

WHY STUDY SUBJECT: THE ISSUE OF POWER AND LOVE

Emil Višňovský

Department of Social and Biological Communication, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Dúbravská cesta 9, 842 06 Bratislava, Slovakia

The issues of subject (the Self), power and love are essentially interconnected. However, while to be the subject means to be in power (and vice versa) to rule at least one's own life, on the other hand to love means "to subject" oneself to the other human being without feeling of "subjection" and "subjugation". The author argues (however unusual this may seem) that essentially there are these two anti-thetical principles of human life and behaviour: power and love. A. Schweitzer as the great humanist was very well aware of the antihumanizing effects of the phenomenon of power within modern society and he called for pure Christian love for life along with his famous ethical concept of respect for life. The author considers desire for power one of the main sources of evil, while love (altruistic in its essence) is one of the main sources of good. Man and mankind have to choose: either to continue the way of making history as the "way of power", or to switch to a radically different mode – that of the "way of love" – unless they do not wish to enjoy just the only one kind of love – the Nietzschean "amor fati".

The topic of this essay is Foucaultian. However, the approach to it is rather different. The commonplace is that the subject (or the Self) has been in the focus of modern Western culture and philosophy as their ultimate principle and value. Attention has also been directed toward such categories as author, agent, identity, person, subjectivity, individuality, autonomy, responsibility, action, labour, creativity. We have got used to seeing and seeking behind these terms an agent (an actor) – simply someone who did "it" and brought it about, because we want to find him guilty or responsible. However, it is a very old tradition dating back to the ancient Greek vision of the "demiurge" and to the Jewish roots of European thought. The issue of subject and of the subjective is the issue of the determination (and of its scope) of the world due to humans: what we introduce into the world is "subjective" and what has not been marked by us, is "objective". People have got used to thinking of themselves as of subjects in opposition to the world; and about the world as an object in opposition to them whether the subject or object is practical or cognitive.

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In our “postmodern” era the borders between the subject and the object have been blurred and doubt is cast on the possibility of differentiating between them. This dualism has even started to be criticized and considered harmful since behind every attempt to become a subject, an endeavour was revealed to take a privileged, powerful (or at least autonomous) position. Thus the question about the subject has been connected with the question about power and the vision of the subject with the vision of the being that rules and controls. If we all fight for the Self, for its assertion, we only fight for gaining power for the Self over other Selves and these try the same – what else than “the fight of all against all” can then come out of it? The struggle to be a subject (master) of one’s life and fate is transferred into the most intimate spheres, into the sphere of human relations and love; it means that instead of looking for love within the other one and giving love to him or her, we are searching for a device for asserting one’s Self. But love is the antipode of such an attitude: it is a “diffusion” within the other one rather than full devotion to him or her, an absolute service to the other one, that is, a voluntary renunciation of one’s Self, of one’s subjectivity.

Thus I am interested in two phenomena that I consider to be – at least from a particular point of view – essential for understanding the (contemporary) human world, namely in power and love, or more precisely, in their relation and counter-position. Of course, the discourse on these issues in 20th century philosophy has been extensive, there have been prominent thinkers contributing to them, notably M. Foucault and the topic is being observed, for example, in the feminist thought, etc. However, I am not going to discuss Foucault’s conception of power and love which is relationalist and anti-substantionalist. For him power is “out there” while I am interested in the power “within us”, if there is such a thing. While Foucault was asking “what is power and how does it appear in human and social relations?” (cf. [1], 71), my question is rather “what is power and how does it appear within us?” This is the power as the intention or as the desire to control and punish – the power/control intention. This approach which is close to Adlerian individual psychology, presupposes the Self as the inner structure (inwardness) being able to act and to cause actions. In other words, this presupposes the Self as the subject of its own action. Or, how else our human action would be possible if there were no such agent? Of course, I do not deny the existence and meaning of power relations, I simply want to switch the topic to power as it is within us. I also want to speak about the personal attitude to power: somebody loves power (a sadist), and somebody hates it – namely power in any form, power as such. While any power is good for some, for others it is a sign and a cause of all evils.

I am therefore not interested in the political power or mechanisms (machineries) of power but in: i) the desire for power as a characteristic of man, something which has got under her skin and controls her thought and action, and ii) the power-control intention of Western civilization as a cultural phenomenon. I am thus not interested either in power relationships or in actual power but I am interested in the fact

where does our desire to control and to rule over everything around us – over nature and things and other people come from and what is the aftermath of the implementation of this desire and intention. And finally what does this desire mean and what could possibly or necessarily be put in its place? I am interested in power not as an objective but as a “subjective” phenomenon – not as a sociological but as a psychological fact and phenomenon, that is a phenomenon which gained control over the subject and penetrated into her inwardness so that it became a personal trait. Such a human can say in defence: ‘we all fight for power, let us not pretend that we don’t. Our life would not be possible without it in society (nor even in nature). It is only Utopians who think the opposite and want to replace the desire for power with the desire for love; they do not see, however that desire for love is similar to the desire to control the other one, that is the desire for power over him or her. To have power is necessary for life and for survival and therefore it is more vital than to have love. We will survive without love but we will not survive without power.’

This line of thought I consider one of the most dangerous faults which I want to point to and which leads us towards self-destruction. It is connected with the fault of setting up love as a form of power. The perverseness and monstrosity of such a world and such a human emerges in front of us clearly.

Of course, each of us needs a certain amount or frame of power to live, but there are many of us who desire an almost unlimited range of power. What we can see all around in this world is precisely the global and universal struggle for subjectivity – and that is – for power: as if each had to fight with every other for it: men struggle for power over women, parents over children, individuals over individuals, people over people, nation over nation, state over state, humankind over the planet. The essence of this struggle is the desired power of the human being over himself or herself, over the condition of his and her life – but this is simply the fear of life or the struggle for survival which seems to lay behind. Because the idea is that a person who has no power is not a subject at all – not a subject of life, will, knowledge or action.

A subject is she or he who is powerful and power is that which is subjective. The powerful subject does everything to disguise his power and to present it as something wholly “objective”. The struggle for power has obtained many very fine and sometimes even hardly distinguishable types and forms. Nietzsche was seemingly right: not only does the absolute decline of this world lie in the monstrous Will to Power but this Will is the nature of our world and civilization.

Thus – what about the human who does not desire power/control at all (that is to be the subject)? Who hates or somehow has not formed this intention as such? It is clear that such a person has little chance to survive in the world we live in. But on the other hand, such a person does not see any better option in being involved in this global struggle for power/control because she sees no sense in it (as Nietzsche himself who escaped from this world to his solitude first and mental illness next). According to him, to live life in such a world is not worth living at all. He sees it as

doomed to be destroyed for there is no chance to survive in such a world and it is not worth becoming more powerful than others (even for the most powerful subject). The way on which man has got to desire for power has no way out and the moment when a man has settled on this way of being is the moment of the beginning of his decline and tragedy (without himself realizing it). It makes no sense to believe in someone who tells you: 'I am the only one who will save the world and mankind (the saviour) – just give me enough power!' We should believe Lord Acton's remark that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. No human being can stand power – and therefore she should not desire it. But we are so deeply rooted in the civilization of power that it seems simply unthinkable not to think of ourselves as subjects. Remember that a small child is becoming herself when she victoriously exclaims: "I have done it myself".

To make it clear: what I am arguing against is only that the desire for power and the position in power itself does not bring the people happiness they falsely desire. But how could a world in which individuals and peoples did not struggle for power, be possible? How could subjects without power be possible (or power without subjects)?

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It was Albert Schweitzer who made his diagnosis and prescribed the therapy of the cultural and civilization crisis on the basis of the concept of 'respect for life' and he himself, as a compassionate and critically thinking person, understood very well the importance of unconditioned, absolute and active love of his neighbour as the ethical core of Christianity on the one hand, and the dehumanizing, depersonalizing effect of the phenomenon of power in modern society on the other. In his speech made as the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in 1952, he stated: "As the power of man gradually increases, man becomes more and more miserable... We have to shake our conscience that the more we promote ourselves to "super-men", we all become the more inhuman (see [2], 10). The contemporary world is in an analogous crisis or even in the crisis greater than the world in which Schweitzer had lived and about which he wrote in this way. He offered a recipe in the form of the renewal of culture and ethics – the Christian culture and ethics together with a rational, critical way of thinking. He often alerted to the risks of the power, which we gained thanks to knowledge, over the physical powers of nature. The greatest danger of this power is its *inhumanity* – the inhumanity of man as a bearer of power and the inhumanity of life and its condition which are created by such humans: "The power that we gained over the powers of nature is applied in a threatening manner like the power of humans over humans," Schweitzer says ([3], 385) and insists on the fact that "man should never sacrifice so as to become a man-thing" (ibid., 383). Where does Schweitzer see the way out of this situation, what solution does he offer to solve the problem? According to him: "The only help

is to get rid of the power that has been given to us. This, however, is the act of spirituality" (ibid. 385). The only power we can recognize is the spiritual power of a Jesus type, which is embodied in *service* – the whole of Schweitzer's life is actually an example of devoting such a service to the neighbours, based exclusively on pure love for them and has nothing to do with any power over them. His will to life is also ethically associated with respect for life as such. for all lives and it embraces and presupposes love (of life): it is not a blind and harsh will to life as a natural power which asserts itself to the detriment of and regardless of the lives of others (lives of the weak) or of life as such. It is a kind will to life – a will taking the "way of love" not the "way of power" and control-arrogance-aggression. If Schweitzer spoke about the crisis in culture and saw the reason in "inhuman thought", then, in my opinion, one of the sources of this inhumanity is precisely our obsession with power and clearing of the space for love in our souls.

Someone might see it as quite unusual to interconnect power and love – or even to put them in contrast: talks about love and hate or power and powerlessness (freedom) are more frequent. To many people the connection between love and power evokes automatically of phrases such as "love of power" and "the power of love" which point to the relatedness rather than to the antithesis between love and power. In spite of this, I would insist on the fact that these are two antithetic principles of life and human action – the former (power) actually founding tendencies which are against life and cause its destruction while the latter (love) is in harmony with the production and reproduction of life.

Power exists in a much more fundamental form than the political one – it is even possible that power is connected with basic natural strengths and that each existence carries some power. Life is thus not possible without power as strength or as capacity "to be able to" or "to master" something. Every living being needs a certain control over the objects and processes of his or her existence, needs to control them to be able to exist at all, and, accordingly, power would even be one of the preconditions of life, its basic need. Politics as such is only an institutional embodiment of power understood in this way, and thus politics may be understood as a mere continuation of aggression and greed for war with different means. Politics which does not know the humane principle that no human life is worth sacrificing in the name of a political end, that is the politics which sacrifices even one human life for its aims, is the politics of sickness – so the question is how is 'healthy politics' possible? It is literally the monstrosity of power that comes to the fore when a live being is subdued by another in the interest of preservation of her own existence. Of course, there is both strength and weakness in nature but the strength used for control and subjugation of anything, whether a being at the same level or another species, the strength used for construing artificial hierarchical systems instead of building and cultivating the given, is a destructive, not a beneficial strength.

In contrast, I want to think of love as a human need to love nature, another human, life; of love embracing also a friendly relationship to all this; of love as a need

to create and give the good. Love is altruistic in its essence. Such a love is evidently one of the main sources of good and such a loving human is an entirely different type of human.

I understand power and love as two antithetical principles of human life. The human is either struggling for power, or creating love in life; the human is either setting off on the “way of love” or the “way of power” as her way of life. Where one creates love, one cannot struggle for power, and, where one struggles for power, one cannot create love. I think that this might be generalized and applied to the relation of man to nature and to life as such.

The worst is when people do not differentiate between power and love, regarding or presenting their struggle for gaining power over another human as their struggle for love. Erich Fromm, another great twentieth-century humanist, wrote: “If we experience love in the mode of possession, it means restriction, imprisonment and control of the subject by the one who “loves”. Such a love is stifling, suffocating, killing, not giving life. What people call love is mostly a word abuse in order to disguise the reality of no-love” ([2], 42). For a man of power, love is reduced to a rude sexual drive and man’s “love of power” is also just an abuse of the concept of love. Because – can power be loved? Can we say for instance that Caligula loved power? Can we in his case still speak of any love? I think that we can be pathologically obsessed with power, but it has nothing to do with any concept of love. For there is no place for love, even for the love of power itself, in the mind and the heart of a human to whom power is the aim for its own sake. And the other way round, there is no place for any form of power, not even “the power of love”, for those for whom love is the aim and meaning, since also here “power” is an inappropriately used word. The point is that control is not the intention of love but the intention of power. It is a mutual joy, help, cooperation, friendship and freedom that is the intention of love. E. Fromm and earlier M. Scheler spoke of love as an inspiring, life- and world-supporting, enriching activity. The true love does not want to gain power, does not want to control the other, but it wants to share joy with him or her, take delight in him or her, in mutual relationships with a partner, not in a relationship to an object of one’s activities. The true love does not overcome or subdue, it thus has its pride but not haughtiness.

Unfortunately such a love appears to be naturally associated with “weakness” since it is not connected to power and strength and wants to operate in a different manner than the power-control intention, that is by an effort to subdue and subjugate or gain control over. As power is associated with strength, so love is like a sister of weakness. The true love is really disarming rather than arming. It might be the Luther’s: ‘I am standing here and cannot do otherwise’ but I am not standing here in order “to have” you which is valid for such love. Instead of being in the power of such love, it is its surrogate in different forms (sexual drive and psychotic passion) that has many in its power. Or even something worse: we are in the power of the power-control intention, obsession to control and dominate, to be master of

our lives (and the lives of others) and of our environment. We think that we are able to have power, that we are its source, that is we are “powerful”, that we are even more powerful than anything, that we are the most powerful on this planet (or at least we would like to be). We think that we even have power over love, that we can manipulate it – but at that very moment we cease to be capable of love, we cease to be its source. Love has nothing to do with us any more as soon as we succumb to the illusion and the charm of power. There is ample evidence and there are many examples of the fact that this power-control intention still prevails in man over the loving intention. The more powerful we are, the less loving we are. The will to life is more interconnected with the will to power than with love and respect for life. Humans think that they will not be saved by love but by power – because such humans do not want to save others but merely themselves. Such humans think they can save themselves to the detriment of others – and this is how they act. I do not say “humans” but “such humans” which means a certain type of humans (ethical, socio-psychological, mental) because there are also other humans who are capable of love and respect for life.

The outcome of the dominance of power over love is an unbearable, uncaring human world in which one cannot live (and we prefer “communication” with the woods and animals to the communication with some types of humans). Power acts all around as a demon pushing love out and thwarting it.

Where does such a monstrosity come from in the form of a deeply-rooted power-control intention in the human mind and culture? Nietzsche's power, or more exactly will to power, is a universal strength, the basic principle of all actions. Darwinism justifies the desire for power by self-preserved instinct, whereas Freudianism by the inferiority complex (A. Adler), ambition, self-assertion and desire to excel. We can find an explanation in the Old Testament: the human being feels that she is a potential rival of God from the very beginning ([4], 19). Anyway, it seems that desire for power follows from human desire for immortality or survival. This desire for power is the desire for greatness, eternity, immortality – in a word, the desire to be god-like. This desire is, however, not only vain, but what is much worse – it is a false, almost tragic desire. As Elias Canetti points to the monstrosity of human desires understood in this way, when the ruler not only wants to be “above” all but he also “wants to be the only human being”, he wants to survive all and nobody to survive him” ([5, 34]). Schweitzer adds a normative ethical demand for the respect for life to an all-penetrating will to life, because we can only survive through love since only love is creation and breeding.

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At this point a precision should be made. I do not call for an effeminate, pusillanimous type of human. The fact of human life is undoubtedly an effort, endeavour and struggle, fighting for something (and probably also against something), but

“the fight” does not necessarily mean “war”. This effort or fight should not always be connected to power and the fight for it. One can also fight for (or play for) love, although a loving person prefers the search for routes other than direct encounter. The difference is that there is always the struggle for power but love prefers peace and harmony. If love has some “power”, it is a non-violent, non-tyrannical power while tyrannical power does not contain any speck of love.

I distinguish between power as an endeavour to control (and manipulate) and as a real rule and strength or authority. People need strength for their lives, especially the inner, moral strength (given to them by true love, although probably not by love alone). E. Fromm tried to solve the problem: he differentiated between two meanings of the word “power”: first it is the hold of power over someone, the ability to control him, and secondly it is to have strength to do something, to be capable, to be strong. The latter meaning has nothing to do with control, it expresses a perfect mastery, something in terms of mastership, competence... Power can thus connote two things – dominance or potency” ([6], 9). Where there is a lack of “the strength to do something”, “the strength over something, “*the wish to control*”, emerges, that is to have power over others as if they were things” ([7], 74). E. Fromm associates authoritarian, sadistic type of human with power while love is connected to a creative and productive type.

The concept of the subject as the Self is again the core of the issue: the Self struggling for power is the proud Self while the Self struggling for love is the humble Self. M. Scheler writes that by humbleness, which he considers to be the mode of love, we give up our Selves: “We are humble... and we give up our entire Self, any of its value, respectability and dignity, which a proud man holds strongly to, we indeed “lose” ourselves, we “give” ourselves at disposal – without fear of what will happen to us...” ([8], 9). The struggle for power is just something opposite: an effort to assert the Self (to make one’s Self visible) probably originating from being in fear of one’s Self. By contrast, Scheler writes: “Have the courage to give up all alleged inner “rights”, “dignity”, “merits”, respect of all people – primarily your “self-respect” – every claim “to be worthy” of some happiness and accept it differently than as if given as a gift: only then you will be humble” (ibid.). Pride in one’s Self means looking at everything from above. Pride leads, according to Scheler, to the complete absence of love – and the absence of love is Hell (ibid., 11). (By the way, what is it that people obsessed with power struggle for – that is the so-called born politicians – if not for the assertion of themselves at all costs. What other than pride is their personal characteristic? What do they prepare if not Hell). The paradox of this pride is that the emptier the human Self is, the more it wants to assert itself outwardly, the more it wants to show off, to make itself visible... There is also a paradox on the other side. M. Scheler writes: “be humble and you will immediately be a rich and a powerful man! As soon as you ‘do not deserve’ anything more, everything will be given to you! Because humbleness is a virtue of the rich, just as pride is a virtue of the poor. Each pride is ‘the pride of

beggars” ([8], 14). Scheler also speaks of two ways how to cultivate the soul – I call them “the way of power” linked with rationalistic individualism that wants to take “its fate in its own hands” and become its “master”, and “the way of love” which is the way of humbleness, of non-conceitednes and a search for harmonious integration of the individual being into the being of a whole. The paradox of “the way of love” is also the fact that conscious struggle for it is possible only to a limited extent – if it is possible at all. There are frontiers beyond which this road ends and the way to power begins. Love either comes of its own accord (and we do not know where, from, and why) or we do not attract it, we “do not attain to it in any way”. According to M. Scheler, also this love is the antipodes of power: spontaneity stands against the artificial constructivism of the reason. Scheler continues: The problem of the weak and the strong human is again solved paradoxically as follows: “...a human is strong only when he is weak” ([8], 17). Those who have set out on the path to love, should not despair, they know its reward themselves, it is never accessible to those who have set off on the road to power. The strength of the humble consists in their consciousness of limitedness and in their voluntary subjection to something higher. The weakness of the proud consists in their bowing to power, servility and vanity. A loving human is not subservient but really serves.

A loving human cannot endure the power of others over himself, particularly of those servile, shallow and conceited (these actually cannot have power over him because they do not have any access to his soul and spiritual values).

Greed for power or power-control intentions can be identified as a main characteristic of the modern human, the human of our era who calls for a transformation. We live in a civilization which is built on power and its struggle for power is unending. Our civilization is the civilization of power. We primarily want to be masters of our lives, not to love them. We want to be masters of nature and not to love it. We even want to control other people rather than love them. We want to be omnipotent like God but not as loving as he is. We act on the basis of power and for power, not on the basis of love and for love. We cannot endure humbleness, maybe a temporary subordination to be able to rule again. Our reason also tells us – cynically – use every opportunity to gain and strengthen your power over the world, over everything and over all others and if you do not do it, you are a blockhead. It is better if people are afraid of you rather than to show your weakness. The phenomenon of power has intruded into our inwardness so that we do not realize it any more or we take it for granted and for our own naturalness! It has even infiltrated into the relationships between the two genders – into love relationships.

This world is a work of the powerful for the powerful, that is the people who have understood life as “usurpation” of the world regardless of the fact that they usurp, whether directly – by violence – or by manipulating the lives of other people. It concerns the powerful in social (and political) terms, not in spiritual terms (rather the opposite, the social position of humans does not correspond to their human qualities at all). These do not control the world by “the strength” of

their personalities but by the strength of their positions within institutions. The essence of the evil of this power is that humanity (and also nature) is here a mere means, not the aim. The second substantial point of this power is that the human being transfers the modern way of relating to things (not living) to man and to life as a whole (nature): humans have lost their capacities to discriminate between them.

A modern ideal of the human being is a an autonomous sovereign being. History still works according to this ideal when it convinces us that the greatest power will be gained when we bring other people under our control. But such a history simultaneously works against humanity. While the power of some people over others increases, the power of the human being over her individual or collective fate does not; to take one's fate in one's own hands – that old modern dream – has not come true. Hegel's idea from the dialectics of master and slave (later adopted by Marx, Fromm, and others) about the alienation of power, when the power of humans turns against them and the traps of their own power enslave them, is being fulfilled. Is not the proof that the project of humanity to gain power over the whole of nature – not to mention control over humans – is ill-fated from the very beginning and is it not a sufficient reason for disqualification of power as such? Should not the project and the meaning of life have been formulated in a different way from the very start? Man should never have wanted to conquer the world, man should have loved it, to learn to love it and to love the fact of his "place in the world", that means the fact of one's life. The whole human project should be reassessed and formulated in an entirely different manner: as a loving project of the partnership of humanity and the world, human and human. Reason by itself cannot lead humanity either to happiness or to the earthly paradise. Reason cannot tell humanity what is good, if the good is not within the heart of humanity. Reason kills the good in the heart of humanity by offering surrogates for the good. The mission of reason is not to tell humanity what is good, but what is correct to do in order to fulfil the good which a human being feels in her heart. Reason itself is not a barrier to evil either. Only a human being who has a heart, knows what good is.

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How should then the issue of power be solved? Can a man of power be changed into a man of love? It seems that the demands for the cultivation of power (R. Guardini, see [9]) or the replacement of the external power-strength by the internal spiritual power of the Jesus type (J. Trojan, see [10]) are only a little less utopian than the demand for the complete elimination of the phenomenon of power from our life. A human being cannot long exclusively for love and see in other people (and in nature) mere partners or helpers. This is a fact which must be taken into account. Human can choose, however, either the way of power and destruction, or the way of love and life. Power has brought us to where we are today – some people

say that it is only reason that can save us again, others say that it is only love that can save us (because reason is interconnected with power). Love itself is probably not enough to survive and preserve life, but without love, which has been replaced by power or which we confuse with power, it will certainly not happen. Good without power is not only possible but also necessary. We could reach it by giving up the power-control intention and by replacing it with another paradigm of life and action which would lead to partnership and harmonization of humanity with nature and humans with humans – the paradigm of loving intention as a desire to create good generously. Otherwise the only kind of love that will be left to enjoy is the Nietzschean *amor fati*.

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