Contemporary ‘people from hideouts’ and the problem of the lack of social involvement

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present Tischner’s concept of ‘people from hideouts’ in the context of contemporary problems of lack of social involvement, characteristic of Polish society. According to Tischner’s intention, the concept of ‘people from hideouts’ is understood as a manifestation of the pathology of hope, which, in my opinion, is expressed in the reluctance to participate in social life and fulfill civic duties. The paper presents key issues for Tischner’s concept related to the role of hope in human life and fear as an exemplification of an abandonment for hope. The text also describes concepts related to values, freedom, and the role of encounter and dialogue in interpersonal relations.

Keywords Hideout · Hope · Activity · Choice · Citizen

Introduction

The philosopher and clergyman Reverend Józef Tischner (1931–2000) was a keen observer of social reality, especially of the condition of people living in Polish society, which, in the 1970s, was very good, according to the official propaganda of the communist state. This decade was called the period of “small stabilization.” It was argued that communist Poland was developing very well, and its citizens were living a life of ease and happiness. Tischner, like many Poles, did not accept the assurances of the propaganda. He believed that the moral and spiritual condition of society was much worse than that revealed by the propaganda; that hidden beneath the official slogans about the strength of the state and the wealth of citizens there was much fear, suffering and loneliness.

In that period, Tischner read and analyzed the work of the contemporary Polish psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński (1918–1972), who was considered not only an outstanding medical doctor, but also a sensitive humanist. In 1972, Kępiński

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published his last book, *Psychopatie*, which Tischner reviewed in *Znak* magazine in 1978. Kępiński's considerations concerning various types of mental disorders became Tischner's tool for describing the condition of a significant part of the society living under the rule of the communist government, as well as a starting point for building the original concept of 'people in hideouts' that was synthesized with the communist state. Tischner would later return to this concept in his philosophical and journalistic publications.

Psychopatie was written from the perspective of a humanist, as were Kępiński's earlier works, not from that of a physician focused on etiology and symptomatology. Kępiński used to say that 'there is no patient, there is a man.' In his book, he does not focus on the description of the causes, symptoms, and typology of mental disorders, but, above all, he tries to understand the man. He reflects deeply on human emotions, sensations, and attitudes. He also tries to find ways to influence the change in personality of those struggling with mental problems, so that they can function in harmony with themselves and actively participate in social life. According to Kępiński, a man is characterized by openness to himself and the world. It is in our nature to exchange information with the environment, an exchange which the psychiatrist calls information metabolism. Kępiński believes that the striving towards truth is the basic principle of information metabolism. According to him, disturbances of information metabolism may lead to mental disorders (Kępiński 2013).

According to Tischner, Kępiński's ideas are the greatest achievements of Polish thought about man after 1945 (Tischner 2002, p. 178). Tischner regarded Kępiński not so much as a psychiatrist, but primarily as a philosopher and ethicist. Kępiński's approach to man, which corresponded well with Tischner's views on interpersonal relations, is regarded as an encounter based on trust and dialogue. These relations are disturbed when at least one of the participants hides something, puts on a mask, and builds a false image of themselves (Tischner 2003). It is worth noticing that Kępiński, while reflecting on the functioning of man, remained under the strong influence of Gabriel Marcel's personalism. French personalism was also one of the key intellectual inspirations of Tischner.

While reading *Psychopatie*, Tischner was moved by Kępiński's reflection on the dysfunction of those with psychasthenia (personality disorder related to obsessive-compulsive neurosis, emotional ambivalence, and impossibility of making decisions), anankastia (a series of obsessive-compulsive behaviors, strong emotional reactions against the will of a person) and hysteria (nowadays, referred to as conversion disorders, characterized by excessive extraversion, emotional exhibitionism, emotional dysregulation, theatricality of behavior, and fear for the state of one's health) (Gabbard 2015).

Referring to the diseases discussed by Kępiński, Tischner first noticed the lack of hope and, correspondingly, the lack of effort to change one's private or public life. Tischner called those struggling with these diseases 'people from hideouts.' In his review, he focused especially on people affected by depression, which he called the disease of will and hope. By transferring Kępiński's considerations from psychiatry to philosophy, especially ethics and social philosophy, Tischner revealed that

the problems that are the source of mental disorders of a small group of diagnosed patients are in fact problems of the entire enslaved society.

As I mentioned, psychopathy, according to Kępiński, is caused by information metabolism disorders, which in turn are caused by people withdrawing from social relations. Why do people withdraw from these relationships? Tischner, who follows Kępiński, blames contemporary civilization, which is a source of fear (Kępiński 2013). Tischner thinks that fear, with its roots in civilization, becomes particularly destructive in authoritarian countries, where people, fearing the authorities, do not express their beliefs openly, and instead put on masks, and pretend to be someone else. Tischner, reading Kępiński's ideas philosophically, points out that fear is a disposition acquired by observing other people and by learning from them. Because others, being afraid, retreat to hideouts, we do act similarly (Tischner 2003). It is in this way that looking for hideouts is no longer an exceptional attitude. It becomes a group attitude, appropriate for the whole society or at least a significant part of it.

What is striking in Tischner's reading of Kępiński's insights is the shift of reflective emphasis on the problem of depression from psychiatry to social philosophy and the ascription of ethical significance to depression. Depression, as understood by Tischner, is not primarily a disease afflicting individuals, but a typical condition of the society. It is expressed by social orientations and attitudes which are anchored in personal delusions and which prompt escape from social activity for the sake of a fearful protection of self-interest.

The purpose of this paper is to depict the function of 'people from hideouts' presented in Tischner's writings. The view, expressed more than a quarter of a century ago, that the lack of social activity results from the absence of hope, openness to other people, and a deviation from values, is still relevant. What is more, while analyzing today's social reality, one can conclude that one is dealing with the rise of a specific social disposition aimed at locating hideouts and retreating to them. This disposition is characteristic, not only of people diagnosed with depression, but also of those with disorders that involve deficiencies of hope, values, and freedom.

'People from hideouts'

Tischner's concept of 'people from hideouts' offers a reflection of the role of hope in human life, the significance attributed to values, and the role of other people and their personal space in the life of a man. First, I will discuss the role of hope, and then will turn to examination of values and freedom.

Hope, values, and freedom in man's life

Tischner's thinking about hope was inspired mainly by Gabriel Marcel's insights. The common core of the ideas of both philosophers is the central place of hope in human experience. For Marcel, hope permeates all human activities. What is more, it is constitutive of personality. Hope is situated in human consciousness. It is not a motive for or cause of human action, but without it man would not be able to act

at all. Like Marcel, Tischner believed that hope had the ability to restore a person's freedom, to liberate her from darkness and slavery. However, in order for such a scenario to be realized in human life, a person must be active and committed, because it will not come about without human participation. In short, using the title of the well-known book by Marcel, man must be on the way all the time, he must be a traveler, a *homo viator* (Marcel 1962).

Hope, according to Tischner, is an opportunity to be open to the exploration of identity, one's role in the world, and relationships with other people. Hope matches the symbol of a pilgrim traveling towards destination future. This destination is determined by hope. For Tischner, deliberations on hope are inseparably connected to ethical issues. Hence, he speaks of the pilgrim's ethos, which is identical with the ethos of hope (Tischner 2003).

Human life requires personal involvement, in other words, action directed by hope. It is a link binding man to the world, making the world understandable. Hope is the most appropriate perspective of discovering the truth about the world, about God and, above all, about oneself. According to Tischner, hope is a sign that man trusts God. This allows people to see their failings, weaknesses or falls in a different light. Hope also helps us distinguish between evil and misfortune, which, although taking the form of a disaster, is not evil. Tischner, speaking about hope, also emphasized the duty that is placed on every human being, the duty to strengthen one's own hope, which requires care and concern from a human being (Tischner 1992).

Hope is not a homogeneous phenomenon. This, in turn, results in the designation of various destinations for the pilgrim, his wanderings along shorter or longer routes. According to Tischner, only a great hope can give direction to our lives. Great hope opens the door to great encounters based on respect, love, and faith. Meager hope can never lead to such encounters; on the contrary, encounters based on meager hope are incomplete, superficial, and often streaked with falseness and fear (Tischner 2003).

It may happen that man's hope grows weak, or, as Tischner says, "gets dwarfed." With the weakening of hope, the space of human life shrinks. Man must leave the previously followed route to hide. A man looks for a hideout to get rid of the burden of the road, where there is no goal or landmarks pointing to the destination. Just as a true wanderer walking without a map or compass feels lost, a man lacking hope does not know where he is. Thus, the only solution is to stop and hide. The hideout gives protection, not only from the challenges posed by life, but also from the world and other people. The hideout is a place where hope gradually diminishes; only its shadow remains, a hope for survival (Tischner 2003).

In his reflections, Tischner, inspired by Max Scheler's material-value ethics, posed a fundamental question about the way in which values manifest themselves in human life. The starting point for these considerations is the Greek concept of *ethos*, meaning the field of life for the living being, an environment, a place to live. The *ethos* of a man has a special character; it is not limited to the physical conditions in which a person lives, but refers instead to relationships with other people. Within these relations, Scheler held that love is the highest value, while Tischner pointed to generosity. Both philosophers agree that disturbances arise in feeling and experiencing values. In this context, Scheler talks about resentment, or moral

self-denial, hatred and hubris, and disruptions in emotional life. Tischner points to melancholy and fear as the conditioning of the attitude of retreating to the hideout. What distinguishes Tischner's thinking from Scheler's is the former's conception of moral choices. For Tischner, the choice is factual. Even not choosing is a form of choice, although such a choice bears the hallmarks of tragedy. An expression of such a tragic choice is the retreat to a hideout (Tischner 2003). According to Scheler, choice must be subordinated to objective norms and the hierarchical order of values. Thus it is a type of normative choice (Węgrzecki 1975).

Hence, people from hideouts made a choice. Instead of accepting the existing values and following them to hope, they gave up and moved to a hideout. By making this choice, they exercised their freedom; instead of being enslaved, they retreated to the hideout, because for them even the hideout is a manifestation of freedom—freedom full of fear for their own good and safety. Man, according to Tischner, has the right to make such a choice, although people refuse to accept higher values, or, as the Cracow philosopher [Tischner] describes it, the objective good (Tischner 2003). Tischner regularly returns to the question of freedom. He claims that we choose the direction of our own lives; that the foundations of the edifice of our own existence depend on us. However, in a massive, like-minded group, the individual's freedom can diminish. Then their choice will be subservient to the will of the majority, an expression of submission to the primacy of mediocrity. This choice, says Tischner, apparently guarantees the individual peace and adaptation, but it can also create existential emptiness and lead directly to the hideout as shelter for individuality. Entering the hideout can take on the form of an escape from oneself, caused above all by the absence of hope and the absence of social relations (Tischner 2003).

According to Tischner, hiding may happen to everybody at a difficult moment in their lives. However, this choice is not final. As long as there is a glimmer of hope in a man, there is a chance that they will overcome their fear and the walls of their hideout will be destroyed. Even the smallest ray of hope gives you the chance to go out towards the light. However, it may also happen that fear, being the source of deep suffering, will turn out to be so great that hope will be diseased. Then, the only remaining hope for man will be the hope of escaping from other people (Tischner 2003). You must care for your own hope, Tischner observes. If we evade the duty of caring for our hope, we contract a disease Tischner calls 'sluggishness of the spirit.' This sluggishness is a kind of pathology of will, sloth, insensitivity to the good that comes in subsequent acts of choice. This sluggishness of spirit, in Tischner's conviction, does not eliminate a man's fear, it only calms him. However, it always stops a man from setting out on the road which leads away from his hideout. Tischner wonders how people in hideouts find the strength to depart their hideouts, despite everything. He answers that this strength can be found primarily in establishing and participating in relationships with other people (Glinkowski 2003).

The role of encountering another man in overcoming fear

In his reflection on how 'people from hideouts' function, Tischner was also inspired by Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of dialogue. Levinas' philosophy was a response

to the experience of twentieth-century, German and Soviet, totalitarianisms symbolized by the tragedies of Auschwitz and Kolyma. According to Levinas, philosophy had always sought to answer the question about the meaning of life, and the crisis of the meaning of life is the expression of the crisis of all Western philosophy. He claimed that the meaning of life lies in dignity, which equals responsibility, especially for another person. Levinas asked what interpersonal relations look like in the context of the experience of totalitarianism. Pointing to the complexity of those relations, Levinas advocated for justice, which is inextricably linked to responsibility for another human being. The condition for achieving such justice is overcoming indifference towards others. The experience of such justice is also encountering another human being, which is participation in the good (Levinas 1991; Gadacz 1991).

Levinas' ideas inspired Tischner who saw the potential to weaken fear and rebuild hope in the encounter with other people (Tischner 2003). Meeting another human being, especially from a hideout, opens up a special dimension of human social experience. According to Tischner, at the beginning, 'people from hideouts' create a space based on rigid rules of communing with other people, and these rules do not take into account the needs of another human being. They aim at pushing the other man away from their safe hideout. People from hideouts try to control another human being, for only when they can control them will their fear diminish. 'People from hideouts' are separated from others and from themselves by a wall of illusions (Tischner 2003). Because they reject values, they also reject the possibility of taking part in a dialogue based on reciprocity. The source of this kind of behavior is lack of hope and freedom based on objective values.

However, Tischner observes that the above attitude does not need to be permanent. Encountering another person may give you a chance to get out of the hideout. What is needed for this? He indicates that people from hideouts need the approving presence of another human being and support in accepting values. For Tischner, the way out of the hideout is also to open ourselves to the truth, that is, to unleash the 'spirit of fostering the truth' in man. 'Being in truth,' according to Tischner, is one of man's basic desires (Tischner 2002). The truth also indicates that man's dignity is indestructible, no matter how low they fall, how deeply they depersonalize themselves in their hideouts. Protection of truth and indestructible human dignity are, according to Tischner, the determinants of genuine courage (Tischner 2003).

'Hideout' as a type of specific social orientation

Reflection on Tischner's concept of 'people from hideouts' prompts a question: Do we deal with people from hideouts in today's culture, and if so, what are the form of their hideouts? Forty years after Tischner's presentation of the concept of 'people from hideouts,' numerous individuals and communities within Polish society manifest inactivity, loss of hope, distortion of axiological orientation or avoidance of interpersonal relations. These manifestations may be surprising today, because the fall of communism, which took place 30 years ago, together with the opening of countless opportunities for the development of individuals and communities,

initiated activity among the people, gave them hope, strengthened their morale and opened them to others.

Out of all the opportunities that have opened to people in hideouts, the most obvious seems to be the possibility of participating in democratic procedures to shape the future of their society and state. Forty years ago, Poles did not have such an ability, which in Tischner's opinion resulted in the withdrawal of many of them to various types of hideouts. Such a withdrawal was an expression of lack of hope for the possibility of changing anything in public life. Yet today, when the possibilities for change are numerous and diverse, such withdrawal is much more difficult to explain.

An example of the current preference for hideouts may be the lack of public involvement in the area of civic activities and duties in the majority of Polish society. As statistics gathered by the National Electoral Commission show, voter turnout has been steadily decreasing since 1989. In the parliamentary elections, organized in 1989, 62.7% of people entitled to vote took part, in 2015 (during the last parliamentary elections) the turnout was 50.92%. In the first round of the presidential election in 1990, 60.63% of those entitled to vote took part, in 1995 almost 65% of those entitled to vote. In comparison, in the last presidential election in 2015, less than half of those entitled to vote took part (48.96%) (Electoral turnout, aggregate data, source: <https://www.pkw.gov.pl>, last access: 29.07.19).

What is more, the low participation in the elections distinguishes Poland even among other post-communist countries. In the list of the average voter turnout in the parliamentary elections for 1990-2007 in post-communist countries, Poland has the lowest turnout (47.31%) among all the countries listed. The highest turnout is reported by such countries as: Slovakia (77.34%), the Czech Republic (75.76%) and Latvia (73.41%). Poland and Lithuania (58.09%) are the only countries where the voter turnout is lower than 60%, although in Lithuania it is still 10% higher than in Poland. In countries such as Estonia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, it is between 60 and 70%, while in Slovenia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia it is above 70%. The disproportion between the country with the lowest turnout (Poland) and the country with the highest turnout (Slovakia) is as much as 30% (Drzonek 2012).

Of course, the lack of activity in elections can be interpreted in multiple ways. The historically established ambivalence of Poles' attitudes towards all social phenomena may underlie this issue. This is how Tischner characterized this aspect of Polish character:

The situation of Poland is characterized by the fact that Poland must experience many opposite ideas at once; ideas appearing elsewhere accumulate one after another in Poland. Before the idea of modernity could blossom here, an opposite idea undermines it, declaring the end of modernity. Before a progressive idea has managed to transform our everyday life - for example, our agriculture - it is undermined by a revelation that progress is empty. Before liberal democracy managed to bring about the rule of law, it is already proclaimed

that ‘democracy does not bring happiness.’ The wounds in Kolyma¹ have not yet healed and we already hear that ‘there was at least no unemployment in communism.’ Similarly with Catholicism: before the faith formed by the *Vaticanum Secundum* flourished, it is already being replaced by the old faith of the Sarmatians. The Polish soul resembles a landscape in which winter and spring want to come together at the same time (Tischner 2015, p. 20).

The dominant absence of electoral activity may be a manifestation of a lack of hope in the power of the individual, but above all the result of the Poles’ lack of trust in authority, which reaches back to the Enlightenment. The history of Poland, since the country lost its sovereignty, has shown that each authority was imposed on the Poles from the outside, and the possibility of choosing rulers was an illusion.² It can be argued that today the citizen does not go to the ballot box mainly because of the absence of hope in being able to change the state, the possibility of giving social reality or the political scene a new shape. Absence of hope is accompanied by lack of trust. The citizen perceives the rulers or contenders for the state government as dishonest, who, under the pretext of caring for the well-being of citizens, will first of all look after their own interests. This conviction is often confirmed by media discourse about tracking scandals and crimes, often used also as an element of struggle between political parties.

A lack of political commitment can also be interpreted as a form of defense against responsibility. If the authorities do not fulfill their obligations or formulate solutions that do not satisfy citizens, citizens can always criticize them with full conviction that they have nothing to do with this state of affairs. However, this conviction is illusory, because it is a manifestation of self-justification, a projection of one’s own faults and negligence onto other people. In Tischner’s words, it is building fortifications within your own hideout.

The walls of the hideout are also built through a distorted understanding of the concept of patriotism. Tischner mentioned this in the essay “Chochół sarmackiej melancholii” (The Strawman of Sarmatian Melancholy). The patriotism characteristic of hideout people often has little to do with activities for the benefit of their homeland, fulfilling their civic duties. People from hideouts perceive patriotism as nationalism and, in extreme cases, chauvinism. These two negative social phenomena are confirmed by people presenting negative social attitudes in their belief that they are endangered by others. ‘Other’ may mean anyone who looks different, prays differently, speaks a different language, or just thinks differently. Every act of contempt or hatred finds its justification in the imagined lack of good will on the part of another human being. This kind of narrative is most often expressed by people in hideouts.

Today, many other social phenomena and processes can be seen, and a certain part of Polish society reacts to them in a manner characteristic of people from hideouts. Tischner’s analyses may be useful, for example, in interpreting the

¹ Kolyma is an informal name of the largest group of Soviet labor camps in the USSR. For Tischner, Kolyma was a symbol of the criminal activity of the totalitarian system.

² Elections in the communist period were also delusions: the absence of opposition parties and regular electoral fraud by the communists made the alleged support for the Communist Party overwhelming.

Poles' reluctance to accept immigrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa, as well as the reluctance of some entrepreneurs to pay taxes to their own state.

Conclusion

Tischner stresses that in order to get out of the hideout, one needs hope, and hope is connected in an inseparable way with values. Tischner distinguishes between two types of experience: agathological experience and axiological experience, the former being more fundamental than the latter. The agathological experience reveals the shortcomings of the world, shows what is negative in surrounding reality, and shows the tragedy of human fate. This experience is the germ of rebellion against reality. Although it lacks full understanding of the causes of rebellion, nonetheless there is a disagreement with what is found. The axiological experience is fuller; it is based on hierarchization, on the search for ultimate goals and priorities grounded in values. This experience is inseparable from thinking according to values, that is, designing actions to change human life. This experience is associated with hope, which gives a sense of strength to action to create changes. This hope, associated with higher values, encourages the need to search, and guides this search for the right way of life (Tischner 2000). Contemporary people from hideouts are ignorant towards negative features of social reality; moreover they reinforce them. It may mark not only their fear of change, but also indicate the problem of devaluation of higher values. What is more, as Tischner points out, the choice to agree with the prevailing evil or to act for social change gives us the opportunity to live in accordance with the values of life without the need to retreat to a hideout (Tischner 2000). When a person is concerned only with her own good, ensuring her prosperity and comfort, then there is no reference to what constitutes the common good.

The examples cited above are the illustrations of the social attitude of not acting in accordance with established activities. Certainly, dispositions of an emotional nature (lack of hope, departure from the objective order of values, delusional attitudes), cognitive dispositions (simplified syntheses, adherence to stereotypical thinking), and behavioral tendencies (lack of participation in political and social life) have many reasons. Some proceed from the history and fate of the Polish nation as well as from changes occurring in social and psychological contexts. However, the genesis of this attitude is best seen in Tischner's reflections on 'people from hideouts' regarding hope and fear, freedom, values, and the role of dialogue in encountering other people.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest I do not have any conflict of interest.

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