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DOUBTFULNESS – A DIALOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The current globalizing world stimulates many doubts. Doubtfulness is a starting point for inner dialogue. Internal dialogical activity often reduces the experience of uncertainty by integration of contrasting ideas. Sometimes, however, the result is quite opposite – doubts grow rather than being reduced. The paper proposes a dialogical model of doubtfulness and presents empirical findings which are consistent with the model. Additionally, the functions of doubtfulness and internal dialogue in philosophy and science are discussed. On one hand, as empirical results show, doubtfulness can be linked to anxiety which blocks human thinking and acting. On the other hand, as exemplified by Galileo, doubt demands a deeper analysis of the situation and is conducive to human development, in personal or even in socio-cultural space.

Key words: doubtfulness, internal dialogue, dialogicality, dialogical model of doubtfulness

Doubtfulness seems to describe human condition from the very beginning of *homo sapiens*. However, culture can maximize doubts, especially those concerning the self. As Leary (2004) argues, our self is a permanent source of numerous inadaptive voices which erode our self-confidence, question our priorities and principles, or create confusion as to our strivings and goals. Moreover, the current globalizing world, or more precisely the current relativistic culture and free market of values, stimulate many doubts and arouse internal conflicts between opposite ideas. These are serious problems which also concern our identity, because on the one hand people are aware of a multitude of incoherent possibilities, while on the other they feel pressure to make decisions and life choices about their personal status, psychosexual orientation, profession, career, future and so on. Such a situation can increase personal or social doubts (Oleś & Batory, 2008). In this context Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) speak of the experience

of uncertainty. They argue that this experience can be a gift, as it opens a broad range of unexpected possibilities, but, particularly at a high level of intensity, it also leads to anxiety and insecurity. They are of the opinion that the experience of uncertainty is composed of four aspects: (a) *complexity*, referring to a great number of parts (of self and society) that have a variety of interconnections; (b) *ambiguity*, referring to a suspension of clarity, as the meaning of one part is determined by the flux and variation of the other parts; (c) *deficit knowledge*, referring to the absence of a superordinate knowledge structure that is able to resolve contradictions between the parts; and (d) *unpredictability*, implying a lack of control of future developments. Thus, they assume that the experience of uncertainty is a consequence of “a global situation of multi-voicedness (complexity) that does not allow a fixation of meaning (ambiguity), that has no super-ordinate voice for resolving contradictions and conflicting information (deficit knowledge), and that is to a large extent unpredictable” (p. 3).

The multi-voicedness of the world is reflected in our selves. Self in our direct experience appears to us as awareness of feelings, thoughts and behaviors which are not always coherent in their content. Many different points of view, often contrasting, can occur when a person refers to the world, other people and themselves (Oleś, 2011). Observation of this fact was the starting point for Hermans’ dialogical self theory which is rooted in the phenomenological approach. According to Hermans, the dialogical self is a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions (different points of view available to a person) which are present in an imaginary space of mind, endowed with voices and intertwined with each other like people in social relationships (Hermans, 2003). Those relationships between I-positions can have three main forms, namely: monologue, change of perspective and dialogue (Puchalska-Wasył, 2006, 2010; Puchalska-Wasył, Chmielnicka-Kuter, & Oleś, 2008). An internal monologue can be defined as a situation when only one I-position of the dialogical self is speaking, whereas the other one is a silent but active listener who has a strong influence on the utterances of the first I-position. A change of perspective means taking somebody else’s point of view (I-position) without necessarily voicing it. During the inner dialogue, at least two I-positions are voiced and interact as interlocutors. This means that a person alternately adopts those different points of view and from those perspectives formulates utterances that relate to one another.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) emphasize that inner dialogue is one of the forms of reducing the experience of uncertainty. Encountering two or more positions in dialogue gives a chance to clarify or to overcome uncertainty by “integration of opposites” or creation of a new idea.

The dialogue can reduce uncertainty but such an effect is neither universal nor obvious. If the person is unable to unify or integrate various points of view emerging at the beginning of internal dialogue, or none of the I-positions

(internal voices) is able to impose their own opinion on the others, the doubts become even greater and greater. Moreover, when a particular decision that has been made is continuously questioned by new counter-arguments representing different points of view (I-positions), the experience of uncertainty as well as doubts grow rather than being reduced. Thus, the functions of internal dialogue initiated in a situation of doubtfulness depend on a variety of inner voices, their power and on external influences, whereas motivation to conduct internal dialogue in the experience of doubtfulness is more clear – dialogue is treated as a possible antidote for uncertainty, doubts are to be solved in an inner discussion.

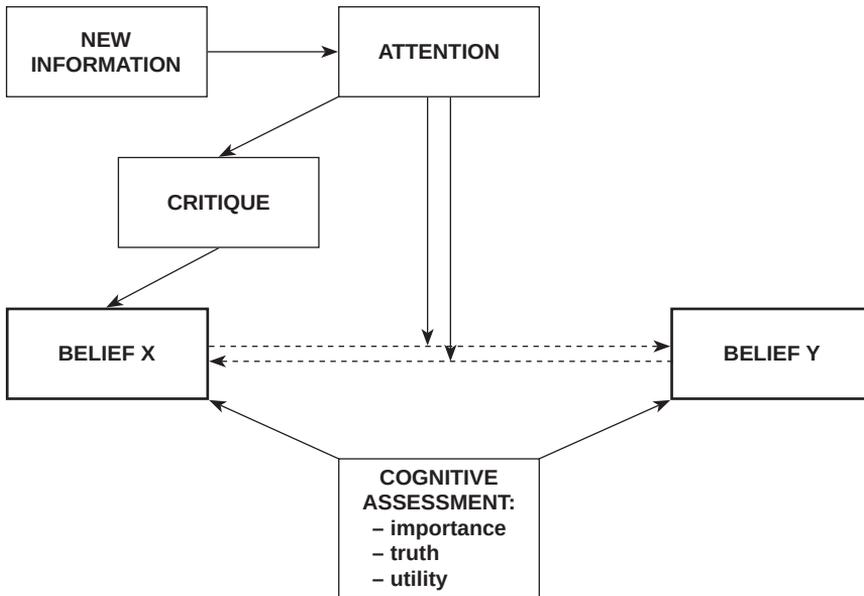
The stance of one language researcher, Saugstad (1977, 1980), appears to be consistent with the idea that doubtfulness is a starting point for dialogue. He claims that it is not really possible to imagine the emergence of a need for communication in two subjects who possess absolutely identical knowledge or – in other words – absolutely identical understanding. An initial knowledge gap, even if only slight, is necessary for dialogue to occur. It is worth noting that Saugstad adds that some knowledge common to interlocutors is necessary, for it is on its basis that understanding is progressively built.

Cognitive model of doubtfulness

According to socio-cognitive theory, doubts arise from different beliefs (Bandura, 1991). The phenomenon of doubtfulness can be considered in two versions. The first implies at least two contrasting beliefs, one of them can be created as an antithesis to the other (for example: *Smolensk disaster – was it just an air crash or a bomb outrage?*), and some cognitive processes (which are similar for both cases): reasoning, comparing the consequences, construing hypothetical scenarios. The second version concerns a basic personal belief or principle that is questioned by internal critique (self-criticism, self-reflection) or external critique (by another person, or indirectly by an institution, or culture), which erodes the certainty ascribed to the questioned belief (for example: *Does God exist?*). As a result, the person considers an alternative belief as possible, though not fully accepted. The questioned belief (*Yes, God exists*) or especially two different and to some extent contrasting beliefs (*Yes, God exists* vs. *No, God does not exist*) produce tension and doubts. The former case is close to cognitive dissonance, the latter illustrates dialectic thinking.

The aforementioned cognitive processes tend to reduce the cognitive dissonance (first version) or to clarify arguments and diminish the space of uncertainty (second version). These processes refer to attention focused on competing or alternative beliefs on the one hand, and to cognitive assessment in terms of (i) importance, (ii) probability of being true and (iii) utility or acceptability (by oneself and/or others) on the other (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cognitive model of doubtfulness

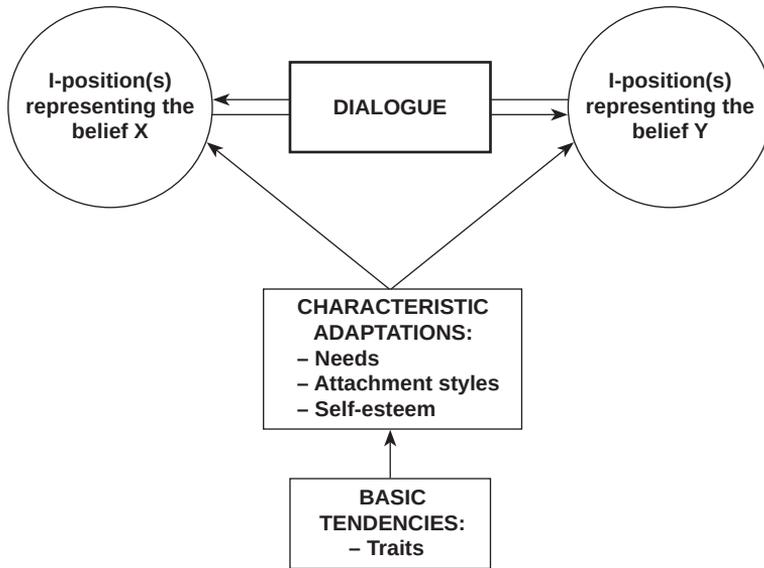


Doubtfulness as a starting point for inner dialogue

In what way does a doubt evoke internal dialogue? We assume that each of the contrasting beliefs represents a particular voice of the self that is an important (at a given moment) I-position. This means that the belief is not only articulated but also supported by additional beliefs, reasoning and/or arguing. In this way the belief is personified as important and specific. As a matter of fact, both competing beliefs are personified, being separate parts of the belief system and associated affects. Moreover, coalitions of existing and additionally created I-positions are also possible.

In the light of the dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Puchalska-Wasył, 2006), we can also suppose that the I-positions involved in internal dialogue as the interlocutors fit the current needs of the person experiencing uncertainty. Each person has a broad scope of potential I-positions functioning as possible partners of inner dialogue. As a reference point we can take cognitive schemas of behavior in the social-cognitive approach. A person has numerous cognitive schemas of behavior but which one is going to be realized depends on the cognitive interpretation of the situation, motivation, self-efficacy belief, predicted results, internal values and social context (Bandura, 1991). Similarly, what I-position is engaged in internal dialogue depends on what the person is looking for: support, advice, warning, clarification, certainty,

Figure 2. Dialogical model of doubtfulness



contradiction, exploration, or emotional exchange. Referring to the integrative model of personality by McCrae and Costa (1999), all these various needs belong to characteristic adaptations – the level of personality developed within interaction between basic tendencies (mainly traits) and the social environment. Characteristic adaptations also include attachment styles and self-concept.

Our thinking about internal dialogues as fueled by doubts is reflected in the dialogical model of doubtfulness (see Figure 2). Its theoretical character demands empirical verification, but it is worth noting that some empirical data obtained so far are consistent with the model.

Dialogue and doubtfulness in the context of empirical findings

Assuming that people differ in the intensity of internal dialogues, and that these differences can be empirically assessed, we constructed the Internal Dialogical Activity Scale (IDAS) to measure this phenomenon according to the individual differences approach (Oleś, 2009; Oleś et al., 2010). We define internal dialogical activity as engagement in dialogues with imagined figures, the simulation of social dialogical relationships in one's own thoughts, and the mutual confrontation of the points of view representing different I-positions relevant for personal and/or social identity (Oleś, 2009; see also: Hermans, 1996, 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Josephs, 1998; Marková, 2005). The IDAS allows to assess the intensity of general dialogical activity (general score) and of seven kinds of internal dialogues

measured by subscales. The names of these subscales are presented below together with one clarifying example of an item for each of the subscales.

- Pure Dialogical Activity (DA) – *I converse with myself.*
- Identity Dialogues (ID) – *Sometimes I debate with myself about who I really am.*
- Supportive Dialogues (SD) – *In some stressful situations, I attempt to calm myself with my thoughts.*
- Ruminative Dialogues (RD) – *After failures, I blame myself in my thoughts and discuss how the failures could have been avoided.*
- Confronting Dialogues (CD) – *Sometimes I think that my “good” side argues with my “bad” side.*
- Simulation of Social Dialogues (SS) – *Sometimes I continue a conversation with other people in my mind.*
- Taking a Point of View (PV) – *Often in my thoughts I use the perspective of someone else.*

Empirically proved relationships between internal dialogical activity and various variables representing personality traits and some characteristic adaptations indirectly confirm the main thesis of this paper, namely that the experience of doubtfulness often initiates an internal dialogue (cf. Oleś, et al., 2010; Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2012).

For example, we computed the correlations between the IDAS and the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The results showed a moderate correspondence between the general intensity of internal dialogical activity and Neuroticism (0.34, $p < 0.001$), as well as Openness (from 0.27, $p < 0.01$ in adolescents, to 0.54, $p < 0.001$ in middle-aged adults). The relationship with Neuroticism was also replicated using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire – Revised (0.39, $p < 0.001$). Generally, the higher the level of Neuroticism and Openness, the higher the level of internal dialogical activity (Puchalska-Wasył et al., 2008). This is probably modified by developmental factors since, in adolescents, internal dialogicality corresponds more strongly with Neuroticism than with Openness (in students, more strongly with Openness or Neuroticism, depending on the sample), while in the middle-aged samples the internal dialogical activity corresponds more strongly with Openness than with Neuroticism (Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2012). This suggests that adolescents use internal dialogues more for coping with the unknown, which tends mainly to reduce anxiety, whereas middle-aged adults use those dialogues mainly for exploring new possibilities and perhaps for dialectical thinking which broadens the scope of personal possibilities (see: Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Oh, 2001). However, it should be emphasized that – according to the correlations – a relationship between the general intensity of internal dialogues and Neuroticism appeared in each group, which seems to confirm the link between internal dialogical activity and an inclination to be full of uncertainty and doubts.

When attachment styles were measured by the Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised Questionnaire (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), only one significant positive correlation was found – between the general intensity of internal dialogical activity and the anxious style ($0.39, p < 0.001$). In that context, the general intensity of inner dialogues seems to be connected to the neuroticism of anxious persons, their self-consciousness, uncertainty and, in consequence, their motivation to test possible social contacts in advance by means of internal dialogue.

Our results also show a slight negative relationship between the general intensity of internal dialogical activity and self-esteem ($-0.32, p < 0.05$) measured by SES (Rosenberg, 1965), as well as self-concept clarity ($-0.37, p < 0.01$) measured by the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCC; Campbell et al., 1996). Thus, inner dialogues are generally easier for those who have some self-doubts or not very high self-esteem. Perhaps an unclear self-concept leaves room for the internal confrontation of different points of view which may tend to clarify self-knowledge.

The aforementioned relationships suggest an affinity between the general intensity of internal dialogues and a tendency to doubt or experience uncertainty based on Neuroticism (and Openness toward the new and the unknown), an anxious attachment style, lowered self-esteem and an unclear self-concept. However, the supposition that solely those personality characteristics coexist with dialogicality would be false. The above-mentioned results were revealed on a general level of analyses. On the particular level, more diverse links between personality variables and different types of inner dialogues were found. They allow to see the proposed dialogical model of doubtfulness in a broader context (see Figure 2).

Our research revealed that there is a consistency between the type of internal dialogues and traits. For example, people high in Neuroticism tend to conduct ruminative dialogues (the correlation between Neuroticism and ruminative dialogues as a subscale of the IDAS is $r = 0.44, p < 0.001$), whereas people high in Openness are prone to use internal dialogues for identity clarification (the correlation between Openness and identity dialogues in IDAS is $r = 0.57, p < 0.001$), (Oleś, et al., 2010; Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2012).

Attachment styles affect the type of internal dialogue to an even greater degree. Secure attachment correlates positively with identity dialogues ($0.64, p < 0.001$) and negatively with ruminative dialogues ($-0.75, p < 0.001$) as measured by the subscales of the IDAS. Anxious attachment correlates with the simulation of social relationships ($0.79, p < 0.001$) as well as ruminative dialogues ($0.53, p < 0.001$), whereas avoidant attachment correlates negatively with supporting dialogues ($-0.67, p < 0.001$) as well as identity dialogues ($-0.45, p < 0.001$), and slightly positively with ruminative dialogues ($0.34, p < 0.001$) (Oleś, et al., 2010; Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2012). This means that general patterns of adaptation correspond with the following types of internal dialogue: security in social rela-

tionships inspires individuals to use internal dialogues in forming their identity and to avoid rumination, whilst, for example, anxiety in social relationships stimulates individuals to simulate and check interpersonal relationships in their imagination.

As formulated earlier (Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2012), we are of the opinion that traits more likely affect the intensity of dialogicality, whereas attachment styles influence the type of internal dialogue, which in a very general way can also correspond to traits.

An analysis of the empirical data leans towards two main conclusions:

- Dialogue initiated by “the same uncertainty” can be conducted in different ways and, in consequence, result in various solutions, depending on the personality context. For example, moral doubts can give rise to identity dialogues in which people try to learn about what is personally important to them (people high in Openness and/or with secure attachment) or ruminative dialogues in which they continuously accuse themselves of weakness and violation of values by the very act of doubt (people high in Neuroticism and/or with anxious attachment).
- Personality characteristics make people susceptible to experiencing doubtfulness which concerns different areas. For example, people with secure attachment style are more likely to have identity doubts (so they usually conduct identity dialogues), whereas people with the anxious attachment style feel uncertainty mainly in social relations (so they primarily conduct inner dialogues which are a simulation of social dialogues).

In order to complete the picture of the relationships between inner dialogue and doubtfulness, one hypothesis should be added to the above-mentioned conclusions:

- Doubtfulness is frequent but not the only source of inner dialogues. For example, my imaginary dialogue with a beloved person can be evoked by my doubts whether I am loved by that person as well as by a longing for my beloved.

Doubtfulness and dialogue in philosophy and science

Russian philosopher of consciousness Vladimir Bibler (1982) emphasizes the importance of dialogue and doubtfulness for the development of philosophy and science. He is the author of the idea that every creative thinking act is the result of dialogue. Dialogue with oneself, in its form, constitutes a conflict between radically different logics of thinking. And what is especially worth noting, this dialogue is based on the experience of lack of understanding, which can also be called doubtfulness, uncertainty or lack of knowledge.

Bibler shares the assumption commonly accepted in philosophy and science that reality is governed only by one Logic (*logos*, the order of the world). This

Logic is understood as the totality of the fundamental laws applicable to every possible object (e.g. the law of identity, $x = x$). At the same time he assumes that there is

... a 'dialogic', a radical dispute with oneself in which each of my selves (internal interlocutors) has its own logic – not a worse one, not a better one, not a more legitimate one, than the logic of the other self. Therefore ... the very being of my logic – in the form of a 'dialogic' – determines its permanent progress, which means that in the response to an internal interlocutor's rejoinder, I unfold and fundamentally transform, improve my argumentation and, simultaneously, the same occurs in my other self (alter ego).
(Bibler, 1982, p. 59)

In speaking of many logics, Bibler refers to a multiplicity of logical positions, each expressing a person's level of participation in the one Logic, since the human mind does not grasp it in its entirety. The philosopher is of the opinion that when people think, they formulate equally what they understand regarding the subject matter and what they do not, and what is illogical about it in the light of the logic already attained by them. Thus, our partial logic clashes within us with the logic of what we do not understand. The awareness that something is logical but at the same time illogical for us gives rise to uncertainty and doubtfulness. A lack of knowledge is experienced in this situation, which – in line with Saugstad's stance – is the starting point for (inner) dialogue. As Bibler claims, owing to the confrontation of two different points of view, people are sometimes able to discover a new element of the Logic of the world and in this way human knowledge is expanded.

Bibler's ideas are exemplified in Galileo's work. His dissertation *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, Ptolemaic and Copernican* (1632/1967), which expresses support for Copernicus' theory, probably had its origin in the experience of doubtfulness. It is well known that the astronomer started to lean towards the heliocentric theory many years before publishing this work, when the facts he had observed turned out to be inexplicable in the light of the knowledge approved at the time. Galileo's doubts can be considered on two levels. The first level is scientific and can be represented by the question: Which of the theories, heliocentric or geocentric, is true? Galileo knew both theories, therefore both of them could become his logical positions clashing with each other. The second level on which the astronomer's doubts can be analyzed is the moral level, and it can be reflected in the question: If the heliocentric theory is true, is it necessary to opt for it risking one's own reputation or even life? It should be emphasized that according to the Inquisition's regulations, from 1616 the heliocentric theory was allowed to be taken into account only as a hypothesis useful for the mathematical calculation of planet movements, not as scientific truth. Thus, if Galileo

had directly subscribed to Copernicus' theory, he would have been accused of heresy and have shared Giordano Bruno's fate.

As history showed, Galileo eventually decided to find and introduce the world to the truth. It is possible that doubtfulness on the second level was the beginning of his inner dialogue, but it is almost sure that doubts on the first level triggered that dialogue. When the facts the astronomer had observed turned out to be inexplicable in the light of the knowledge which was approved at the time, he started to lean towards the heliocentric theory. However, he wanted to be sure of the correctness of this theory in order to be able to defend it. Before trying to convince others, he had to assure himself of the validity of Copernicus' theory. He therefore began to search for empirical arguments in its favor. At the same time, he had to find arguments against it in contemporary knowledge, and then either (1) rebut these counter-arguments, (2) prove that they were not at variance with the heliocentric theory, or (3) modify his own ideas under their influence. Those mental operations are consistent with the functions of internal dialogues as proposed by Kuchinski (1983), who calls them, respectively, (1) the structuralization of the given point of view (as opposed to the rebutted one); (2) the formulation of prerequisites for a synthesis of the points of view involved in the dialogue and (3) the correction. According to him, a complex inner dialogue is necessary to reach the correct generalization from knowledge.

The internal dialogue conducted by Galileo was reflected in his dissertation, which was constructed as a dispute among three people: Salviati, Sagredo and Simplicio. Each of the three characters in the astronomer's work represents a different logical position. Simplicio opts for traditional scholastic philosophy, full of reverence for the unquestionable Aristotelian authority, and claims that Copernicus' point of view, which contradicts the Aristotelian one, is nonsense. Salviati holds the opinion of Galileo himself, a follower of the heliocentric theory. Sagredo, a pragmatist, does not know the latest discoveries in the fields of mathematics or astronomy, but his remarks help remove all ambiguities from the discussion. It is characteristic of the *Dialogue* that Galileo is not only able to raise objections to the heliocentric theory from the perspective of his opponents (Simplicio or Sagredo), and rebut them from his own point of view (Salviati), but also to take the logical position of his adversary to prove the validity of his own logic.

On one hand, the dispute among Salviati, Sagredo and Simplicio seems to be the externalization of Galileo's inner dialogue, its aim being to assure himself of the validity of the heliocentric theory. On the other hand, the choice of such a form of work appears to be the best way for Galileo to avoid the accusation of heresy. He decided to present his ideas as one of three standpoints in a discussion on the assumption that an apparent balance in the dispute would guarantee his safety. In that context, the idea of the dialogical form of his work as a defense against *Sacrum Officium* could be one of the factors conducive to Galileo's moral choice to seek the truth and subscribe to it even at the risk of his life.

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Typical features of the postmodernist period in which we live include dissemination of an ironic attitude towards statements previously regarded as universal ones, relativism of the truth and other values, negation of all the paradigms, and the ‘deconstruction ethos’ of established structures. Lack of any constancy which gives assurance, continuous changeability, a flood of multiplicity, and moreover fluid identity (Giddens, 1991) cause people to feel lost and often make them unable to find meaning in their lives (Gergen, 1992; cf. McAdams, 1996; Tarnas, 2000). The experience of unpleasant uncertainty and doubtfulness which then arises can become a starting point for internal dialogue.

In this cultural context the role which dialogue can and should fulfill today is probably larger than ever before. If a person does not want to unreflectively succumb to promoted trends or to get lost in their thicket, but he/she wants to see problems from different perspectives and to make decisions independently, he/she must learn to choose consciously. Internal dialogue based on the ability to confront various standpoints can help establish a relationship between one’s own concept of life and the proposal of the world (cf. Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

In philosophy there is a stance that the inclination to doubt is an expression of human weakness, but at the same time this tendency was of great importance in the process which enabled humans to attain the status of rational beings (Kołakowski, 1990). As we attempt to show, on one hand doubtfulness can be linked to discomfort and even anxiety which blocks our thinking, keeps us from acting and consumes lots of energy. On the other hand, doubt demands a deeper analysis of the situation and is conducive to development – not only in personal space, as exemplified by Galileo. Doubtfulness is an exceptional ability which is typical only of humans – no other beings attain it. According to Kołakowski (1984), it is a human ability and a human right that should be protected. Nobody likes doubtfulness, but if we destroy it, we undermine reason...

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