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Dariusz Juruś[1]

THE BEING OF VALUES

Abstract

In this paper I present three main approaches to the problem of the being of values by discussing objectivism, subjectivism and relationism referring to historical positions. I conclude that axiological discourse, when reduced to the horizontal dimension, leads to the relativisation of all values, the process of blurring the boundaries to their eventual annihilation.

Keywords: values, objectivism, subjectivism, relationism

Although it seems that axiology as a branch of philosophy already had its heyday more or less in the first half of the 20th century, the issue of values – whether one recognises it or not – is still valid. Values – whether we like it or not – fill our lives: we have value systems, we fight for values, and sometimes we even die for values. Indeed, values are important to us, we care about them, and values are significant. Therefore, it is worth starting our reflection on values with ontological solutions and answering the question concerning the way values exist.

In the axiological tradition,[2] three approaches can be distinguished regarding the being of values: objectivism, subjectivism and relationism. Objectivism is the theory that value constitutes something[3] that exists independently of the subject. Subjectivism holds that value is something dependent on the subject, in particular on the subject's mental or emotional states. In the case of relationism, we are dealing with the view that a value

[1] Dr. hab. Prof. JU; Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland; ORCID: 0000-0002-2018-9361; dariusz.jurus@uj.edu.pl.

[2] Axiology as a separate branch of philosophy emerged only in the second half of the 19th century, mainly due to neo-Kantians of the Baden School (Rickert, Windelband), Brentano's research or Nietzsche's philosophy.

[3] We write "something" because it may be an idea, feature, being or quality.

arises as a result of the relationship between an entity, which is somewhat qualified, and a subject that relates to it in some way.[4]

OBJECTIVISM

The first objectivist theory of value can be found in Plato. According to him, values are ideas[5] that exist in an ideal sphere. Values, such as the Good or Beauty, which are identical in Plato's concept, do not belong to the factual, real or natural order, but to the ideal order, which is changeless and eternal. As stated by Plato, we have access to the sphere of ideas or values, thanks to reason,[6] and not thanks to the senses which enable us to access the sensual world (the world of the cave). According to Plato, only ideas constitute real or objective reality. The sensual-earthly world imitates only the ideal reality (*mimesis*), participates in it (*methexis metheksis*) or is made present (*parousia*). In Plato's view, the highest idea is the Form of the Good:

> But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.[7]

The Platonic concept of value constitutes both axiological ontological objectivism (value exists in itself regardless of the existence of other

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[4] Apart from these approaches, one can distinguish the view that values do not exist, but are only valid (Rickert, Windelband).

[5] Not all ideas are values or ideas of values, but all values are ideas.

[6] The idea of the Good-Beauty eludes discursive cognition. In *The Seventh Letter*, Plato writes: "There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself" at http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/seventh_letter.html, accessed 18.11.2022.

[7] Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1497/pg1497-images.html, accessed 18.11.2022.

beings and the existence of the human psyche) and axiological epistemological objectivism (value is independent of all subjective acts, including those which are cognitive, volitional, emotional, or lustful).

In *Timaeus*, Plato speaks of God who creates the world from eternal matter and an eternal idea:

> Let me tell you then why the creator made this world of generation. He was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world, as we shall do well in believing on the testimony of wise men.[8]

God creates the world referring to an ideal pattern: "If the world be indeed fair and the artificer good, it is manifest that he must have looked to that which is eternal."[9] Thus, God is not the creator of value-idea. Moreover, considering Plato's concept, we are dealing with both ontological and theological objectivism.

The objectivist stance was developed on the basis of the Christian philosophy of Saint Augustine. In his conception, God is the only Good: while things are good, but they are not the Good. In particular, the Good does not constitute ideas that according to St Augustine, are the thoughts of God as patterns for things which are being created (meaning that God creates ideas and things as a result of his thinking). Thus, the ideas of good and beauty do not exist objectively, but are – as thoughts – dependent on God.

God creates all things that are good as his artefacts. He also creates the criteria of good, that is, measure, form and order, as ideas. The more of these that occur in things, the better things are. Evil is the absence of good understood as the lack of measure, form and order. Therefore, evil does not exist substantially, but incidentally. God, like the Platonic Demiurge, is the basis of all values. The attributes of God are the mind, will and love. In the concept of St Augustine, values depend on God, and this puts his theory – axiological theological subjectivism – in opposition to Plato. It can be said that in the horizontal order, St Augustine is, like Plato, an objectivist (values are independent of the thing), while in the vertical order he is a subjectivist (values are dependent on God).

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[8] Plato, *Timaeus*, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html, accessed 19.11.2022.

[9] Ibid.

In the 17th century, objectivist views in ethics were put forward by Henry More (1614–1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688). More wrote that there are certain fundamental principles of morality which neither require nor are capable of proof, and into which all moral reasoning may be resolved. These principles are known as moral "noemata."[10] Moreover, the right reason is the judge of right and wrong (Niemczuk 1994, 62) According to More, these truths are discerned by "the boniform faculty," a kind of intellectual intuition. As these values are analogous to mathematical truths, they are objective, eternal and absolute. Knowing them is a specific way of participating in the divine mind. Cudworth clarifies More's thought by maintaining that ideas or values exist in the eternal mind of God, who neither invents nor creates them freely. Thus, they do not depend on the will of God (Niemczuk 1994, 63).

In his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz expressed a similar view, writing:

> This is why, accordingly, I find so strange those expressions of certain philosophers who say that the eternal truths of metaphysics and Geometry, and consequently the principles of goodness, of justice, and of perfection, are effects only of the will of God. To me it seems that all these follow from his understanding, which does not depend upon his will any more than does his essence.[11]

There is also an objectivist theory of value in the case of philosophers of the phenomenological tradition. Max Scheler (1874–1928), for instance, distinguishes between the intentional variety of consciousness, which includes emotional acts, and the unintentional variety of consciousness, that is, emotional states. He assigns a cognitive function to the former, understood as an intentional feeling. According to Scheler, "feeling is therefore a meaningful occurrence" (Scheler 1973, 258).[12] Objects of the emotional *a priori* or feeling constitute values. As stated by Scheler: "It is here that

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[10] H. More, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2175864.pdf, accessed on 20.11.2022.

[11] G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, at https://web.archive.org/web/20060611040020/https://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/Leibniz-Discourse.htm, accessed on 20.11.2022.

[12] M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of and Ethical Personalism*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk, Evaston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, at https://wiac.info/docviewer, accessed on 20.11.2022.

feeling gains a cognitive function in addition to its intentional nature" (Scheler 1973, 257). Scheler stresses the *a priori* character of feelings as follows: "Feeling, preferring and rejecting, loving and hating, which belong to the totality of spirit [des Geistes], possess their own a priori contents independent of inductive experience and pure laws of thought" (Scheler 1973, 65).

In particular, the object of intentional feelings can be feeling-states. As Scheler writes:

> We must distinguish between the intentional 'feeling of something' and mere feeling-states. This distinction in itself does not yet bear on the content given in intentional feelings, i.e. when we regard them as organs for comprehending values. There is original emotive intentionality. Perhaps this is most apparent when both a feeling and feeling it occur simultaneously, when a feeling is that toward which feeling is directed.

For example, we can relate to pain (a feeling-state) in a different way: we "suffer," "endure," "tolerate," or even "enjoy" pain (Scheler 1973, 255–256; Pyka 1999, 146).

According to Scheler, values are ideal qualities which we grasp directly by feelings. A value-quality can be related to a concrete bearer or can be ideal as a general quality (Pyka 1999, 238). Their qualitative nature is evidenced by the fact that they are grasped directly and have variants; for example, the case of the savoury quality:

> No more than the names of colors refer to mere properties of corporeal (*körperlich*), things – notwithstanding the fact that appearances of colors in the natural standpoint come to our attention only insofar as they function as a means for distinguishing various corporeal, thinglike unities – do the names of values refer to mere properties of the thinglike given unities that we call *goods*. Just as I can bring to givenness a red color as a mere extensive quale, e.g., as a pure color of the spectrum, without regarding it as covering a corporeal surface or as something spatial, so also are such *values* as agreeable, charming, lovely, friendly, distinguished, and noble in principle accessible to me without my having to represent them as properties belonging to things or men (Scheler 1973, 12).

Values as such objectively belong to objects and do not come down to feelings accompanying their perception. (The beauty of a landscape is in the landscape itself, not in our admiration for it.) Values do not consist

in some common characteristics which can be discerned in a given object or person. According to Scheler, attempting to establish a common characteristic leads into "an epistemological error" and "a moral illusion" (Scheler 1973, 14; Galewicz 1988, 48): "Just as it is senseless to ask for the common properties of all blue or red things, since they have nothing in common except their blueness or redness, so is it senseless to ask for the common properties of good or evil deeds, moral tenors [Gesinnungen], men" (Scheler 1973, 15). These value-qualities create goods entirely independent of the realm of goods in which they appear. For example, a man can be sympathetic to us without our being able to indicate how this comes about. Moreover, values show their independence of goods when the bearers of given values change. "Neither is it true that values become affected in their order when their bearers change in value. (…) The value of friendship is not affected if my friend turns out to be a false friend and betrays me" (Scheler 1973, 18–19). Thus, the emotional grasping of value precedes its conceptual understanding (*Res amans* precedes *res cogitans*).

Values as ideal qualities contain an element of oughtness [Sollsein] (positive values apply to the ought-to-be; negative ones to the ought-not-to-be) in that values attract us [ziehen an] or repel us [stossen ab] (Scheler 1973, 209). The first condition of value-cognition is the love of the spiritual person for being, that is, directing the value of love into the world, which illuminates the sphere of values, thus allowing feelings to access it. The opposite of loving is hating, which tightens one's field of vision, making it impossible to access the world of values.

According to Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), values are, due to their way of being, Platonic ideas. They belong to that realm of being which, as Plato discovered, can be captured with the sight of the spirit, but which cannot be seen or touched; thanks to values, they constitute what all things that participate in them are what they are, namely, valuable. However, in present terminology, this means that values are ideal entities (Hartmann 1962, 121, after: Galewicz 1987, 147). In treating values as beings, Hartman ascribes to them the status of ideal being; he considers this way of being to be primarily in relation to the existence of real being. Hartmann compares the ideality of values to the ideality of mathematical entities, stating that the ideal entity of the structures of values is guaranteed by the self-being of real responses to value – not unlike the ideal being of mathematical entities, which is guaranteed by the reality of the processes in which they are contained (Hartmann 1965, 284, after: Galewicz 1987, 151).

Values, like the laws of logic and mathematics, determine reality. Both manifest themselves in real being as principles. The latter, however, determine reality in an absolute way – reality cannot resist them. On the other hand, values are existentially weaker and, in their own way, powerless in determining reality. When values are to be applied, the resistance of real beings must be overcome. As opposed to mathematical beings, logic beings or the laws of physics, values appeal to emotions.

Although values exist in an ideal way, they are relatively valid. Their relative validity is related to their drive towards novelty, their limited capacity of axiological consciousness, blindness to values, as well as relationships in the world and the world of values (Hartmann 1958, 327–332, after Galewicz 1987, 299–308). Values – according to Hartmann – exists independently of consciousness; their value-quality (being positive or negative) does not change or is independent of the will. For example, we cannot change the sign of justice from positive to negative. Hartmann writes that values exist independently of consciousness. While consciousness can capture them or miss them, it cannot produce them, and cannot freely establish them (Hartmann 1993, 207). Values have an *a priori* nature and as such, they precede the goods on which they appear. They are conditions both for the possibility of goods and the conditions for all desire and striving (Galarowicz 1997, 144). Only when assuming the primacy of values is it possible to understand other axiological phenomena. The fact that things and relationships between things can be good and evil, that one can strive for them; that wanting finds goals that exist perfectly in themselves, and yet they determine deeds in reality, that there is recognition and condemnation of human behaviour; that conscience speaks in a judgmental way in the depths of consciousness that assumes, blames, places responsibility – all of this becomes understandable only on the assumption that man's attitude towards life is governed by values understood as defining prius (Hartmann 1993, 199). Moreover, Hartmann claims that values are absolute although their matter may contain a moment of relationality (but not relativity). For example, food contains relationality, a feature that is independent of the consciousness that understood it.

In the axiology of Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889–1977), the fundamental category is "importance" (Beduetsamkeit), which he defines as a special moment, thanks to which a thing can evoke an emotional response or can motivate our will (Hildebrand 1973, 29–30, after Galarowicz 1997, 246). Importance applies to everything that moves us or that we care

about. Therefore, it is not only positive as we care about both joy and pain. Hildebrand distinguishes three kinds of important goods or categories of importance, namely: (1) subjective importance, the importance of what is pleasant or subjectively satisfactory; (2) objective, internal importance; and (3) importance for a person. An example of the first category may be the pleasure of drinking wine, walking in the woods, etc. Hildebrand emphasises that the value of what is subjectively satisfactory is often revealed in confrontation with the objective value (going to a party vs. caring for a close, sick person).[13] An example of an objective importance is the beauty of Handel's music, the greatness of a heroic deed, or an act sacrificing something for someone. In this case, the value is the *principium* (what is determining), and our happiness – *principiatum* (what is determined). On the other hand, for what is subjectively satisfactory, our satisfaction is the *principium*, and the *prinicipiatum* is the meaning of what is pleasant or satisfactory, which belongs to the object (Hildebrand 1988, 135). The values of the two categories are essentially different and irreducible. An example of value for a person would be his/her participation in a concert, during which objective values and everything that enriches the person are realised.

Hildebrand distinguishes two kinds of values: ontological and qualitative. Ontological values concern the essence of a given being, for example, being a person, while the qualitative values are only characteristics of certain beings, for example that someone is healthy, intelligent, etc.

Although ontological values are not gradual (you cannot be more or less a person), qualitative values are. Both are hierarchical; the hierarchy of

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[13] Contrary to what is subjectively satisfactory, the objective value is not intrusive; it speaks to us from above, from a sober distance; it speaks with the power of objectivity, making a majestic claim that our wishes cannot change (Hildebrand 1988, 136). This brings to mind a comparison with Kantian idea of duty, about which Kant wrote: "Duty! Thou sublime and mighty name that dost embrace nothing charming or insinuating, but requirest submission, and yet seekest not to move the will by threatening aught that would arouse natural aversion or terror, but merely holdest forth a law which of itself finds entrance into the mind, and yet gains reluctant reverence (though not always obedience), a law before which all inclinations are dumb, even though they secretly counter-work it; what origin is there worthy of thee, and where is to be found the root of thy noble descent which proudly rejects all kindred with the inclinations; a root to be derived from which is the indispensable condition of the only worth which men can give themselves?" (Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott). https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5683/5683-h/5683-h.htm#link2HCH0003, accessed 21.11.2022.

qualitative values is as follows: vital, aesthetic, intellectual, moral values. In the case of ontic values, their hierarchy concerns the kinds of beings: the ontic value of a living being is higher than the value of an inanimate object, the ontic value of a person exceeds both, while the Creator is the highest being in the hierarchy (Galarowicz 1997, 254).

SUBJECTIVISM

The thesis of ethical subjectivism is "good and evil are features whose possession by an object depends on a certain entity, or: every good thing is good depending on someone" (Tatarkiewicz 1989, 42). Subjectivists argue that values depend on the entity's feelings or will.

The first philosophers who promoted subjectivism were the Sophists. The Older Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias) held that good and evil were a function of individual or collective judgments, while the Younger Sophists (Thrasymachus, Callicles and Critias) believed that the judgment of the stronger should be taken as the criterion of good and evil. In the first case, we are dealing with conventionalism, while in the second, with some kind of naturalism.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was a subjectivist, who claimed that good is the function of desire. In his view:

> one cannot speak of something as being simply good; since whatsoever is good, is good for someone or other (…) The common name of all things that are desired, insofar as they are desires, is *good*; and for all things we shun, *evil*. (…) there must needs be many things that are good to some and evil to others; so that what is good to us is evil to our enemies. Therefore good and evil are correlated with desiring and shunning (Hobbes 1991, 47).[14]

Thus, good and bad are neither objective nor are they features of things, but a correlate of feelings – desire and aversion, and these in turn, a correlate of pleasure and pain. According to Hobbes, there is no correlation between the good and the features of the objective world.

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[14] T. Hobbes, *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert, trans. Charles T. Wood, T. S. K. Scott-Craig, and Bernard Gert, 1991, chapter XI, 4, https://books.google.pl/books?id=4BWnfnuzWAEC&pg=PP9&hl=pl&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false, accessed 23.11.2022.

A similar stance on the problem of values was taken by David Hume (1711–1776), who claimed that:

> Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or rea1 existence, which you call "vice." In whichever way you take it you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind (Hume 1896, 469[15]).[16]

In the case of the Sophists, Hobbes and Hume, we are dealing with naturalistic subjectivism. There is, however, as we have already mentioned, theological subjectivism. In addition to Saint Augustine, according to whom the personal God, whose will dominates over reason, is the creator of values, this was the view of John Duns Scotus, namely that God does not want things because they are good, but that they are good because God wants them and loves them (Niemczuk 1994, 110). Similarly, William of Ockham claimed when he wrote that God could order blasphemy, perjury, etc., but God does not order what is naturally good, because there is no such good (Tatarkiewicz 1989, 47). Descartes, on the other hand, in trying to reconcile the objectivity of values with voluntarism, employed the example of ancient poets inventing tales that Jupiter had created the Fates, but after they had been created, then Jupiter himself had to submit to them. He therefore thinks that while the essence of things and mathematical truths are independent of God, Descartes nevertheless supposes that they are

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[15] D. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 1986, https://files.libertyfund.org/files/342/0213_Bk.pdf, accessed 23.11.2022.

[16] Hume writes in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*: "The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable (…) this final sentence depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species. At https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4320/4320-h/4320-h.htm, accessed 21.11.2022.

changeless and eternal because God has so willed and ordained (Tatarkiewicz 1989, 49).

However, as Niemczuk emphasises, "the concepts which placed the mind of God over His will, or considered both powers to be identical, there was no axiological subjectivism" (Niemczuk 1994, 109). In rationalist concepts (Leibniz, Cudworth), moreover, God is good because His will desires objective good.

RELATIONISM

This stance is found in Aristotle and his Christian successor, St Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle rejects both Platonic idealism and the objectivism of values, as well as the subjectivism advocated by the Sophists, namely a subjectivism whose emanation is hedonism.

In his first sentence in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes: "Every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit, is considered to aim at some good. Hence the Good has been rightly defined as 'that at which all things aim'" (Aristotle, 1976, 63).[17]

In identifying good with an end, Aristotle then asked what the ultimate goal of any endeavour and, thus, the final good, was; in that something can only be what is final and self-sufficient:

> Now we call an object pursued for its own sake more final than one pursued because of something else, and one which is never choosable because of another more final than those which are choosable because of it as well as for their own sakes; and that which is always choosaable for its own sake and never because of something else we call final without any qualification (Aristotle 1976, 73)

Moreover: "A self-sufficient thing, then, we take to be one which by itself makes life desirable and in no way deficient; and we believe that happiness is such a thing" (Aristotle 1976, 74).

The criteria, thus understood, can only be fulfilled, according to the learned Stagirite, by eudaimonia (happiness): "Happiness, then, is found to

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[17] *Nicomachean Ethics,* translated by Terence Irwin, https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/PHS433/Nicomachean%20Ethics.pdf, accessed 21.11.2022.

be something perfect and self-sufficient, being the end to which our actions are directed" (Aristotle 1976, 74). Eudaimonia is not something subjective,[18] which is testified by Aristotle's claim that happiness consists in a happy man not only living well but having a life that is complete.[19] This formulation suggests that eudaimonia occurs in man's development. This is also how eudaimonia should be understood – as development towards one's own perfection. This development, unlike happiness, is objective in nature. Thus, whether someone develops resp. realises their own potencies is not a subjective issue, but an objective issue.[20] Thus, eudaimonia is not about satisfying any desires, but only those that lead to the development of the individual. Therefore, not every goal, but a desirable goal is considered eudaimonic. The good resp. the highest good is, for Aristotle, a correlate of righteous desire[21] and as such, it is the object and purpose of striving, not of cognition. It is therefore dependent on the will of the subject. On the other hand, it is conditioned by the objective features of the deeds and actions that are to contribute to the subject's perfection, that is, his happiness. A good eudaimonia appears as a result of the relationship as it occurs between the developing subject and the act which is to serve this goal in becoming perfect.

For St Thomas Aquinas, as for Aristotle, good is the goal of all actions: "Goodness is what all desire" (…) Since goodness is that which all things desire, and since this has the aspect of an end, it is clear that goodness implies the aspect of an end" (Thomas Aquinas[22]).

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[18] This subjective trait of eudaimonia may suggest a translation of this concept as "happiness," which has a subjective component since if we ask someone whether he is happy, we do not require proof or argumentation from him. We assume that the concept of happiness is something subjective, an expression of an individual feeling that does not require any rational justification.

[19] Aristotle writes that happiness "demands not only complete goodness but a complete life" (Aristotle 1976, 81).

[20] A drug addict or alcoholic who claims to be happy is not, however, a eudaimon in the sense of Aristotle; because he does not develop its potencies, but degenerates as a rational being.

[21] As in Brentano's research, where good is the correlate of right love and evil is right hatred. See *O źródle poznania moralnego*, trans. C. Porębski, Warszawa 1989.

[22] Online edition of *The Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%5B1%5D,_EN.pdf, accessed 21.11.2022.

Therefore, goodness is not an object of cognition, but relates to wanting and the appetite (*appetitus*). This is also how goodness differs from being, which are materially the same. The same is true of other transcendentalities such as beauty and truth. Here, we are also dealing with material identity and conceptual dissimilarity. This difference lies in the difference in the way of capturing individual values. Therefore, in the case of good, it is desire; in the case of beauty, it is contemplation or liking; while in the case of truth, it is an intellectual approach. Thus, the appropriate value appears at the moment of the subject's attitude to a given thing. Value, therefore, does not lie – as independent of the subject – in the object, but appears as a correlate of the subject-relative attitude and the object-relative qualification. In particular, this means that it is only up to the subject what value is revealed – different values may reveal themselves in the same object – but not the very existence of value, or more precisely, the objective qualities present in a given object (According to St Thomas, transcendentals are not qualities or properties of being, but modes of being [*modus entis*]). This results from the fundamental assumption of Thomas' metaphysics, in which he identifies truth, goodness and beauty with existence, and treats the latter as independent of the subject. Moreover, referring to Aristotle, St Thomas identifies happiness with the highest good, making it, on the one hand, an object of desire and, on the other hand, a hostage of objective qualities that testify to the perfection of this object.

Moreover, as Niemczuk points out, Kant's concept can be considered relationalist in that he places good in the realm of practical philosophy and maintains that it cannot exist independently of the acts of the subject, since it does not belong to the objects of experience.

The act which constitutes the subjective correlate of the good is the act of the will, that is the rational desire. In Kant's concept, good is of a noumenal nature and as such is the subject of the rational will which is to form the formal motivation behind its action. As stated by A. Niemczuk: "… good is a relationship between what is absolutely good and complacency, that is, between noumenal rationality and – necessarily accompanying it – a positive, though at the same time senseless, state of subjectivity. This relationship, which is the good itself, is the existential will, or *esse*" (Niemczuk 1994, 207). Will is not an object because it does not appear as evident and therefore cannot be perceived as an object, nor can it be identified with subjective complacency. Therefore, it becomes a relationship: the good combines the objective condition of submission to the

categorical imperative and the subjective condition of complacency. The motive behind the will to do good is an unreasonable feeling of respect. In Kant's ethics, respect is the link between thought resp. ill and deed. As Kant wrote:

> Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law (*Achtung*) … simply the law of itself, which can be an object of respect, and hence a command. Now an action done from duty must wholly exclude the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will, so that nothing remains which can determine the will except objectively the law, and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and consequently the maxim that I should follow this law even to the thwarting of all my inclinations (Kant, Foundations).[23]

CONCLUSIONS

At present, reflecting on values seems to be necessary, not only due to the fact that axiology as a branch of philosophy has been marginalised today, but also because values understood as irreducible to subjective mental or emotional states have been pushed out of the public discourse. On the one hand, emotivism seems to have contributed to this state of affairs, as it negates the objective status of value, in particular the Good, and attributes only an emotive and evocative character to ethical judgments. As a consequence, ethical views have ceased to be objective for people, while ethical disputes have become disputes not about beliefs or facts, but about attitudes. These reasons have become persuasive reasons, appealing not to reason but to emotions. On the other hand, the decline in interest in the issues of values is related to the anti-essentialist trend in philosophy. Anti-essentialist aesthetics (Weitz, Kennick, Ziff), referring to Wittgenstein, have given up searching for the essence of beauty or art, believing such research to be both useless and harmful. As a consequence, beauty has ceased to be of interest to artists, aesthetes and, finally, the public. Thirdly, truth as an epistemic ideal has been rejected by postmodernists who see it as a threat to freedom and a tool of oppression.

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[23] I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, http://www.sophia-project.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/kant_foundations.pdf, accessed 21.11.2022.

In all these areas we are observing, on the one hand, the disappearance of the sense of transcendence, and on the other hand, the constant need to cross all kinds of boundaries. Axiological discourse, reduced to the horizontal dimension, leads to the relativisation of all values, the process of blurring the boundaries, and, eventually, to their annihilation.

Becoming aware of these processes should be the first step on the way to regaining the correct axiological perspective, in which truth, goodness and beauty constitute all human actions, while, at the same time, being both their source and goal.

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