

## INTRODUCTION

### Problems and approaches in axiology and ethics

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Were one to ask which philosophical notion made it big over the last century, a likely answer would be “value”. Though short, its history is rather unusual. For a long time philosophical thinking did very well without recourse to the notion of “value”. Philosophers debated virtue or good, with the notion of “value” consigned to economic sciences.

It appears that several developments in philosophy had to take place for the notion of “value” to be transposed into ethics. Firstly, the turn towards subjectivity, characteristic of modern philosophy, favoured questions focusing not so much on “good in itself”, but the way good is experienced. Secondly, the fall of classical metaphysics along with its concept of transcendentals undermined the conviction that the being and good are interchangeable (*ens et bonum convertuntur*). Thirdly, the gradual devaluation of natural law, resulting from the technical functionalisation of nature, precipitated the need to again articulate the question of the source of normativity. If, in a postmodern society, we cannot agree on the potential (non-) existence of God, and nature has become a “storehouse of prefabs”, let us at least agree on “basic values”. But what values would these be? As far back as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was hardly an obvious question.

In 1893, Christian von Ehrenfels put forward his notion of “Werttheorie”, or value theory. Soon, the notion of value, along with axiology understood as a general theory of value, came to dominate the philosophical discourse of twentieth-century Europe. Eduard von Hartmann, Heinrich Rickert, Wilhelm Windelband, Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Hans Reiner, Joseph Seifert, Roman Ingarden, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Henryk Elzenberg, Louis Lavelle or René Le Senne are merely the most important of those thinkers who for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century set the tone for the philosophical debate on values. The popularity of axiology and “the material ethics of values” drove Martin Heidegger to dub thinking in values (*das Denken in Werten*) the greatest blasphemy (*die grösste Blasphemie*) against Being (*Sein*). The second blow to axiology was dealt by the sociologically-oriented Frankfurt School.

1970s marked the beginning of the waning of axiology as a subdiscipline of philosophy. The notion of value no longer had theoretical credence in ethics. Exiled from philosophical discourse, the notion found a safe haven in social and political sciences as well as the law. Moral and ideological disputes, which sometimes rend the public sphere in Poland (and elsewhere), always appear to be disagreements on values. The heated debate on the final shape of the preamble to the Lisbon Treaty and the Christian values absent from it, or the recent calls to defend the value of the family show the extent to which “thinking in values” continues to permeate public space.

It is in this context that we invited some eminent philosophers to make a statement on the perspectives of modern axiology and new forms of justifying philosophical ethics. In response, Peter Knauer briefly outlines the main directions in contemporary attempts to justify ethics. In his extensive article, Arno Anzenbacher recounts the five classical forms of justifying ethics, from St Thomas Aquinas to utilitarianism. Dieter Birnbacher and Christoph Hubig show in their texts how the newly defined notion of values can become the cornerstone of moral order and normative ethics, as well as, potentially, the beginning of an “applied axiology”.

Two Polish writers are represented in this issue. Monika Torczyńska addresses the issue of values in the context of the beliefs of Tadeusz Czeżowski. Krzysztof Serafin is one of the first Polish philosophers to attempt a description of the main features of Maria Gołaszewska’s axiology.

Ukrainian author Vladimir Goncharov also draws on the issue of values, albeit in a very practical and detailed context of pedagogy. In his paper, he addresses several issues concerning the transformations of the way education is understood in Ukraine (the text is published in the second part of the issue).

We hope this diverse discourse will be a valuable contribution to contemporary debates in axiology and ethics.

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