

INTRODUCTION

At a time when the humanities – for the most part – have ceased to concern themselves with fundamental and universal issues, when scientists have concentrated their research on immediate problems, often producing reports rather than scientific texts, and when universities – slowly turning into corporations – are preparing young people for the labour market, it is worth reflecting on issues without which all other problems undertaken within the framework of reflection on culture become sterile.

This is why we are resurrecting the concept of values, a concept forgotten in philosophy perhaps because it is now considered useless or even harmful. Herbert Schnädelbach wrote:

As with values, it is with 'life': as a philosophical subject they have become alien to us. Someone preaching something about theories of value in a philosophical institute today would either arouse suspicion of being a representative of the 'eternal values' ideology preached by their great-grandparents, or they would appear to be an exegete of Marx, promising to abrogate the mysteries of the relationship between use-value and exchange-value (1992: 249).¹

The question of values is important because it is *de facto* a question of meaning. When we consider whether life has value for us, we are also asking whether life has meaning for us. Heinrich Rickert wrote about this explicitly when he stated:

The problem of values is central to any scientific elaboration of the problem of the meaning of life or a general worldview [...] properly understood problems of meaning always lead to problems of values, because to explain the meaning of life is as much as: to realise the values that give it meaning' (Schnädelbach 1992: 225).

¹ All translations by Dr. Paul McNamara.

Values are also the entities around which reflection on culture and identity should focus due to the fact that it is not irrelevant which values will form the foundation of culture.

Values are also constitutive for the formation of human identity in making up its spiritual core-essence. However, essentialism is rejected in contemporary post-humanism, for which man is no longer defined by his nature, but by his relationship to other entities, namely: man-machine, man-animal or man-plant relationships. Man thus becomes a processual entity for which there are no boundaries, in particular those related to life expectancy, intellectual capacity or well-being. For contemporary post- and trans-humanists, the problem of human limits and possibilities is only an epistemological problem, not an ontic one. They believe that crossing more boundaries is only related to acquiring new knowledge and implementing new technologies. However, it seems, as Martin Heidegger has already recognised, that existing within boundaries is an immanent feature of man and his identity, and that ignoring this fact leads to predictable and unpredictable aberrations.

Playing around values or playing with values, juggling their meaning, shifting them around in the hierarchy, must consequently lead to crises involving different spheres of human life, both individual and communal. Reinhart Koselleck, in analysing the concept of crisis, began with its genesis. The Greek word *krino* meaning separation, disconnection, indicated the activity of choosing, of making a final, irrevocable 'either-or' decision (Koselleck 2009: 222–232). A crisis has led to a change in the state or space in which the individual had hitherto functioned. It has been and still is a process, therefore, which, on the one hand, can lead to negative consequences, but can also have positive results, provided the individual manages to take advantage of this particular 'moment of transition'. The self-reflection of the subject accompanying the crisis, if supported by discernment and adequate knowledge, offers one a chance to emerge victorious from a difficult situation (due to it being a crisis). However, this knowledge must be possessed, constantly acquired and used. What if we do not have it? Have we neither been equipped with it, for various reasons, nor been taught to seek it? We thus become helpless in the face of even the smallest failures or stumbles.

A crisis of values, involving, among other things, a change of priorities, either communal and/or individual, may therefore result in a crisis of the individual or the community itself, deepening and spilling over into other

spheres of life, including those relating to identity, leading to its disintegration and division. This is by no means a new or unfamiliar phenomenon for mankind: it takes on various forms, such as a destructive revolution, the collapse of statehood or nepotism. We are then confronted with a culture of destruction, or more precisely with an anti-culture – a denial of what culture is in its classical, ancient sense – as the art of nurturing (cultivating) the soul and the mind. Thus, any action that harms the mind and the soul in the broadest sense will harm the human being himself, his condition, both physically and mentally. Anti-culture ignores universal connections, it further breaks down a triad that has long since broken down, separating truth from beauty and goodness. Something that was once the same has been separated, disconnected, mixed up, losing its original essence. As a result, today ugliness pretends to be beauty, evil pretends to be good, and lies pretend to be truth. The world of anti-culture lives around post-beauty, post-goodness and post-truth. These phenomena are present in many areas of community life. The more they appear, the more they become familiar, taming their users.

This makes it all the more necessary to reflect on culture in its true, classical sense, a task which we attempt to do through the articles in this volume. We therefore trust that the reader will find in it an inspiration for in-depth reflections on human identity, values and culture.

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