JANA PECNIKOVA[1]

CULTURAL SLAVERY OR FREEDOM?
VALUES AT A CROSSROADS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Abstract

Values have played a major role in the creation and formation of the European cultural space. It was Europe, a continent found at the forefront of ideological, cultural, social and religious revolutions that was involved centrally in continual searching and re-evaluation. Cultural values are not regarded only as a result of a moment of artistic activity with such values having played a key role in the evolution of human society. However, they are still being misused in a period of technical revolution, in a similar manner to the past, when values were misused by ideologies opposing human rights and human dignity. The aim of this analysis is to show the position of freedom as one of the democratic values in contemporary society, one described as a civilization with high level of risk and danger, along with a very visible crisis of trust and responsibility, termed as a crisis of values and cultural slavery.

Key words: values, culture, freedom, cultural slavery, liberty

INTRODUCTION

Values have played a huge role in creation and formation of the European cultural space. Thanks to continual searching and evaluation, Europe has been the stage for ideological, cultural, social and religious upheavals. Although values in general have had a calming effect on people, there have also been times when values made people satisfied or worried, along with motivating them to activity and making them feel united.[2] While values can be found hidden in the sphere of different historical events influencing

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[1] PhD; Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica; jana.pecnikova@umb.sk.
[2] V. Brožík, *O hodnotách a ľuďoch*, Nitra 2006, p. 115.

world affairs, they are also the reason for many conflicts. When conducting a detailed look at the history of the term, it is interesting to follow Whitehead who uses the term "value" in order to define the inner reality of an event.[3] However, it is very difficult to view the world as an event of values without a historical connection with tradition. The presence, quality and polarity of values can be examined only during the process of life events concerning the individual. Values cannot be made similar to qualities, although they can be wrongly presented by individuals as if they were values. Values can be performed in the rational, functional relations of events, knowledge and ideas which are changed without human effort.

The rapidly changing nature of values has become the reason for their relative state. Due to natural catastrophes or changes in political regimes, diametrically different values have appeared in comparison to those which were valid in the past, before such changes occurred. Morris can be considered to be the founding father of the value theory.[4] Following this theory, values are interconnected, creating one complex unit with change in one area being automatically performed in other areas, thus defining relative and changeable value criteria. When trying to measure values, we should consider the idea that for individuals (acting in order to satisfy their needs) values can be so diverse that anything can become a value. As this is the reason why values are changing so quickly, people have learned how to differentiate whole groups of values according to different functions which the same thing can have during one's lifetime.[5]

Values may be categorised into those which are ethical, aesthetic, ecological, legal, cultural, etc. As every individual valuates on the basis of their own attitudes and norms, these valuations can contradict the norms of other people, i.e. *the quality of function* is different for every individual. For example, Elliot, an English literary scientist, discovered in the second half of the 19th century that the value of each new literary work changes existing classical literary values to a certain extent. Indeed, a new literary work can emphasise the previous values, revive them or overcome them, a phenomenon which Morris calls a changeable value pole.[6]

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[3] Ch. Whitehead, *Matematika a dobro a iné eseje*, Praha 1970.
[4] Ch. Morris, *Sign, Language and Behavior*, New York 1955.
[5] V. Brožík, *Hodnotové orientácie*, Nitra 2007, p. 8.
[6] Ch. Morris, *Sign . . ., op. cit.*

A value is the result of conducting a valuation. Although nothing is of value *per se*, a value can be reached through the medium of a process, namely the process of human activity. Traditionally, the identification of values with norms has been present in the field of ethics. The valuation viewpoint is performed via an opinion which reflects one's personal experience. This opinion presents one's mental approach towards values. Individuals often acquire opinions and the patterns of others and follow them in their own actions. It is important to differentiate patterns and schemes of behaviour (models of actions). Human values are gained through experience. An individual ascribes the value according to the standards of a group, differentiating what is "good" and "bad" following established norms. All individuals (identities) have their own system of values which supplement the common system shared with their environment and sociocultural group. A value system is defined by an individual's relationship towards the world, their position in the world, as well as relationships with the environment and the motives of their activities.

CULTURAL VALUES

When defining cultural values, one also has to take into consideration different social approaches. Some opinions, dating back to the previous century, perceive culture merely as a system of outcomes of human activity, not acknowledging the idea that culture is a permanent process. A very sharp contrast may be observed when asking questions about the real world of values which is viewed in two polarities, either as the world of value relations, or as the world of material and spiritual culture.

Cultural values are permanently shaped and re-shaped by every society and individual being a member of a given society. Although they are usually divided into two basic categories, namely material and spiritual, this categorization is not finite, whereas one and the same object or relationship may be viewed as a part of both. Cultural values are part of the world of values and they are dependent on human activity. A huge importance has been attributed to ethnic, cultural and religious values as they dominate the emotional feeling of a nation.[7] Thus, when defining the term

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[7] E. Čulenová, *Jazyk: Matrica alebo plášť?*, Banská Bystrica 2012, p. 98.

"cultural values", the spiritual basis of culture and its values should be taken into account.

Cultural values are very peculiar in their nature. While on many occasions culture is identified with art, art is just one of the cultural forms in existence. Although art as a reflection of culture, as a statement about cultural values, represents in reality the complexity of culture, it cannot substitute or replace it in any way.[8] As cultural values are considered to be the products of the cultural activity of humankind which is a characteristic quality, it is not represented only by quantity. While evaluation of this activity is conducted on the basis of results, these do not have to be in the form of material products. Thus, a cultural value does not result from a moment of individual creative activity.

A cultural need is the result of preferring certain values which are the product of the creative activity of man and which were promoted by individuals as dominant in their way of life. Cultural needs are conditions to interest that which could be described as an active relationship of the common subject towards any value inevitable for the creative way of being.[9] Signs which enable our identification of values should not be interchanged with values *per se*. Although valuation is always the process of comparison, not every comparison is a valuation.

The experience with satisfying higher cultural needs leads to "personalization" shaping individuals in a unique way. Art helps us to realise the meaning and value of our own roles and all that is connected with them via values.[10] Culture is often perceived as a system of duties which we must respect if we want to live in a society which has accepted this system (norms).

Cultural norms are based on a system of rules.[11] This is connected with how to put values into practice. Norms are specifically designed in order to be able to measure values. We suppose that values are anchored in the mind of people and their ideas. They often become starting points and targets of human efforts. Therefore, individuals find their way in life by recognising and focusing on values.

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[8] V. Brožík, *Hodnotové . . ., op. cit.*, p. 76.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[11] E. Morin, *From the Concept of System to the Paradigm of Complexity*, Wordpress (PDF), 1977.

CULTURAL SLAVERY OF VALUE APPROACHES

Contemporary society can be described as a civilization with high level of risks and dangers, as well as one with a very visible crisis of trust and responsibility, termed as a crisis of values and approaches towards values. Values have played a key role in the evolution of human society. However, there is still misuse of them in a period of technical revolution, in a similar manner to the past, when values were misused by ideologies opposing human rights and human dignity.

Today, this feeling has doubled due to increasing extremism and terrorism. As stated by Tondl:

> The increase of danger, its extent and impact, is also influenced by the fact that the standard of the contemporary society provides an incomparably larger and more serious extent of risks and possibilities regarding the abuse of all available technical appliances.[12]

Values can also be found present in seemingly unrelated individual performances. They can be abused by radical groups, often spreading the cause of conflicts in a virtual space.

People's decisions are always choices between what is possible and tolerated. This decision applies and respects certain values and approaches towards values that are performed in society in the form of norms. Every culture has developed own system of these norms as a precondition for own existence. Values and norms direct society towards so-called civilised behaviour. Ethical, social and cultural norms are mutually connected with global values and a cultural atmosphere, as well as with traditions, images and duties. These norms create functional borders of a system that should not be violated.

Values and norms are bound to human activity, determining the quality of these relations and disseminating them through the medium of communication. This concerns the processes of communication, linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication, the use of social patterns and the preferred forms of human behaviour.[13] Through the medium of communi-

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[12] L. Tondl, *O aplikacích etických hodnot a hodnotových postojů I.*, Banská Bystrica 2010, p. 3.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

cation, understanding, adequate acceptance and proper interpretation, it is possible to disseminate values trouble-free between different cultures. Respecting differences in a socially tolerated way is, therefore, an inevitable condition. There are many ways to make intercultural communication easier. One of them is to admit the existence of exceptions while assuming that a value valid in a society does not have to be regarded as universal.

Different social patterns represent one of the most common problems when the values of two different cultural groups clash. Although in the past, the gender positions, relationships and tasks assigned to individual members in society were clearly determined, today we face new non-standard and unusual situations, connected with global changes and technical developments. Therefore, we need to focus again on values and their impact on individual or group behaviour.

As a consequence, we favour the idea that the education system should be comprised of a complex level of knowledge about society, humankind and culture to the broadest extent. If in the past the education was influenced by fundamental ideology, today there has been a new space opened (especially at secondary schools and universities), in order that this kind of knowledge can be introduced to students in an innovative way.

As was mentioned earlier, knowledge as a value may be also misused and manipulated. Knowledge as a value presupposes perception and valuation from both points of view, positive and negative, leading to its individual employment: acceptance or non-acceptance of situation, person, etc. A tolerant approach towards values should lead to acceptance of permissive conditions, whether presence of an activity/person is possible, allowed, or at least tolerated. However, it is also true that many things which are considered now as unacceptable, unsuitable or often harmful, were regarded as normal, standard and totally acceptable by previous generations.[14] Thus, we assume that there is a constant dynamism in this process.

The development of values and attitudes towards them has never been trouble-free and from a historical point of view, arose from concepts of conflict which were influenced by the development of culture and civilization, reflected especially in the creation of cultural, artistic and technical artefacts. The whole development of human knowledge has been

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

accompanied by new requirements towards culture and crisis. Weber also differentiates two types of rationalities, namely one of purpose and one of value.[15]

When taking into account attitudes towards values, one also needs to pay attention to the possibility of seeking new and better concepts. As values are elements present in the process of decision-making, it is important to integrate them into the process of intercultural communication. Nowadays, we have been facing new challenges in the sphere of the individual values of humankind. In the past, values were bound to religion and tied to close family-social relationships. Thus, individuals were determined by their upbringing in a family setting resulting in the acquisition of such concepts as honesty and truthfulness, both being the reason for pride when employed in certain occupations. Human solidarity was also considered to be an especially positive value.

Crisis and conflicts in contemporary society are usually not conditioned by differences in the level of civilization. Indeed, this is not primarily about "the conflicts of civilizations", but about the conflicts of different orientations towards values.[16] This opinion is in opposition to that of Huntington who does not pay as much attention to the value approaches of societies, but rather views the material side of the development of civilization.[17]

Scientific and intellectual isolationism, a phenomenon which dates back to the 19th century, is the problem of complex value approaches to development. It rests on very narrow specialization limiting cross-cultural communication. As a result, there is a certain amount of doubt created in the area of some fields and the relevance of knowledge, whereby mutual respect is missing. Thus, value tasks and challenges require an interdisciplinary approach.

Generally, current European culture is more often than not indifferent, characterised in abstract concepts such as freedom, equality, democracy, solidarity, continuous development and maintaining an open market. The so-called Western culture prefers a universality of cultural values, even though this universality does not reflect the operation and management of individual states. This diversity of systems leads to the acknowledgment of different values in different contexts.

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[15] M. Weber, *Metodologie, sociologie a politika*, Praha 2009.
[16] L. Tondl, *O aplikacích . . ., op. cit.*, p. 18.
[17] S.Ph. Huntington, *Střet civilizací. Boj kultur a proměna světového rádu*, Praha 2001.

Today, there is also a cultural fragmentation arising within states, where parallel cultural worlds are created. Many people believe that happiness may be found in achieving freedom, in the shape of unlimited freedom, believing that social justice is only an expression of a requirement to take share in this happiness that equates to the lack of any responsibility, and that equality is synonymous with gaining an equal share in material benefits, thus enabling a carefree life.[18] A society which loses trust in the future becomes closed and isolated, leading to resignation from, and the rejection of the ideals of freedom and equality.

A free society that is fragmented in this way divides people into groups instead of confirming social equality (into young, old, men/women, disabled, etc.).[19] Freedom, one of the basic democratic values, is connected primarily with security in contemporary society (protection from terrorist attacks). However, the protection of the state along with unending conflicts, destabilise the idea of freedom as a universal value.

The French renaissance philosopher Boétie, in his masterpiece entitled *On Voluntary Slavery*, came to the view that life without freedom cannot be happy.[20] According to him, the freedom of man is limited by fear. While those who are at the bottom are afraid of power, those who are at the top are afraid not to lose it. The theory of power was later on developed by the concepts of Hobbes and Weber.[21]

Berďajev[22] who developed the philosophy of the freedom, rejects Western European rationalistic tradition and his theory is based on an intuitive, spiritual perception of freedom, whereas, freedom itself is not the only object of research. Thus, human beings should not be the slave of their existence. Perception of personality and freedom is connected with personal reason, will and activity.[23] Freedom is performed through active performance that is based on this value. Moreover, freedom, in a theoretical way, without the exertion of practice, may be contested.

Current slavery is connected with a process of socialization that can move to social hypnosis, absorbing humankind itself. Thus, a society of the

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[18] U. Di Fabio, *Kultura svobody*, Brno 2009, p. 16.

[19] Z. Bauman, *Komunita. Hľadanie bezpečia vo svete bez istôt*, Bratislava 2006.

[20] É. de la Boétie, *O dobrovoľnom otroctve*, Bratislava 2014.

[21] M. Weber, *Metodologie . . ., op. cit.*

[22] N. Berďajev, *Filosofie svobody*, Praha 2000.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

free must not create the rule of power and the powerful, but should lead to solidarity. However, humankind creates slavery itself, as well as its dependency on society thanks to the development of civilization.

Civilization has helped humankind to set itself free from the hegemony of natural powers. Although civilised people have been changing the world around them thanks to their intellect, there are also side-effects of their activities such as oppression, exploitation, as well as the suffering of great masses of people, which are excused by the values of civilization. Great writers, such as Tolstoy and Rousseau, warn in their masterpieces that civilization suppresses freedom and makes slaves of people while promising emancipation.

As far as the development of society follows a material basis, it suppresses to a great extent the level of the value of human life. Thus, humankind feels as if it was crushed by this huge variety, disintegration and conditionality of the civilised world.[24] Although culture and civilization will always coexist, in a certain way, civilization is older and more genuine, with culture having been created later.[25] While the process of civilization takes place especially at a level of collective identity, culture is more individualised. Thus, a civilised person is not automatically synonymous with one who is cultural.

As may be noticed in contemporary society, civilization can suppress culture, the bearers of which can be made into slaves of other values, thereby distanced from the core values of the original culture. Cultural styles often imitate traditions, drawing on them and introducing new, innovative elements. Up to now, culture has been based on the quality of selection. This is why a cultural elite can lead to the formation of an aristocracy. This, in turn, would mean the destruction and degradation of individual cultural layers, and thus culture itself.

Culture is made up of the creative activities of free individuals, not slaves of culture. The subjectivity of authors transcends into the objectivity of the world through the medium of artistic creativity, whereas the main criteria is the reflection of values and perfection within cultural norms. However, any person may become a slave of cultural values that are enforced by a higher authority.

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[25] See the theory of Ogburn – cultural lag. W.F. Ogburn, *Social Change With Respect to Culture and Original Nature*, London 2012.

When dealing with the concept of cultural slavery, it is important to take into account the relationship between freedom and authority. As early as the 19th century, Mill indicated that freedom in society should be guaranteed by liberties and rights, as well as by representative groups that should make efforts to achieve the so-called common good of society.[26] However, in places where a governing elite exists, a considerable part of morality of the given society arises out of own interests and the feeling of superiority of this elite.[27] Moreover, inequality in social status also reflects a dysfunctional society.

An awareness of collective freedom is developed through the medium of faith in a social authority that is not weakened by the fact that this authority is being denounced, e.g. in other parts of the world, or in a different country. However, those who accept authority connected with a cultural environment without reservations, become slaves. Freedom of thought and opinion become substituted by imitation and acceptance of thoughts and opinions that are held by a given authority. Therefore, such a person or a group is very easily manipulated. This often manifests itself in the form of different cultural groups which promote ideological concepts, such as fascism, etc.

Faith in freedom in society is interconnected with the ideal of truth. In reality, the saying that the truth always wins over persecution is one of the untruths that are repeated by people until they become clichés. Every human experience contradicts this statement. Indeed, history has much to tell us about cases where truth gave way to persecution. Moreover, if it cannot be suppressed forever, it can be muted for a long period.[28] Thus, it is very difficult to find the truth. In addition, the truth does not have to represent the real truth, even if it has been agreed upon by a majority.[29]

CONCLUSION

When talking about cultural slavery, it is important to suppress free thinking as it comprises a threat to doctrines and ideologies. In comparison to

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[26] J.S. Mill, *O slobode*, Bratislava 1995.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[29] See the post-truth theory.

actions, thinking does not have borders given by cultural community and it does not require power necessarily in order to materialise. A plurality of opinions has a better chance to lead to progress than the only ideology, governing in the form of totality. In my point of view, Europe is bound to plurality for its progress and versatility.[30] Because of globalising tendencies, however, we have noticed a similarity in different cultures and their systems. As the original values cannot oppose pressures and new trends, their uniqueness is gradually replaced by uniformity.

Humbolt defined two inevitable conditions for human development: freedom and a variety of conditions.[31] If these two factors are not present, the result is mass uniformity, amorality and artificiality, which are responsible for a loss of values, a weakening of the inner structure of a cultural community, as well as that of cultural diversity. Following this view, although society has the right to be sovereign and superior over individuals, this is only on the condition that their free development is permitted. Respecting general criteria, valid for all the people equally, should enlighten the members of community about what they can expect. Sovereignty/authority can take neither individuals' free will, nor their rights to conduct their own decision-making.

We suppose that by acknowledging the values of every individual, the fight against cultural slavery is possible. Today, this individual freedom is threatened by extreme nationalism, new technologies, industrialization or promotion of intolerance. Cultural systems should enable individuals to identify personal liberties in such a system, one which does not limit their development. Every culture is peculiar regarding its own customs and traditions, which form each individual in a specific way. The negative side of this appears when individuals become slaves of the system, instead of gaining knowledge and becoming open towards their identity through the medium of intercultural interactions. Thus, the individual rejects them and remains closed within the uniform space around them.

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[31] W. von Humboldt, *O rozmanitosti stavby ľudských jazykov a jej vplyve na duchovný rozvoj ľudského rodu*, Bratislava 2000.

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