world.

Describing experience, Wojtyła refers to the human being's consciousness and agency. They make the human being capable of self-observation and experiencing oneself in the external and internal aspects. Components of experience: awareness of the self as an acting being and awareness of oneself in action are used to analyse the human person from a dynamic perspective. Different kinds of experience oscillate around the notion of the subjectivity and irreducibility of a person. The human being as a subject is distinguished by originality and individuality and gives his or her own existence a unique shape and direction of development. Through consciousness, the human being becomes, in a sense, a witness to himself or herself and a witness of the self as the source of own actions. Wojtyła understands action as a special moment of insight into a person, as "understanding the 'human act' as a dynamic conjunction of 'person-act' is fully covered in experience" (Wojtyła 2000a, 59). Since through the concrete fulfillment of an act one can more adequately get to know a person and who the person is becoming, one can at the same time get a better insight into the field of morality. This is because, in his or her actions, a person acquires a certain quality of being either good or bad. The person's moral qualification arises from specific choices made in favor of given values; then, the person is revealed even more in his or her dynamic essence. Wojtyła stresses that moral values "not only determine the inner quality of human actions but they also never enter into a dynamic sequence of actions without leaving an imprint whereby the human being as a person, owing to his actions that may be good or may be evil himself becomes either good or evil" (Wojtyła 2000a, 61).

A person as witness experiences his or her subjectivity and uniqueness in activating his or her own actions. Therefore, experience in the original sense means the experience of the self, and only later the experience of others. The realism of the human experience is revealed in this internal, individual, and unique character of the human being that cannot be reduced to anyone else. The external experience of one's own self (as the object of the experience) or of others, as well as the internal experience (of one's own self or other selves) integrate in the individual and relate to the same subject. The experience of one's own self makes it possible to know others but also, in a way, the experience of others enables a better understanding of one's own self. These experiences are interconnected and intertwined.

Starting from the original understanding of the experience of the self, Wojtyła developed the conception of the human being on the basis of successive types of

experience, namely, the experience of action, freedom, responsibility, morality, love, and spiritual bond and relationship with God.

Parallel to the amazement at the human being described by Wojtyła runs the experience of amazement at the journey. This is because *Camino* does not seem to be just any journey or simply a journey. *Camino* is a road whose significance and meaning are uncovered anew each time and in individually experienced time, giving it a personal touch, and forming the perception of reality in a new perspective.

The amazement at the journey may emerge and develop in different cognitive, emotional, and spiritual directions. The scale of that amazement may expand with attempts at taking new directions. *Camino* is characterized by the type of experience of the self, another human being, and the surroundings, in which the breadth of emotions, observations, and events is greater than that found in the monotony of everyday life. This means that the hitherto known dimension of experience is transported into a different one, which is unusual and different, and which opens new cognitive possibilities to the subject. This is the source of the thesis about the specific power and impact of the *Camino* as the condition of a deeper understanding of oneself or another person, the world, or God.

The “man on the journey” has multiple connotations and is seen as a pilgrim who carries his fate to the final destination. This is a reference to another dimension of everyday life, a new approach to the journey itself, and to a sharpened attention to nuances, previously hidden from the human being. A pilgrimage to Santiago is not always linked with a clear religious motivation, however, I would like to propose the thesis that the person who enters the pilgrimage route becomes a pilgrim, at least in some sense.³ Being a “man on a journey,” he or she has the opportunity to have a unique experience, even if it is not intentionally named spiritual or religious. Although the *Camino* provides a natural space for making the journey for religious reasons, it is not inaccessible to all those who travel on the road for entirely different motives. A certain transformation from a human being who simply travels on a given route (in this case, the Christian route leading to the tomb of St. James the Apostle) into a human being-pilgrim, may occur spontaneously, unknowingly, without prior planning or stimulation. This is to show that the very decision to enter the road may become an opportunity to encounter God both for those who wish to deepen their relationship with God in faith and for those who do not know him.

For the description of the “man on a journey” *Camino* represents the moment in which a person leaves his or her existing status quo. This may be done in response to the need for change or the desire for inner development, rejection of the current way of living, or the desire to spend some time in isolation to set oneself and relationships

³ Paweł Plichta deals with interesting distinctions in the context of the cultural, religious, and sociological understanding of pilgrimage. The author specifies the profile and the ethos of the modern pilgrim, both in the historical-cultural, and religious aspects, sketching the primary meaning and significance of traversing the routes of St. James (Plichta 2016b, 263–92).

with others in order, or to find a solution to specific problems. Setting off and embarking on the journey may be fascinating but also terrifying, it may be intriguing and paralyzing, provocative but also shocking; it may inspire hope but may also bring fear. This decision is certainly associated with hardship, psycho-physical effort, and entry into the unknown, however, it is also an attempt to interpret one's own deep motivations. The human being on the journey may not immediately know these motivations or be aware of them, instead, they may crystallize with each step. Hence, I think that the experience of the *Camino* impacts directly or indirectly the interpretation of one's individual style of pilgrimage, walking the road towards a set goal (in this case, reaching a holy place) in order to i.a. enter into a dialogue with the cultural, social, and religious reality that one encounters, to strengthen one's own identity, to deepen one's Christian consciousness, and, in a way, to manifest one's adherence to religious values, to bear witness to one's faith (Stefaniak 2018, 70).

Józef Tischner's conception is the second perspective on experience, while the idea of the journey itself leads to questions about truth, goodness, and beauty, as well as about losing one's way, going astray, emptiness, and evil. His philosophy of the encounter (also called the philosophy of drama) can be read in the context of a way in which the presence of the other self becomes a space of hope or fear, affirmation or negation, victory or defeat, doom or rescue, good or evil. This sets a broad research perspective and brings out new aspects of the interpretation of the *Camino*. The three-element view of the human being as a dramatic being refers to the concept of the journey because on it the human being experiences oneself and others in a specific time and on a specific stage, as well as meets the other face to face (Tischner 2006, 5).

Tischner treated experience as an event, which was something impossible to be duplicated or reproduced. An event entails all that is surprising, unique, and original, which cannot be enclosed into a scheme or framework. The experience that is constituted each time in a given event is distinguished by indelible novelty, potentiality, and its own specificity. To the experiencing subject, it not only opens a place for a multiplicity of experiences, observations, and feelings, but also provides a foreground for a deeper understanding of oneself, others, God, and reality. Tischner has stressed repeatedly that, in fact, we are given only one reliable experience. It is the experience of the Other, irreducible in his or her being and value. In meeting the Other, all things, including presence, participation, gestures, words, and looks, acquire a new meaning each time. According to Tischner, the experience of the self cannot be complete without a reference to the self of another person which, in the event of the encounter, takes the real form of a dramatic tension between good and evil. Tischner's experience of the Other is, *in fact*, an act of attaining the witness of the Other, the Other's witness, and witnessing of the established relationship. Becoming a witness in an experience is in itself an interesting perspective on the fate of the human being and his vocation in the world. If we are to agree with the author of the *The Philosophy*

of *Drama*, the witness, as the subject experiencing the Other, reaches to the deepest “layers of existence where questions arise about the meaning and meaninglessness of all that exists” (Tischner 1980, 142). According to Tischner, experience is not a simple compilation of facts but a complex and creative process of an encounter between I and You, dramatized by their personal freedom. The two “selves” that encounter one another, with their different biographies, hierarchies, conditioning, and resources, experience one another, but also their own selves, in that event. They also experience something that happens between them, namely, a series of often non-verbal, nuanced signs, gestures, symbols, impressions, or feelings that repeatedly create an original composition that plays out over time.

Witnessing understood this way is not only about a dry compilation of facts into a certified chronology of events but about the addition of meaning that one wants to leave to others in witnessing. One witnesses for a reason and in the name of something. The purposefulness of the witnessing is to serve something or someone, it can help with something or even cause a certain action. In witnessing, one attests to the truth and to that which refers one to the source of the truth. The multifaceted character of experience in which the power of witnessing is made apparent flows through the Other and, thanks to him, the meaning and significance of one’s own self acquires a new and valuable optic each time.

The reading of the *Camino* with the aid of Tischner’s concepts sheds a new light on pilgrimage, as well as on being “on a journey” in the senses approximated earlier in this paper. It is worth adding that without this “stage” there would be no place for the encounter to occur (Tischner 2006, 12). If one treats the *Camino* route as a temporal and spatial event endowed with meaning, dramatized with questions about the meaning and meaninglessness of everything that exists, it turns out that the *Camino* can be an important condition of the encounter and a unique cognitive, actional, and relational opportunity. Thus appears the potential development of a person, unforeseen opportunities for change, encounters, and entry into areas of humanity that may have been hitherto little known. Of course, there is also the possibility of a person’s regression, and his or her spiritual diminution, as, to use Tischner’s language, at the root of every encounter there is the agatological dimension of the drama of good and evil. Roads and pathless wildernesses, understood physically and symbolically or metaphorically, reveal the ambiguous implications of thinking about the human being. By thinking of meeting the Other on the journey, Tischner presents numerous moments of transition of “with” into “for.” Being with the Other and accompanying the Other on a journey is, at the same time, being “for” the other. This is how a community is formed, in which one experiences not only one’s own self in oneself but also the other who, in a way, becomes me, while I become him. On the journey, the relationship between Me and You enters the optics of “Us” where their mutual history takes place.

3. The Phenomenon of Silence on the Road to Self-Discovery

Among the host of valuable phenomena that reveal the specific character of the *Camino*, silence deserves a more in-depth presentation, as it reveals the specificity of the journey understood in metaphorical terms, as well as the peculiarity of that journey. Capturing the essence of silence as such is extremely difficult, which is indicated by its heterogeneous, complex, and multifaceted nature. Silence expands the problem of human experience onto new meanings, however, their description encounters a number of barriers. What is revealed on the *Camino* thanks to silence can serve a deeper discourse on the conditions of human subjectivity and its reference to others and the world,⁴ however, it certainly does not exhaust the issue. It seems that the attempt to describe the silence that becomes evident on the *Camino* may become not so much a counterbalance to the “civilization of noise” (Sztumski 2012, 139) as the point of departure in the characterization of a certain “pedagogy of silence” (Olearczyk 2010, 9), which, in turn, in the discourse on the problems experienced by the modern human being, seems to play an integral role in the process of self-discovery, development (including spiritual development), and the understanding of reality by the individual. Thus, the theme of silence can be addressed not only from the perspective of responsibility for silence or education to silence (Olearczyk 2010, 11) but also responsibility for one’s self in the horizon of silence (which forms, develops, takes shape, experiences itself, others, and the world within that silence).

Today, the concept of silence qualifies as an interdisciplinary category and is developed on the grounds of philosophy, ethics, theology, mysticism, psychology, and pedagogy, as well as broadly understood art and culture. This implies that there are various ways of defining and understanding silence and multi-directional interpretations of silence. Significant hypotheses are related to the stipulation of silence in human life on different levels of the human being’s functioning in the world. It is emphasized, i.a. that silence is a certain answer to the needs of the modern human being, an alternative to the ubiquitous noise and chaos (resulting, for example, from the information noise and technicization), a bridge between the external and internal worlds, an aid to the explanation of a range of social and cultural phenomena, and a space for reflection (Olearczyk 2010, 21–31).

In the essay “Filozofa wstęp do ciszy” (A Philosopher’s Introduction to Silence) Jacek Filek distinguishes between four basic meanings of silence. He speaks of relative silence, absolute silence, ambivalent, and dialogic silence. Yet, he does not develop the theme of silence in the absolute sense, because, as he claims “it is the silence of death. We have no participation in it” (Filek 2014, 90).

⁴ Other phenomena, such as freedom, space, relationship, presence, trace, time, beauty, responsibility, love, hardship and suffering, and the experience of trial, manifested on the *Camino* and bringing out many characteristics of the human being as a “being on a journey,” go beyond the scope of this study and will require further research elsewhere.

Relative silence has many forms. One can point to its narrower and broader dimension. In the narrow sense, silence is the absence of sound and is gradable; in the broad sense, meanwhile, silence is metaphorical and can be “perceived” in a certain way.

The ambivalence of silence, in turn, may involve a situation where “we demand silence even though we do not desire it at all. We demand silence on the one hand so that we can listen on the other” (Filek 2014, 93). Silence in itself is neither positive nor negative. Its value is determined by the circumstances, context, and horizon in which it exists.

Filek also distinguishes between external and internal silence, which Plato called the “eyes of the soul,” i.e. a peculiar sense of internal insight into things and matters that are inaccessible to the sense of sight. In the second sense, Filek adds an analogy to the sense of hearing. There is, he argues, a specific “hearing” of the soul that makes it possible to hear what happens within a person and in the person’s self. Then, a person has a share in the inner silence, which is

the opposite of the turmoil of thoughts, the rush of desires, the jostle of feelings [...] The inner silence is the condition for hearing the voice of conscience. It can be understood in the Christian sense – as the voice of God in the human being. However, there is also a more universal interpretation of that voice; namely, the existential analysis of conscience, which understands it as the voice of the inner self, silenced by everyday business, by life subjected to the dictatorship of the most cunning dictator that hides behind the anonymous *one does* (Filek 2014, 92).

The last type of silence analyzed by Filek is the dialogic silence which occurs between a given I and You. He emphasizes that “Silence between us is a form of quietness, and quietness is a form of speech. Quietness speaks and its speech may have various meanings; therefore, quietness is meaningful” (Filek 2014, 92). The dialogic silence takes the form of a meeting, as the story of I and You is played out in it. Filek maintains that “we experience the fullness of the encounter when we can hear the inner voice of the other person in the dialogic inner silence” (Filek 2014, 92).

The reflection on silence and quietness, which is often associated with it, gives rise to the great meditative-mystical-religious, as well as poetic and philosophical tradition, which left its mark on fiction writing with their deep symbolism and endowed them with great value in describing the human being and his struggle in the world. However, it is worth adding that silence and quietness should not be treated as synonyms, as the distinction between them contains a powerful load of meaning and can refer to divergent aspects of human existence and condition.⁵ Important

⁵ The difference between silence and quietness is exemplified by the poetry of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, who clearly separates these two terms. He does this using his own expressions: “monologists of quietness,” as

contributions to the philosophical account of quietness (its basic functions and dimensions) are made by the reflections of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger; however, they do not provide a clear definition of silence (especially when it comes to the specific type of silence, which is the inner silence). In Wittgenstein's work we are dealing with the discovery of the linguistic inexpressibility of what we experience in the realm of values; meanwhile, according to Heidegger, the voice of one's conscience or the quest for truth can only be heard in the mode of silence (Olearczyk 2010, 88–91).

In an attempt to grasp the deep meaning of reality, literate authors, as well as hermits, and Desert Fathers pointed to the indispensable role of silence in human existence, which gives expression to an increasingly clear perception of the world and the phenomena that occur in it. In the complex meanderings of the human being's interior, silence turned out to be the site where values and virtues emerged but also the site of combat and struggle against temptations. Silence and quietness have in a sense become the human being's link with oneself or with God, and, paradoxically, even with others (which was expressed i.a. in the theory of "quiet communication" in Martin Buber's work) or in Cyprian Kamil Norwid's "theory of silence," which was the outcome of the analysis and references to the classics of earlier poetry such as Ignacy Krasicki (with his "Pochwała milczenia" [In Praise of Quietness] and the essay titled "Milczenie" [Quietness]) or Józef Koblański (the author of "Milczenie" [Quietness]).

After the Desert Fathers (Kurek 2018, 10–15) one should mention that it is silence that invites one to penetrate deeper and deeper into the layers of spiritual reality and asceticism and becomes the condition of the clarity of the mind and purity of the senses. It is, among other things, in the silence of the inner life that the human being's spiritual struggle, as well as prayer and union with God are taking place. It provides the space for the deepest connection and relationship with the Creator. On the one hand, silence is also the space of dynamization of temptations and abandonment of the chosen path; on the other hand, however, it is also the space for the optics of inner victory and fidelity to the chosen path, as well as purification and entry onto the path of virtue.

In the contemporary literature on the subject, it is important to note the book by Alain Corbin *A History of Silence: From the Renaissance to the Present Day*, in which he interprets silence not only as the "absence of noise" but also as the necessary condition for concentration, "listening to one's self, meditation, prayer, day-dreaming, and creativity" (Corbin 2019, 9). The problem noticed by the author

distinguished from the "dramatic silence." Quietness requires the involvement and decision of the subject and is either a consequence of historical events or (as was the case with the Pythagoreans) an attempt to contemplate the inexpressible. Meanwhile, silence has multiple meanings and exceeds the subject's capacity for articulating it. Silence cannot be verbalized or defined. Its definition remains vague and imprecise (Śniedziewski 2007, 28–29).

is outlined at the level of the possible drowning of silence in noise or is caused by the fear of silence. Silence is inherent in the human condition and is an important axis of self-discovery, creativity, and contemplation of truth. For Corbin, the place of imposing silence is the figure of the cathedral and the desert, which represent a place of listening, insight, deeper perception of phenomena and deeper self-discovery, as well as the sublime as a real human need (Błaszczuk 2020, 218). Thus, we can speak here of “inner” silence, that is, a very peculiar reality available to the human being, who participates in it and experiences it in a subjective way. The basic functions of silence in the internal aspect can include, among others: cognitive-reflective and transcendental, existential-axiological and personal-creative, metaphysical-contemplative, religious-mystical, as well as personal-communicative functions (Szmyd 2014, 204).

The cathedrals and the desert, revealing fundamental aspects of silence and its role in human life, mark a certain way of looking at the journey, not only in temporal and material aspects, but also in terms of the infinite and immaterial.

There are numerous kinds of silence on the *camino* and ways to “detect” or encounter it, which can compound the myriad attempts at describing it. It can present itself as a characteristic belonging to something and at the same time as a condition of, for example, a person’s subjective relation to God, another person, nature, or even the cosmos as a whole.

Silence can appear at one time as a need or desire, at another time as a reaction or even a necessity to end what has been disturbed. It can itself fascinate and attract or evoke trepidation and fear, nevertheless “the promotion of silence as a value appears as a necessity in the context of the problem of noise [...]. The disproportion between the culture of silence and the culture of noise manifests itself as a fundamental problem of civilization” (Olearczyk 2010, 31).

There are many facets, types and meanings of silence on the *camino*, appearing in different contexts, places and times. Some are related to the laws of nature and their rhythm, others enter the realm of human experience and subjectivity, or even spirituality. The span, surprising facets and ways of occurrence, as well as the metaphorical references of silence, reveal the fundamental rationale for which the human being as an individual stands before the question of the meaning of his own Self and self in reference to what is outside the Self. Silence appears not only as a temporal-spatial event, but also as a condition for self-discovery or deeper interaction or the emergence of that which has hitherto been hidden from the human being. Silence often becomes a place for the germination of thoughts and actions, but also a source of loneliness and possible emptiness. When lived and experienced, it simultaneously opens “the possibility of reflection on the inexpressible” (Śniedziwski 2007, 27), the incomprehensible and infinite. This points to its metaphysical dimension, where questions about the meaning and significance of what is are born. Silence also “helps to achieve internal discipline, which requires inner balance, adherence to

rules, norms. Silence is a keystone, a connector, a kind of unity between the visible and material and the hidden and spiritual” (Olearczyk 2010, 37–38).

Silence can be found or evoked, surprising a person or being anticipated by them. It can testify to something or indicate something, signify a situation of tranquility, a steady flow of time and an unbroken harmonious weave of events, or reveal a situation of tension.

“Before” and “after” associated with silence reveal its different aspects and dimensions. Another dimension of silence is the moment that foreshadows it, and a different one that creates it after a given event. An example is the silence before the storm, which cannot be compared to the silence after the storm.

Silence does not have a permanent character, so it escapes simple generalizations or definitions. Something or someone can disturb silence or break it, interfere with it or deliberately establish it, order it or demand it. Silence can be interrupted but also evoked in a given situation. The goals and nature of silence may vary, but what seems relevant to the evolution of a person’s path in life contains the profound truth of the overwhelming power of silence, affecting a person from within and without.

In an attempt to define silence more precisely, it is worth looking at its essential properties. It has the characteristics of an “awakener” (e.g., of reflection, emotion and other states in a person), a “therapist” (e.g. by calming and taming a person’s fears or emotions, or a condition for listening to oneself), a “motivator” (for discovery, exploration of both one’s own inner self by a person and the environment), and a hostess (as an invitation to enter into various relationships either as an opportunity to realise many new things, or as giving a space to retreat and through it discover what is new in oneself, others or the world). Thus, on the *camino* one can distinguish, experience or observe, among other things: the almost absolute, unbroken silence of nature and its own rhythm, the silence of sleeping cities, towns and villages of a slightly different nature experienced during the night hike, the silence of one’s own thoughts, emotions, feelings, fantasies and fears, the silence that invites one to undertake hardship, effort and sometimes risk, the silence that subdues turmoil, tumult, noise and chaos in various dimensions, the silence of heat or rain, the silence of seclusion and solitude, the silence of beauty and its contemplation, silence as a space of freedom and at the same time its prerequisite, silence as an opportunity for self-transformation, bringing one closer to understanding oneself or reaching the deeper layers of one’s own Self.

Silence, as the opposite of voice and sound, sharpens listening or mobilizes the movement of thoughts in unexpected directions. It can call or exhort to do something, or herald something to come. It can scare and frighten or calm and soothe. It certainly plays a significant role in a person’s life, and is even sometimes a key interval in the hustle and bustle of a particular period of life. Silence is also the antonym of noise, all clamor, turmoil and hubbub. It has its own eloquence, and can even often act as a kind of “speech.” Silence “speaks” and communicates both to the one

who participates in it and to the one who generates it. It can “speak” with itself, as it were, provoking the subject to reflect or to speak, it can “speak” to someone, as if speaking to his inner self, but it can also “speak” about the “self” in a specific moment of its being. The “self” of a person can in and through silence discover layers that he or she would not otherwise experience. It seems that in silence one understands oneself better, in silence emotional, spiritual, ethical and aesthetic sensitivity is sharpened. The intellect in silence enters a slightly different, so to speak, more concentrated register of functioning, and this opens up space for new areas of understanding. Silence is the prerequisite for the appearance of what cannot be heard or perceived in the noise. It is through it and in it that new possibilities, surprising moments of experience, different intuitions, non-standard approaches to circumstances, thoughts or people are highlighted.

The functioning of a person in silence enters a completely different register of communing also with another person, which gives rise to various areas of cognition, knowledge, or the birth of virtues. In silence one can experience the emergence of nuances of relations with the Other that are different from before, and new facets of reality (not necessarily positive). All this can make silence even a necessary condition for the emergence of what has hitherto been dormant or dulled by everyday life in a person.

Silence, as a condition for new insights, deeper analysis or sharper concentration on something/someone, is one of the more fascinating features of the *camino route*. It is encountered on a daily basis, especially in the morning glow of the day, when villages and towns are still asleep or are only tentatively initiating movement, interrupting the nocturnal stillness and almost soundless existence of nature. The silence on the *camino* surrounds the walker and permeates his consciousness. Whether a person wants it or not, silence dominates, showing on the one hand the beauty and often untouched character of streams, forests, meadows and mountains, and on the other hand highlights a certain mode of the various hardships one must face to reach the destination. Silence can trigger emotion, because it refers, as it were, to the original harmony of the world, to that which is often scarred by time, destructive human activity or unfavorable circumstances. It therefore provokes the posing of questions about the human condition, about the ultimate meaning of the human being and his pilgrimage in the world. It is in silence that these questions can become an exposition of what troubles, torments and puzzles the human being, or what is his hope, longing and deepest desire.

In walking the *camino*, silence reveals its own character, which must be distinguished from self-isolation provoked by silence. It is one thing to seek a quiet place for contemplation, and another to evoke contemplation with the silence one experiences in the moment. Hence, silence on the *camino* can be interpreted as a gift with which a person can do something (positive or negative). One can enter it with his or her whole self, listen, as it were, to what is possible to hear, understand, contemplate

in it, or drown it out with distraction, chatter, a series of unnecessary activities. The disposition of the person, depending on the day and physical strength, plays a huge role here, nevertheless the reflective nature of silence, which virtually imposes itself on the walker, can become a valuable opportunity for future transformation, acquiring new sensitivity and giving birth to creative ideas.

Experiencing the Other (human or God) in silence carries a lot of meaning. It turns out that the “silent communication” that Martin Buber perceptively described in the philosophy of dialogue on the *camino* becomes the dominant reality of communication. Silence is the fullness of the word. In spite of silence, and *de facto* thanks to it, the creative “in-between” of I and You is constituted, which in its form and content often communicates much more than verbal speech. The point here, however, is not to give primacy to silence over sound, the absence of words over speech, but to show its overwhelming influence on the nascent relationship of I and You. On the *camino*, the building of relationships in silence is clearly experienced, and not only because physical fatigue, irritation (from heat or cold) or other external obstacles often prevail, but because silence and the time that flows through it give a certain atmosphere, ambience and mood to the subjects. It is worth noting that Martin Buber did not narrow down silent communication to either the intimate relationship of lovers or mystical shared silence with the other. By giving the example of two people meeting by chance on the route, Buber argues that the mere attunement to the other, despite the lack of knowledge about him or her, already “brings out” the word. The experience of the other, the dialogue with this person, took place on the plane of this kind of interaction, where spoken speech was not a necessary condition for communication. Well, “silence [alone] brings it to the neighbor, for whom it was, after all, intended, and who accepts it, like any true destiny that befalls him or her, without reservation [...]. For where people, if only without words, rid themselves of mutual reservations, the dialogical word occurred in a sacramental way” (Buber 1992, 210).

Silence does not remove difficulties or potential conflicts with the other. Nor does it guarantee a successful chain of events or the occurrence of facts, but it does give space for overcoming and solving various problems in a different setting of interaction between I and You.

It is also impossible not to associate silence with the sight and sense of beauty and the harmonious passage of time. Silence refers back to what is further away, as if beyond the horizon. It reveals the absolute essence of beauty (of nature, of relationship with another, of one’s own life). It transports one, as it were, beyond time, or in other words, shows the passage of time in a different perspective, where universal values, perhaps sometimes set aside in everyday life, count.

The *camino*, in the analysis of silence, reveals itself as an event that can transform the I and You and approaches to many things. Moreover, on the *camino* a distance from what escapes or dominates in the practice of daily life, what captivates

or delights, what prevails or is in deficit is born, and this gives inner insight into hitherto unknown or little known corners of one's own being, one's limitations but also one's potential. This does not imply the exclusivity of this experience in reaching one's own Self or better understanding others. On the other hand, the *camino* provides an impetus for change, for an unorthodox approach, and opens up a space for reflection that may have its far-reaching consequences in the future.

In silence, the "in-between" of the I and the given You is highlighted. A kind of intersubjectivity is established in it, the quality of which is different from that without silence. In spoken speech, intersubjectivity manifests itself in verbal communication, which must meet various criteria of conversation. In silence, on the other hand, a completely different character of bond with the Other is established, one that does not demand expression in words, but perhaps just as strong and lasting.

Being near, being in relation or with respect to the other, and being for the other reveals the uniqueness of the phenomenon of silence. To be present is to be awake, to see the Other at one's side. Companionship on the journey is very often discovered through silence and in being embraced by silence. To be present is to be responsive to what the other brings to the relationship, to what he or she brings as his or her own experience, to be attentive to his or her needs, desires and purpose, and to be sensitive to his or her flaws and qualities. Presence, not so much as a physical filling of space by the Other and your presence beside him or her, but as an intentional orientation and "tuning in" to the Other, requires both awareness of otherness and acceptance of it. The presence of the Other on the *camino* is not just walking together, traversing the trail together, but interacting with each other on different levels and planes. These center in the "in-between" of I and You and, depending on the situation, change, intensify or fade away. The dynamics and variability of circumstances as well as the linear passage of time mean that the interaction can go through different phases, stages and degrees of intensification. Then, the very presence of I and You is constantly transforming and evolving. Therefore, an extremely diverse kind of bond is forged not infrequently in difficulties, overcoming barriers and encountering problems, and even in spite of them. There exists, thanks to problems, a vast array of values, enabling solutions to be found. There is, at the same time, a powerful reservoir of possibilities that can and should be made effective in transcending difficulties and finding resolution. In the *camino* experience, the multiplying difficulties reveal the sense of struggle, trial, strength of will and character. On the *camino*, the problems that occur (for example, relational, linguistic, organizational, or related to psycho-physical resilience), paradoxically, can fulfill the condition of something valuable in the experience. If it were not for difficulties and problems, there would be no progress in the cultivation and development of ethical attitudes, but also in seeing one's own limitations and flaws. It is often against the background of problems that what is creative, good and valuable in a person is highlighted and brought out. The process of getting to know oneself and the Other is forged in the crucible of

various experiences, which are often the resultant and mixture of antagonistic values pulsating in the human being, but on the *camino* they take the form of an essential condition for the decision to enter the route, walk it and complete it.

In summary, the essence of silence is manifested in its depth. Through participation in it, a person can learn more about himself and others, it can be “vertical in nature, referring to God, and horizontal, involving contact with people. It is a subjective, individual experience on the way to perfection. It allows finding values in oneself and actualizing them in action, dynamizing one’s own and social life by developing a certain aspect of the world of values” (Olearczyk 2010, 41).

Conclusions

The issue of the human being in reference to the way carries a wide spectrum of meaning and can reveal new areas of interpretation. Showing a human being on a particular route, *camino*, not only uncovers new dimensions of experience, but also, thanks to it, points to a specific understanding of pilgrimage. Both the departure from the synthesized concept of Karol Wojtyła and Józef Tischner allowed a closer definition of the specific nature of the *camino* as a place where the irreducibility of the human person, endowed with a unique interior and the possibilities of self-discovery, was articulated. The phenomenon of silence, on the other hand, showed the depth of the experience and proved to be an important foundation for understanding, experiencing and perceiving the *camino* in a new light. The journey itself was shown in a dynamic perspective. Its own dynamics, as well as the dynamics of the human subject, were highlighted. The dialectics of the two dynamics permeate each other, enabling the spiritual, ethical and social formation of the human being.

Summing up the reflections about the human being on a journey and in relation to the Camino de Santiago, it is worth outlining some conclusions.

First of all, the *camino* not only becomes a chance to calm oneself and turn to spirituality, but also to experience transformation. What is present in pilgrimage is a separation from everyday life, entering the realm of learning, experiencing and perceiving differently than before. Through the analysis of silence in its various dimensions, the *camino* is shown as a condition for entering a new area of relationships but also as a basis for possible changes in a person.

Secondly, the *camino* has an inclusive character, not excluding anyone because of any differences. Cultural-ethnic-worldview pluralism, allows an individual to relate themselves to others to gain a more insightful view of their own destiny and the purpose of their existence. Through dialogue with one’s own self, with another person in an encounter or relationship with God, there is an expanded perspective of awareness of the journey as such and that of the individual, which refers to the free choices

of the human being. In this view, the *camino* becomes a “bridge of hope” (Plichta 2016a, 209) on the path of encounter with others and God, a place of coexistence, trust-building and even possible metanoia.

Thirdly, the *camino*, in the aspect of the cited analysis of silence, appears as an event that is marked by potential, both in the perspective of the human being’s self-discovery and his relationship to others and God, as well as to the surrounding reality. Silence on the *camino*, in its various forms, can open the subject to a change in approach to their own life, expand the room for reflection, and inspire new insights into their own destiny. In addition, the culture of silence emerging on the *camino* can become a counterbalance to the culture of noise, which the human being is exposed to from both the spiritual side and his functioning in the world.

Fourthly, the *camino* becomes a contemporary perspective, a sign and even a testimony to the progression of spirituality in the broadest sense. Pilgrimage to Santiago provides for many non-believers or those who do not engage in religious practices the conditions for a kind of revitalization of spirituality, and for believers the building, consolidation and strengthening of their religious identity. All this means that the phenomenon of secularization is likely to decline and affect individual societies less and less.

Fifth, paraphrasing the philosophical approaches presented, the *camino* can establish for the people who meet on it “a world of important and unimportant matters, momentous and trivial moments, sacred times and everyday times” (Tischner 2006, 13), which becomes a constant way of rediscovering one’s own participation in the being of the other, one’s vocation in the world, and one’s relationship with God.

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