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WHERE SHOULD THE "ONTOLOGICAL TURN" TURN? METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL COMMUNITY

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In my research conducted in the community of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Przeworsk, I was searching for a way to understand what the use of charismatic gifts (e.g. speaking in tongues and prophecising) meant to my interlocutors. Inspiration for the study was drawn from the methodological framework of the 'ontological turn', defined by Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen. The present article illustrates how the methodological perspective influenced the research – what it allowed me to see and what it hindered. The conclusion presents the possible routes of evolution for the ontological turn that would make it possible to overcome the mentioned problems.

* * *

Podczas badań przeprowadzonych we wspólnocie Odnowy w Duchu Świętym w Przeworsku, starałam się zrozumieć, jak moi rozmówcy i rozmówczynie rozumieli posługę darem charyzmatycznym. Inspiracją metodologiczną dla moich badań była perspektywa zwrotu ontologicznego (zwłaszcza w rozumieniu Martina Holbraada i Mortena Axela Pedersena). Niniejszy artykuł pokazuje, jak to podejście metodologiczne wpłynęło na moje badania – co pozwoliło mi dostrzec, a co utrudniło. W podsumowaniu staram się przedstawić, w jaki sposób zwrot ontologiczny mógłby się rozwijać, aby przezwyciężyć wcześniej zasygnalizowane problemy.

K e y w o r d s: Ontological turn, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, anthropology of Christianity, spiritual gift

The "ontological turn" is a new rapidly developing trend in anthropology. Its main postulates include conducting conceptual experiments which would allow us to re-evaluate the categories we use as anthropologists. The methodology drew my interest, since my research brought me in contact with terms such as "gift", "opening up", "healing" and "prophecy" – terms which I often felt I understood very differently than my interlocutors did. At the beginning of the study, my core interest lay in investigating how the members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal acquire skills such as praying in tongues, prophesising or translating tongues. Initially, I attempted to describe this process in the categories outlined by scholars specialising in religious socialisation

(mainly drawing from the works of Thomas Csordas and Tanya Luhrmann). The major problem was, however, that in some contexts my interlocutors expressly denied that their abilities could be the result of learning. Instead, they described the process invoking the category of "opening up" to a spiritual gift. In their narratives the term was strictly related to a specific notion of human actions – they perceived themselves as a "channel" for divine activity in the world.

This prompted me to consider the methodology of the ontological turn as the possible means to understanding the terminology employed by my interlocutors. The perspective appeared appropriate as it allowed for the portrayal of these categories as equally deserving of respect and attention as the ones I was using as an anthropologist. In addition, at that time the ontological turn still had a relatively small presence in Polish anthropology[1], which allowed me to hope that I could present the Catholic Charismatic Renewal from a new and insightful perspective. In this paper I show how the ontological turn enabled me to deepen my understanding of what it means to act with God's will.

However, having concluded my field research, I began to wonder to what extent my goals had been reached. What did the ontological turn framework allow me to do, and what did it hinder? Conversations with other scholars (mainly anthropologists, psychologists and philosophers), as well as renewed contact with my interlocutors helped me confront the shortcomings of the approach I had adopted. The present article aims to recount these observations, demonstrating how the methodology of the ontological turn worked in the context of my research and what problems arose from following this approach. I do not presume to be able to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the methodological framework, but only to show its results for a specific research project, assuming that in a different context the issues identified might not be of much importance. When evaluating the ontological turn, I considered the following issues:

1. To what extent does the methodology allow me to subjectively get closer to the interlocutors?
2. What new theoretical problems can I see through the lens of the methodology?
3. How does the methodology situate anthropology among other disciplines and how does it enhance interdisciplinary collaboration?

The choice of these criteria was driven by my belief that the aim of anthropology is to try to understand people's lives in an open and reflexive way. I drew inspiration from Tim Ingold's (2017, 22) definition of anthropology as a "generous, open-ended, comparative, and yet critical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the one world we all inhabit". Moreover, anthropology does not exist in a vacuum

[1] Related topics have appeared in, for example, the works of Kacper Świerk (2013), Tomasz Rakowski (2017), and Irena Teleżyńska (unpublished). Currently, research in the framework of the ontological turn is also being conducted by Anna Przytomska.

– to be heard and to have impact, we need to collaborate with other scholars. Therefore, I have also analysed what framework for the interdisciplinary discussion is set by the ontological turn.

The final section of the article presents a number of possible courses which the development of the ontological turn could take; ones that could, in my opinion, contribute to overcoming its flaws and fulfilling the above-mentioned criteria.

THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN

In the last two decades, the popularity of the term "ontology" in anthropology has increased; it has appeared in science and technology studies (Latour 2011), has been used to describe suggested methods of overturning dualisms such as nature and culture (Ingold 2003, Descola 2013), and been employed in the context of the methodological framework stemming from the works of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2011, 2013), Martin Holbraad (2009, 2010, 2012) and Morten Axel Pedersen (2011, 2012, 2017; De Castro, Holbraad, Pedersen 2014; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). The meaning of "ontology", however, differs in each of these cases, and is not always in accord with classical philosophical definitions. Due to its spatial constraints, this article focuses on the ontological turn as understood by Holbraad and Pedersen, who delineated their proposal over three publications: *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically* (Henare, Holbraad, Wastell 2007), *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination* (Holbraad 2012), and *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). In cases when the arguments presented in the above-mentioned works were at variance, I have described the methodology in accordance with the newer publication.

Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) define the ontological turn as a trend radicalising three tendencies present in anthropology, namely: reflexivity, conceptualization, and experimentation. Radical **reflexivity** is associated with the premise of "taking people seriously" and drawing attention to the ontological assumptions made by the researcher. This means that instead of explaining the seemingly absurd beliefs held by one's interlocutors with cognitive errors (i.e. epistemological differences), one should focus on specifying how the researcher would have to change his or her views in order for the interlocutors' statements to make sense. Approached from this perspective, every anthropological study would force scholars to ask questions regarding their own fundamental views, for instance about the meaning of relations, thought or truth. Holbraad and Pedersen emphasise that this kind of ethnography (the so-called ontography) could therefore influence our understanding of such basic concepts as culture, thing, or comparison. Thus, the methodology becomes radically reflexive in that experience gained during field research transforms anthropological activity itself.

The ontological turn also proposes to radicalise **conceptualization**. The authors of the framework claim that many works written as a result of the postmodern critique in anthropology gave focused on how people DO NOT think. Scholars aimed at showing that anthropologists were ethnocentric in assuming that their interlocutors shared their understanding of such categories as kinship, nature and culture, or time. Holbraad and Pedersen suggest that to make such accusations is to stop halfway. In their view, anthropologists who face the problem of a different understanding of a given category ought to demonstrate how it should be conceptualised in order to portray how the studied people think. If an ethnologist notices that the anthropological concept of kinship does not match the studied reality, he or she should address the question of what kinship, family, relation, etc. ought to be in order to describe a match interlocutors' reality. This result in anthropology producing new categories and terms that could change the researchers' mental outlook, as well as provide alternative concepts to other academic fields. Thus, the authors of the ontological turn attempt to transform the negative critique of western-centric notions (typical for postmodernism) into the positive creation of new categories.

The third postulate of the proponents of the ontological turn is to radicalise the anthropological tendency to experiment. This manifests in the fact that ethnologists try to present themselves differently during field research, as well as in conceptual experiments and the constant questions: "what if we thought of x as ...? How would that change my understanding of the studied community?" Thus, experimenting with terms becomes an essential tool for conceptualisation, which enhances anthropological reflexivity.

Contrary to what some critics say, understood in the above-explained manner, the ontological turn in itself does not presume any given ontology (Laidlaw 2012; Pedersen 2012). It constitutes a possible methodological framework, guidelines for transforming the experience of alterity, which arises during field studies if people do and say things the scholar deems incomprehensible, into a theoretical reflection. As Holbraad and Pedersen repeatedly stress in their most recent publication, the ontological turn "asks ontological questions without taking ontology as an answer" (2017, 13). Thus, for them ontology does not carry a descriptive ("how things really *are*") or normative meaning ("how things *should be*"), but a possibilistic one ("how things *could be*", "how we *could* think of a given thing").

Since the application of the ontological turn methodology is best explained using a specific example, I shall recapitulate the argument presented by Holbraad in his monograph *Truth in Motion* (2012). The experience he identifies as fundamental for the development of anthropology is that of encountering alterity. Holbraad himself experienced it during his research in Cuba, when he realised that the followers of the cult of Ifá deemed the words of the oracle as indubitable, invariably true. He could not comprehend how statements regarding the state of affairs – such as e.g. "The fridge in

your house is broken!" – could be considered indubitable. One could imagine that, at times, some fact or another would undermine such an opinion. Holbraad's consternation stemmed from the fact that, at least initially, he was trying to make sense of the situation perceiving "the truth" as an adequate representation of reality. In European philosophy, such a definition is usually referred to as the correspondence theory of truth (see: Russell 1995). Applying it to describe his interlocutors' statements, Holbraad would be forced to conclude that they are absurd. To avoid such a judgment, he decided to analyse the possible changes in the concept of truth that would render his respondents' statements rational. Thus, he introduced the idea of an "inventive definition" (see: Wagner 2003, 59–72) to define a speech-act that inaugurates a new meaning by combining two or more previously unrelated meanings[2] (Holbraad 2012, 220). In Holbraad's view, in prophesising about their clients, the *babalawos* were, in fact, creating such a definition. For instance, by saying: "you are prone to impotence", they linked impotence, the notion of "being prone", and person to whom the divination pertained into a new whole (Holbraad 2012, 218–224). Such a definition could not be considered false, because it did not attempt to present the formerly used category, but rather redefined the person, performatively determining who he or she became.

Holbraad then made the recursive move to apply the concept stemming from his fieldwork to anthropology itself. He noticed that the truths we provide as anthropologists could also have the nature of inventive definitions. We employ our own network of terms, and thus are unable to present an adequate representation of the categories used by the studied community. Anthropologists' statements regarding the concepts used by their interlocutors to describe the world can only be true as inventive definitions. We can use the terms known to us to create a new concept which would bring us closer to understanding a given category, but would not be equivalent to it.

In *Truth in Motion* Holbraad presents studies within the framework of the ontological turn as processes consisting of several steps. The first involves describing the studied community or phenomenon as accurately as possible. The anthropologist should then determine whether this description contains any contradictions – instances in which the behaviour of the analysed people seems irrational or even absurd. At the next stage one must identify the categories which are the source of the contradictions, that is the ontological assumptions that result in the experience of alterity. The anthropologist may then start to experiment, trying to redefine these categories so that they would not cause inconsistencies in anthropological description. He or she then creates inventive definitions, formulating new terms and meanings that will fit the analysed material. The final test is confronting these new categories with the ethnographic material again

[2] The very definition of an inventive definition provides an excellent example of the concept. In this case the definition combines the notions of "speech-act," "inauguration," "novelty," and "meaning," to inaugurate a new meaning.

– if they eliminate contradictions from the initial description, they are adequate. In *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017), the authors did not define the stages in this process so precisely; most likely due to the fact that the criterion of logical consistency is rather problematic[3]. The process of conducting ontographic research is nevertheless described in similar ways as before, starting from the experience of otherness in the field and consisting of experiments with ontological assumptions adopted by the researcher in order to develop new concepts which could bring change to anthropology.

The above-described framework of the ontological turn seemed particularly appealing in the context of my research, since it problematised the experience of alterity, which I also encountered. I was trying to become acquainted with the world of the members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, myself being deeply rooted in the scientistic and atheistic worldview. The ontological turn seemed to offer a perspective that would allow me to come closer to understanding the categories used by my interlocutors. What is more, Holbraad and Pedersen's works had the appealing quality of directly answering questions bordering on the philosophy of science, which arose due to the post-modern crisis in anthropology and pertained e.g. to the status of knowledge spread by anthropologists, the manner of formulating theses and possibility of inferring from them. The authors of the ontological turn postulated regarding anthropology as a discipline in constant motion, incessantly creating new concepts and proposing alternative routes of thinking. Ideas developed by anthropologists within such a framework could inspire research in different academic disciplines. They could even be used in the criticism of other scholars' assumptions, by demonstrating that different approaches are possible.

CHARISMATIC GIFTS

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a movement within the Catholic Church. Its members accept the existence of charismatic gifts and the experience of Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Kokott 2011). In Poland the movement is referred to as Renewal in the Holy Spirit (see Siekierski 2018, 135).

[3] It is too narrow, since people often seem to hold contradictory beliefs. An anthropological framework describing such contradictions should therefore accept them, presenting them as understandable and rational – but make no attempt at making the statements of the study subjects more consistent. The criterion of logical consistency is also too wide, because it does not guarantee that the definitions put forward by anthropologists will be in any way translatable into how the studied subjects understand the given categories. One can imagine formulating several different definitions which would work the same in terms of satisfiability as Holbraad's idea of truth as an inventive definition. The final reservation is rather self-explanatory – the choice of logical consistency as a criterion seems as arbitrary, as it is Western-centric.

The community associated with the parish where my research was conducted comprised seventy-two individuals, around one-third of whom took active part in community life. The majority of the members were women (ca. 80 %), which is typical for church communities in Poland (Kuźma 2008, 205–223). Most members were between 35 and 60 years of age. The group was led by a democratically chosen lay leader and a "spiritual guide", i.e. the priest responsible for the community. The meetings were conducted on a weekly basis and usually entailed spontaneous prayer, adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, reading the Bible and individual meditation, as well as singing religious songs. At least once a month community activities also included a mass, meetings of smaller groups or diaconal gatherings. The aforementioned smaller groups consisted of five to nine individuals and a facilitator to moderate the discussion. The aim of the meetings was to discuss a previously chosen topic (e.g. "my resolutions for the Lent"). Diaconies were teams of people chosen to perform a given task (e.g. praying for priests, organising music for celebratory events, etc.).

My interlocutors use the term "gift' in a very broad context. To present it in more detail, I shall provide a more specific description of the four charismata which seemed particularly relevant for the community in question. A person who had a gift was said to be "serving with" it, which is why I also decided to adopt this phrase. It demonstrates that the person endowed with a spiritual gift was, in a sense, serving the community. Although definitions found in theological texts do not present the terms of a "spiritual gift" and a "charism" as synonymous (Falvo 1995, 61–63; Pawlak 1999, 79–84; Przybył 2012), the majority of my interlocutors used them interchangeably. I therefore adopt this perspective in my description of the ethnographic material.

For the majority, the first charisma to be received was **the gift of praying in tongues** (also called glossolalia). In this form of prayer the faithful were producing a string of incomprehensible syllables (at times resembling the babbling of an infant, at other times similar to some unknown language) and gave praise to God in such a manner. The community shared the belief that the incomprehensible sounds were in fact words in a foreign language, living or dead. The person praying in tongues was, however, unable to understand them. The phenomenon of glossolalia appeared at almost all meetings of the Renewal; the people praying aloud together created a symphony pleasant to the ear. Members of the community often used this form of adoration individually, at home or even at work. Some emphasised that the glossolalia is the lowest of all gifts, since it only benefits the one individual while being incomprehensible to others.

At the meetings of the Renewal which I attended the communal prayer in tongues or the appeal to the Holy Spirit were followed by silence. It was a time to "listen in" to what God wanted to communicate. On several occasions someone would then speak up, and his or her words were regarded as **a prophecy** (cf. Csordas 2002, 15). The term was used in a slightly different meaning than in common colloquial language, since my interlocutors agreed that such a prophecy did not necessarily pertain to the

future. These could simply be statements reaffirming them of God's protection or guidelines for personal spiritual development. The prophesising individuals described the experience as a strong compulsion to say something, and a discomfort that passed the moment the message was conveyed:

> "I feel as if I am about to explode, or if not, then burst into tears or just clench all over, and burn, this will just burn me if I don't get it out" (woman, ca. 35 years old).

Some prophecies were delivered in tongues, and sounded the same as glossolalia, but appeared during the "listening in" phase. These instances required the use of a complementary gift referred to as **the interpreting of tongues**. One person would speak in tongues, while another explained the perceived meaning of the message. It was assumed that the interpretation should be delivered in the first person singular, providing a direct transmission of God's words. The Renewal members who utilised this charisma described their experience as having words appear suddenly in a blank mind. Some experienced the sensation visually, with the words appearing in writing, e.g. in a golden thread.

The majority perceived the utilisation of gifts, especially that of prophecy and interpreting tongues as stressful, since they could never be sure if the words they were speaking were indeed messages from the Holy Spirit and not figments of their own imagination. This mindset may be illustrated with the following statement: "when the prophecy ends, you are drenched in sweat, and, like, shaky. And you can't be sure that you said anything important, sometimes you don't even remember what it was you said" (woman, ca. 55 years old).

The community did have certain techniques of "discernment", or determining the origin of a given thought or word. Although not always presented in this context, at times **discernment** was regarded as a kind of gift. Ideas and words of divine origin could be recognised by the following criteria:

1. They were concordant with the Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church; several persons told me that "a charisma never comes before the hierarchy of the Church" (woman, ca. 20 years old);
2. They ought to bring joy and serenity both to the individual conveying the message and the community (it was therefore advised not to dwell on the prophecy for too long after one has delivered it);
3. After receiving a long prophecy or interpretation, community members shared their feelings regarding the message; the fact that it moved many people was regarded as confirmation of its supernatural provenance;
4. Another element facilitating the process of discernment was the repetitive nature of messages; e.g. if a similar motif appeared in several prophecies,
5. At times more than one individual felt the compulsion to interpret a prophecy in tongues; ultimately the task was performed by only one of them, but the

other could then confirm that he or she wanted to speak the same words (or very similar ones);

6. There was a member of the community tasked with noting down or recording longer prophecies and interpretations, so that they could be re-accessed after a time to see what impact they had on the group.

The above-mentioned gifts were the ones most frequently discussed within the community. The term "gift" was also employed in reference to other predispositions. My interlocutors spoke for instance of the gift of intercessory prayer, love, joy, motherhood, and understanding the Holy Scripture.

HOW TO LEARN TO SERVE WITH A GIFT?

Starting my research, I was fascinated by how my interlocutors received the ability to serve with a charismatic gift. Works by Tanya Luhrmann (2012a, 2012b) and Thomas Csordas (2002) proved very inspiring; both these authors describe similar processes as examples of "learning" religious practices. Csordas (2002) analysed the phenomenon of acquiring knowledge in charismatic communities. Referring to the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher of perception, Csordas adopted the view that cognition is embodied, and applied it to anthropology. According to this theory, cognition does not occur only on the abstract level, but is mediated by the body – its structure, current condition, and capabilities. Csordas theorised that actions regarded as spontaneous, such as glossolalia, slaying in the Spirit, or possession, may appear owing to a "socially informed body". Despite the subjective feeling of having no control over their own behaviour, people taking part in such practices have corporeal knowledge on how such acts should look and what one should be experiencing at the time.

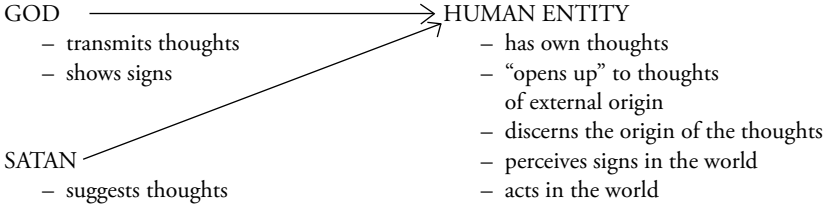
Tanya Luhrmann (2012b), in turn, focused on explaining how the members of the neo-charismatic Vineyard Church gain the ability to hear the voice of God. In doing so, she referred to the concept of the "theory of mind", a term used in cognitive psychology to define the ability to assign mental states to other people, which a person acquires at a certain stage of their development. A child usually starts explaining other people's behaviours by them having their own desires and beliefs around the age of four (Moskowitz 2009, 433–434). In Luhrmann's perspective, the theory of mind is a specific socio-cultural concept of the nature of the human mind. In her view, the members of the Vineyard Church were learning a new concept, in which the mind is accessible not only to its owner, but also to supernatural forces. Together with other scholars, Luhrmann was working towards creating a typology of cultural concepts of mind (Luhrmann 2011).

As my knowledge about the Catholic Charismatic Renewal community in Przeworsk grew, I began to notice that although the above-presented approaches did deepen

my understanding of charismatic religiosity, they were not entirely suitable for describing the research situation in which I found myself. Luhrmann and Csordas were referring to the category of "learning"[4], which in the context of my research proved particularly problematic. When I asked my interlocutors whether they learn to use charismatic gifts, many responded that this was absolutely not the case. The process of acquiring charismata was most often described as an "opening up" to a spiritual gift. Naturally, I could deem it an emic category, which in anthropological terminology may be presented as religious socialisation. I would then attempt to describe practices employed by the members of the Charismatic Renewal in order to acquire the gifts, and then present them as instrumental in learning a "theory of mind" or embodying a specific approach. It appeared, however, that I would show more respect towards my interlocutors, if I made an attempt to understand what they meant by "opening up" (using the methodology of the ontological turn) and subsequently juxtaposed this category with the concepts presented by other researchers studying charismatic communities. Moreover, such an approached would prove more insightful, since "openness" has rarely been the subject of thorough anthropological analysis[5].

"OPENING UP" AND THE CONCEPT OF A HUMAN ENTITY

Interestingly, in my interlocutors' statements the attitude of "openness" was connected to a specific concept of the human entity and action. It manifests itself, among other things, in the choice of activities ascribed to God (e.g. transmitting thoughts) or to human beings ("opening up", discernment). This results in a particular model of generating action which may be presented as follows:



[4] In the present work I focused on describing the theory presented by Csordas and Luhrmann, yet the acquisition of skills in charismatic communities has been described in terms of "learning" by other scholars as well. The earliest such work includes William Samarin's study on glossolalia (1979). As far as modern anthropologists are concerned, this approach is represented e.g. by Matt Tomlinson (2012), as well as Arnaud Halloy and Vlad Naumescu (Halloy and Naumescu 2012). Note should also be taken of the works written by Tanya Luhrmann in cooperation with psychologists (Luhrmann, Nusbaum and Thisted 2010).

[5] The few authors that did touch on this subject include Barnes (2016).

God grants a human entity a certain potential to act, but for it to be fulfilled, people need to "open up" to it. At times they also need to discern whether the potential is truly God-given, as it may also originate from the persons themselves or from Satan. The persons subsequently begin to transform the potential into a specific action, which also requires adopting the attitude of "openness", since they need to cast off the fear that a given action (e.g. prophesising) will be regarded as silly or out of place.

The members of the Renewal community accepted the stages of this process, if to a varying degree. In some situations discernment and "opening up" did not seem to play any significant role – the signal from God was perceived as direct, not mediated by human will. Experiences described in such terms were usually associated with strong emotions, as in the following statement:

> "Have you ever played the Sims? (...) Well, you get this, you control a sim... a sims, yeah? Yeah, and I was at a mass once, asking for someone to be healed I think, and it went on, and so forth, and you had to kneel in front of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Later the priest got down to walk around among the people with the Sacrament. (...) And he walked by me. Then I got up and went after him (...), I went up the stairs, onto the choir. (...) And I felt like someone was controlling me, that's what I'm saying, yeah? (...) Well, it was such an experience that even now I don't know what happened. I tell you, it was like someone was controlling you with a mouse. The whole church is kneeling and you are following the priest, yeah?" (man; 25 y.o.)

Situations which could be regarded as coincidences were also presented as non-mediated. In such cases the happy and unexpected occurrences were usually interpreted as divine control over human beings:

> "After those retreat days and the baptism in the Holy Spirit I was really pumped up and was thinking: (...) How do I serve Our Lord Jesus? I would so love to serve somehow! And I remember that my mom broke (...) her toe (...) and I took her to the A&E. Suddenly a woman just dropped onto my car! It wasn't moving. She fell from this slope. (...) So I try to talk to this woman, because, well, I don't know who she is, yeah? And she just gets into my car and says »Ma'am, child, you're a godsend, I have been praying all day that someone would take me to the station!« In Przeworsk the station is quite far away, right? »Please take me there!« And I'm thinking, fine, okay, I can do it, yeah? (...) So when she had already jumped into the car, I just meekly drove her to the station and all the way there she just kept on talking about how much she had prayed to the Holy Spirit and asked the Lord Jesus to give her some Guardian Angel to drive her! (laughs) (...) At that moment I felt that, well, now I am an instrument. As a driver, but still" (woman, ca. 55 y.o.).

In most situations, however, the role of human beings was presented as equally important as that of the Divine. Believers needed to turn to God and "open up" to His signals in order to be able to act according to His will. They tried to "discern" the origin of the thoughts in their minds and the occurrences in the world around them, so as to decide what steps they should take. This attitude was particularly important in the case of gifts such as prophesising or interpreting of tongues, but also before making certain life decisions:

People reaching hands to God during an Evening of Worship
Source: http://www.chrystus-krol.przeworsk.pl, access: 30.09.2018

> "We are the ones with free will and we should be the ones choosing. We have thousands of thoughts, but which ones are good? (...) Very often it is through signs [that we know God's will]. When I am wondering, when I don't know, then God sends a person to me who will, through... who will touch on a topic and in a way confirm that I am to do this thing, yes. Well, sometimes you face difficult choices, yes, decisions, like for example to build a house. I had this wish in me. (...) But I was thinking, fine, but this was in me all the time and I didn't know if it was mine, or if God wants to bless us in this. And I still don't know. One never knows for sure. But I simply went to intercessory prayer, all the while asking: Lord, is this Yours or mine? Is this truly... do You want to give us Your blessing for constructing this house? I beseech You, put people in my path that would confirm that it is so". (woman, ca. 55 y.o.)

Serving with charismata was related in a similar manner. The "opening up" to the gift was presented as a human act, but the responsibility for the message conveyed while performing a charismatic service lay with God. The role of human beings was to ceaselessly address God, deepening their "openness". One of my interlocutors described it thusly:

> "I invented this simile once, I did not know how to grasp it that the person with a gift is simply a funnel through which God pours a stream of blessings, and they are not able to take it all in, an through this funnel blessings pour onto others. Through various gifts, opportunities of a given per-

son, their temperament and so on. What has always appealed to me is that even if the blessings pour over, something stays in this funnel, a fraction, some droplets are there! So this person who allows this – something always stays with them! (woman, ca. 35 y.o.)

Within this framework, a human being is the "channel" through which God acts in the world. The believer does not have much influence on what is relayed through this "channel", but may decide whether to open it or not[6]. This finds confirmation in accounts of the experience of utilising gifts. Members of the Renewal stated that in these moments they felt as if "a wave of heat washed over them", "electricity shot through them" or "light appeared in their minds". Such experiences were treated as confirming the presence of the Holy Spirit within a person's body.

Interestingly, in Polish context such understanding of human being extends beyond communities of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit. As Lubańska (2018) and Siekierski (2018) have shown, Polish mainstream religiosity becomes more and more influenced by charismatic sensibility.

ACTING IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD'S WILL

The model of human action described above appeared an interesting alternative to how behaviour is described on an everyday basis. As noted by Jack Hunter (2010), anthropologists frequently disregard the realness of the experience of communicating with supernatural forces, deeming them a part of the social reality and evading the question whether such experiences may stem from causes not rooted in psychology. However, in engaging in such practices, scholars assume which part of ethnography can be presented as physical facts, and which as social facts. With this observation as the starting point, I would like to compare manners in which acting in accordance with God's will is described in the anthropology of charismatic religiosity and analyse the underlying notions of such presentation. As an example of such a description, I have chosen Simon Coleman's *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity* (2000), which is a contemporary anthropological study with a worldwide reputation. Therefore, some observations about assumptions regarding the nature of action in this monograph, may be symptomatic also to other ethnographies of charismatic communities.

In *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity*, Simon Coleman describes how the members of the World of Life community in Uppsala embodied the words of the Bible, so as to receive guidance for their actions. Coleman divided the methods for embodiment into narrative emplacement, dramatisation, internalisation and externalisation (Coleman 2000, 117–142). **Narrative emplacement** consisted of describing oneself and the community through references to biblical events, characters and ideals.

[6] Some interlocutors did, however, mention that a given person's experiences may influence e.g. the wording of the prophecy. They have no impact on the meaning of the message conveyed.

Coleman exemplified this with statements of religious leaders emphasising the existence of a global community of believers that had to fulfil a mission of evangelisation. **Dramatisation** was understood as enacting roles ascribed to the saints. In their everyday life, believers followed certain "scripts" borrowed from religious texts. **Internalisation** consisted in materialising the words of sermons and lectures – members of the community treated these words as something tangible, which could be received during mass through extending one's hands or consumed while reading the Bible. The final type of practice – **externalisation** – was expressed through the performative use of the words which had previously been internalised. Coleman presents the example of an interlocutor who had been in a car accident and consequently had mobility problems. At some point she started to entreat her body, saying: "In the name of Jesus, you are healed!" which caused her to recover.

The practices of dramatisation, internalisation and externalisation are reflected in the model of activity presented in the context of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Przeworsk. It must, however, be noted, that in this case the practices were much less textual in nature. Rather, my interlocutors drew their strength to do mundane tasks from the Bible and the sermons they heard, as well as from listening for the voice of God. Thus, they dramatised their life by enacting the roles known from these sources. However, these were not always easily connectible with any specific character. A good example comes from a female interlocutor, who heard the divine voice during a prayer of adoration. It said: "Go and cook this poor man [her husband] some beans in tomato sauce" (woman, ca. 55 y.o.). One can, naturally, detect certain models of behaviour in the above-presented story, yet such cases do broaden the concept of dramatisation outlined by Coleman.

The same holds true in the case of internalisation. During their meetings the members of the community would extend their hands towards the altar. However, my interlocutors did not interpret this gesture as absorbing only words, but also energy or light. Moreover, they saw it as a symbol of their "openness", the readiness to listen for God. This demonstrates that the anthropological category of internalisation and the emic "opening up" are strictly related (though not synonymous).

In the context of my research, externalisation could be understood as acting in accordance with the previously adopted attitude of "openness". The most vivid examples of such behaviour came from situations in which a person saw themselves as controlled directly by God (as in the above-cited statement referring to the Sims).

It is apparent that Coleman's framework allows a certain classification of the actions undertaken by the members of the Renewal. His analysis was, however, lacking in insight on what it really means to "act in accordance with God's will", a postulate indirectly suggested by Hunter. As an unreligious person, I found the concept of such activities incomprehensible and inconsistent with what I understood as "action". I therefore tried to uncover the roots for the individualistic and secular notion of this concept.

The philosophy of action defines the key components of this notion as intentionality and agency associated with a given subject (Stout 2005, 1–15). Such a vision is at variance with the model of action stemming from the statements made by the members of the Renewal – since in this case the subject is not singular, both the intent and the causality is shared. This conclusion prompted me to turn to the concept of collective action. It is an action undertaken by several subjects, such as a walking together, or participating in a game. Philosophers of action have been debating how to define the difference between two individuals doing something together and two other ones who are simply performing the same activity without the sense of acting collectively. Margaret Gilbert (2010) distinguished three possible approaches to this issue.

The first of these approaches is based on the assumption that collective action stems from the personal intentions of the agents. Each of them acts in the belief that "I intend for us to be doing something together". John Searle (1990) and Wilfrid Sellars (1963), in turn, postulated the existence of a specific kin of intentions aimed at "we". In this framework, agents acting collectively hold a specific kind of belief that "we intend to do something together".

Gilbert (2010) rejects both of the above-mentioned approaches, stating that they disregard the fact that people acting collectively may require certain behaviours from one another. For instance, if two people decide to go for a walk together, one has the right to hurry the other if they slow down or stop. Thus, the philosopher offers a third solution, based on the concept of a joint commitment. In her view, collective action is not only a matter of intention, but also of a certain binding decision. The joint commitment to act is therefore the set of the agents' commitments to act in a given way. A person who fails to perform the action to which they had committed may consequently be reproved by the other actors.

It may be noted that in describing the Word of Life community, Coleman decided to emphasise the actions of its members, and not those performed by God. The practices of dramatisation, internalisation and externalisation are presented from the perspective of a human subject and the words used by this individual. Thus, Coleman's approach is rooted in the classical concept of action as performed by an independent subject with intention and agency.

In my estimation, in order to reach a fuller understanding of the experience of my interlocutors, and perhaps some charismatic movements as such, one ought to accept the possibility of a different perspective which relies on a transformed concept of collective action. The common feature of philosophical approaches to collective action is the fact that they strive to explain how is it possible that individual, autonomous subjects are able to conduct actions together. Cited philosophers took for granted that agents are separate beings that have such mental states as intentions, commitments or wishes. However, as I have shown above, the concept of human entity is radically different in the case of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. In my interlocutors

statements there was not tension between having one's own mind and free will and being an instrument in God's hands. They assumed that two separate beings – namely God and a human – through "openness" (which is a sort of intention) are able to form a sort of collective being that acts in the world.

The concept of action – and therefore also of agent – that arouses from this analysis is both individual and relational. It saves individualistic notions of free will and personal attitudes but also allows to postulate such relational objects as collective thoughts, intentions and actions.

WHAT COULD THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN "OPEN UP" TO?

The above reasoning was the result of applying the framework of the ontological turn to my research situation. At the beginning of my research I focused on how members of the Renewal community learn to serve with a spiritual gift. When I had discovered that my interlocutors themselves prefer to describe the process of acquiring charismata by using the category of "opening up", I decided to employ the methodology of the ontological turn to understand better what "openness" meant to my interlocutors. I identified that this category rests on specific notions of human entity and action and I tried to depict them as faithfully as I could. However, there still remains the question of how people acquire the ability to use spiritual gifts if they did not have this skill prior to becoming a member of the Renewal community and did not think of themselves in terms of "openness".

My bachelor's dissertation (Biernacka 2017) focused on activities such as adoration prayer, intercessory prayer and visualisation practices during retreat days. In my estimation these activities can be regarded as helping my interlocutors to think of themselves in terms of the relational model of action. In the present article I will focus only on one example of such practises: a dance of worship. The dance began to be included in the formula of Evenings of Worship as my research was drawing to a close. The Evenings of Worship were open services of prayer organised by the Renewal community once every two months. During the one that I attended several people demonstrated the dance accompanied by lively songs of religious nature and encouraged others to join in. The song was repeated a number of times, creating numerous opportunities for the congregation to dance. Although initially the idea of partaking in such activities seemed ridiculous, after a time I decided to participate. This state of hesitation reminded me of a statement the priest responsible for the Renewal community made about glossolalia:

> "It is like, you know, if a person has everything figured rationally, neatly and sensibly, then such a prayer suddenly seems weird, nonsensical, incomprehensible, how can it be?" (man, ca. 60 y.o.)

A photograph depicting the dance of worship.
Source: http://www.chrystus-krol.przeworsk.pl, access: 15.12.2016

Commencing a prayer in tongues a person forces oneself to perform a new, seemingly irrational action. The similarity between these two experiences – glossolalia and the dance of worship – allowed me to see the analogy between overcoming one's embarrassment in the case of dance and the process of "opening up". When I spoke to the members of the community after the Evening of Worship, they admitted to similar feelings regarding the dance. It appeared to me, therefore, that the dance may be perceived as an embodiment of the attitude of "openness". However, as I identified the dance as a moment arousing a strong feeling of alterity, I started to consider how postulates of the ontological turn could be applied in this case. Therefore, I tried to figure out what ontological assumptions underlied my experience of alterity. Although Holbraad and Pedersen do not offer a precise definition of ontological assumptions, but at one point mention that these are similar to concepts (2017, 35). I identified such assumptions as "movement is an exposure" but, nevertheless, deepening them did not seem compelling. Instead of taking me closer to the physical experience of the process of spiritual gift acquisition, this method transferred the analysis to a conceptual level.

In my estimation, in the case of the dance of worship physical movement (and not "movement" as a concept) plays similar role as the category of "opening up" in

the previous analysis. Dancing allows to understand better how acquiring the attitude of "openness" works – just like the concept of "opening up" supported me in the investigation of the notion of action. Relations between concepts are outlined in the below table:

Old concept I used at the beginning of the research	**New concept that allowed me to understand better my interlocutors**
learning	"opening up"
individual, autonomous subject	subject as a "funnel" for God's will
collaborative actions based on individual agency and intentionality	collaborative actions based on collective agency and intentionality
ontological assumptions	physical movement

The aforementioned situation can be seen in a broader context, which would allow to notice that the notion of ontological assumptions is generally problematic when used to describe processual phenomenons. I will try to depict this problem basing on one of Holbraad and Pedersen's work (2017, 312–361) .

The authors of the ontological turn conducted an analysis of conversion and transcendence in Christian tradition – examples of the lack of continuity, a broken relation. This appears to be similar topic to the process of acquiring the attitude of "openness", which requires adoption of a new conceptual framework. Holbraad and Pedersen's approach based on Strathern's writings (2004) about relations. Her definitions were than transformed in order to outline a concept of transformation not based on negation. As a result, although the authors of the ontological turn started with an issue linked with a process and transitionality, they concluded their examination by presenting a specific, established term.

In my estimation, this problem may also stem from one assumption which is fundamental to the ontological turn and, as it transpires, pertains to ontological assumptions. Ontological assumptions are a methodological construct, not an ontological one[7]. As a concept, they are to help researchers reach a deeper understanding of their relations with the studied group. At the same time, one does not need to assume that such entities as ontological assumptions do indeed exist in the minds of one's interlocutors.

Instructing anthropologists to conduct their research thinking in terms of the ontological assumptions which they are adopt implies a rather individualistic and

[7] Absurd as this statement may seem, it stems from the fact that Holbraad and Pedersen first started to employ the notion of ontological assumptions, and only later decided that they did not want to propose any ontology. Updating their methodology could perhaps have spared them numerous misunderstandings, but the task now is difficult given the fact that it is already in widespread use.

Cartesian image of cognition, even in heuristics. In this model, the anthropologist becomes a subject possessing certain mental constructs, through which they acquire knowledge about the world and other people. For this reason, Holbraad and Pedersen claim that transforming one's own ontological assumptions only provides us with the information on how the world *could* look like and how we *could* perceive it, and not on how it truly *is*.

When I tried to overcome this rather unsatisfying conclusion, I became inspired by the relational concept of action derived from the narratives of Renewal's members. What if the concept of action was applied to anthropological activity itself? It is a relational framework, in which, in order to work together, two subjects mutually commit to being "open", ready to receive the thoughts originating from the other agent. Such a relation may result in a spiritual gift, which does not fully belong to the person serving with it. It seems that ontological assumptions may be regarded in a similar manner. As noted by Holbraad and Pedersen, the discrepancy between assumptions and a studied reality leads to feelings of alterity. One could go a step further and consider whether it is even possible to hold any ontological assumptions without a clear context. It would perhaps be helpful to think of ontological assumptions as emerging from a confrontation with the world that surrounds us, such as a spiritual gift arises as a result of a relation.

POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN

I would like to conclude by presenting a number of possible paths of development which the ontological turn could take. One frequently voiced shortcoming of the framework (noted e.g. by Bessire and Bond 2014; Graeber 2015; Heywood 2017; Salmond 2014) consists in the fact that it moves away from the people it is supposed to study. Despite references to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's postulates to "take people seriously" (2011) and "permanently decolonise thought" (2013), anthropology as defined by Holbraad and Pedersen ultimately aims not at acquiring knowledge about people, but developing new concepts and meanings. What is more, the authors of the framework do admit that the concepts they establish (e.g. the concept of truth as an inventive definition) do not necessarily correspond to their interlocutors' understanding of these categories. Such correspondence is not deemed necessary since, according to Holbraad (2009, 2012), at this state of conducting research we do not rely on the concept of truth as an accurate representation, so the depiction cannot be precise. This conclusion depends also on the individualistic understanding of ontological assumptions that was marked above. Within the framework of the ontological turn, field research may become simply a source of inspiration to create new concepts.

As David Graeber (2015, 35) observed:

> "Engaging in such thought experiments does not really open us to unsettling possibilities. Or, anyway, not the kind of unsettling possibilities that are likely to get anyone fired from their jobs".

Graeber also noted that the creators of the ontological turn do not use in their works terms such as "serf, slave, caste, race, class, patriarchy, war, army, prison, police, government, poverty, hunger, inequality" (2015, 32), which may seem alarming in the case of a framework that expressly refers to the discourse of decolonisation. According to Casper Bruun Jensen (2017) Graeber's criticism is not valid, because the ontological turn aims to transcend the limited set of categories developed in the world of western academia, which would contribute to decolonisation on the conceptual level (cf. Holbraad *et al.* 2014). In my own estimation, this reply does not fully invalidate Graeber's reservations. It may be observed that at least some parts of the current public debate refers to issues anthropologists face directly and people with whom they interact personally. Thus, we would like to be able to take a stand and offer certain solutions e.g. in the context of the discussion on refugees. This does not mean that we are to stop developing our conceptual apparatus.

Furthermore, conceptual decolonisation does not necessarily have to be a model of political independence assumed by the people with whom we conduct our research[8]. One of the members of the Renewal community in Przeworsk read my bachelor's thesis and shared her impressions of it. She said that although, in her opinion, my description of the category of "opening up" was accurate, she found the work "rather cold" and "philosophical". She stated that a person who learned about the existence of the Renewal from my work would not understand the "value of human faith", and "would not experience what we feel every day". She saw more benefit in a work that would present how the Renewal changed people's lives and described their everyday experience of faith. Does this mean that, as an anthropologist, I ought to respond to this need and conduct my research accordingly? It seems that although I should not disregard the suggestion, I can still see the value of thought experiments which may advance anthropological theory. It would, however, be unfair to present them as justified with the will to work for the benefit of the "conceptually colonised" interlocutors.

In the conclusion to *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (2017), Holbraad and Pedersen tried to predict the further development of their framework. As mentioned above, one of their ideas involved moving beyond the concept of relation stemming from Marilyn Strathern's (2004) writings, employed in works following the framework of the ontological turn. The two authors therefore adopt the strategy of using ontography to analyse and transform the basic concepts in which the turn is rooted (such as movement, transformation, criticism); in doing so they often stray far

[8] Ironically, Holbraad presented a very similar argument in his polemic with research on agency (2012).

away from their own fieldwork. As suggested earlier, one possible solution to this problem is to change one's attitude towards ontological assumptions as such, and instead see them as relational, stemming from a given context and interactions. Another path (which does not exclude the former) would be to use the methodology of the ontological turn to study phenomena deemed controversial, politicised, or related to oppression. This could facilitate the emergence of a method to combine the openness to new conceptual categories with engagement and offer something to the people who help establish these categories.

It may also be argued that the ontological turn does not facilitate any cooperation between anthropology and other disciplines. If I understand the creators of the framework correctly, they believe that ontography allows anthropologist to develop concepts which could later be used in other fields of academic study or question assumptions regarded as obvious in these fields. This statement seems to overestimate the interest experts in other disciplines may take in concepts developed in anthropology. Having studied cognitive science, I have often participated in psychological conferences, and presented papers on the cognitive aspects of my ethnographic research, which contained references to the framework of the ontological turn[9]. Despite seeing the potential for using Holbraad and Pedersen's methodology in fields such as experimental philosophy or the phenomenology of religious experience, I find it hard to believe that such cooperation could consist in the conceptual network being dictated by the anthropologist. Other academic fields are not always willing to abandon their existing theories entirely, and often do not accept criticism based in ethnography as valid. This is due to dissimilarities in the models of explanation adopted in different disciplines – understanding the meanings people ascribe to their experiences is significant in anthropology, (cf. Barnes 2016), whereas, for example, cognitive psychology is more interested in an external analysis of cognitive processes.

Although Holbraad himself was sceptical towards cognitive anthropology (Holbraad 2010, 182; Holbraad 2012, 30–32), interdisciplinary research seems to be another possible direction for the successful development of the ontological turn. Cognitive issues play a vital role in Pedersen's works (Pedersen 2011; Pedersen 2017; Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007, 141–166), yet he was not directly involved in research conducted in cooperation with specialists in other academic fields. I believe that such a confrontation could be very fruitful in terms of theory and associated with feelings of alterity no lesser than in the case of ethnography itself.

[9] "Glosolalia – między antropologią a psycholingwistyką" ["Glossolalia – between anthropology and psycholinguistics"], delivered at Interdyscyplinarna Konferencja Badań nad Językiem 20.05.2017; "Teoria umysłu – od kognitywistyki do antropologii" ["The theory of mind – from cognitive science to anthropology"], delivered at Zderzenia Poznawcze, 20–12.05.2017; "Teorie poznania, o których nie wiecie, bo robicie złą naukę" ["Theories of Cognition you do not know, because you are doing the wrong science"], delivered at VI Konferencja Perypatetyczna, 27–29.10.2017.

I would like to conclude with the statement that, despite the problems I encountered while conducting research within the framework of the ontological turn, I still see the benefits of this methodology. The greatest lesson I learnt from reading Holbraad and Pedersen's works is the belief that regardless of the nature of the theoretical problem we are facing – be it the tension between agency and oppression, between naturalisation and constructivism, or anything else – it may be resolved through ethnography. The authors of the ontological turn encourage scholars to recognise these tensions in their research and identify the assumptions on which they are based. The people we meet in the field may help us discover these assumptions and construct an alternative network of concepts. It is this perception of anthropological theory, as a practical activity rooted in action and relations, that I consider the true value of the ontological turn.

Translated by Julita Mastalerz

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