

The Plurality of Values and Relativism: Introduction

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Problems of the nature of good (in today's language—the nature of values), the plurality of values, and their possible relativity, are old philosophical problems. Certainly, we know that in the history of philosophy the value problem has appeared under different names, it has been conceptualised differently, and it has been given different solutions. Positions such as objectivism, subjectivism, relationalism, ethical (axiological) relativism, ethical (axiological) absolutism, perspectivism, axiological pluralism, axiological monism, and some others, are examples of that.

All articles collected in this issue of *Culture and Values* focus, in particular, on the plurality of values and relativism. The choice of these questions is not accidental. Regardless of their theoretical interest, i.e. of the question of which position is the most legitimate (e.g., pluralism or monism, relativism or absolutism), some practical interests are extremely relevant. After all, human beings are teleological; they cannot be understood without values. Because values are what makes humans goals possible. It is not a mere truism to say that a lack of goals in life

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means a lack of meaning in life. For behind such a statement lies a 'serious' ontological insight: the structure of human agency is teleological; a condition for human purposefulness are values and value consciousness. Accordingly, the questions of the plurality of values and their relative or absolute nature are fundamental anthropological issues. Axiological understanding seems to be a precondition for anthropological understanding.

Nevertheless, this question is not only valid from the perspective of the systematic philosophical theory. It is also relevant for ordinary human feeling and valuing. It is in people's everyday choices, actions and, crucially, the justifications or excuses we formulate for them, that the belief that everyone is right, that everyone has their own point of view, is most evident. How often, when asked about values, people begin their answers with formulas 'in my opinion,' 'it seems to me,' 'from my point of view'? And what happens when such a difference of judgements develops into a clash or a conflict between different reasons, each of which asserts itself as the right and the legitimate one? Similar conflicts can also disturb an individual's life, even without reference to other people's reasons. And again, relativism may not be the best solution here.

A question of the plurality and relativity of values also arises in the context of the plurality and diversity of cultures and civilisations. For, certainly, the human world is not culturally monolithic. Recognising different and diverse civilisations, with all their components, involves in turn recognising different and diverse values.¹ May one perhaps build a kind of hope on this: that it will make possible the minimising of cultural-civilisational conflicts?

But maybe an understanding of the plurality and relativity of values should itself be consistently pluralistic. Since values themselves can be different, perhaps solutions to relativity should also be different, depending on the nature of values involved.² The dangers of aesthetic relativism will not be strictly the same as those

¹ Cf. eg. Feliks Koneczny, *On the Plurality of Civilizations*. Translated from the Polish, Introduction by Anton Hilckman, Preface by Arnold Toynbee (London: Polonica Publications, 1962).

² Cf. Leszek Kopciuch, „Multi-kulturalizm, wartości oraz relatywizm i (lub) pluralizm,” *Idea. Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem pojęć filozoficznych* 28, no. 1(2016): 5–21.

of moral relativism. Extraordinary values cannot be universal values. Great personalities, exceptional individuals, are based on values that are embodied exclusively in them. They are strictly individual.

The articles published in this issue of *Culture and Values* focus on these topics. Almost all of them were written on the basis of papers presented at the conference “Contemporary Challenges and Values 3: Value Plurality and Relativism” (Lublin, 15-16 May 2024).³ One cannot expect the problems of plurality of values and relativism to be definitively resolved in them. Nevertheless, one can expect that these articles will contribute to our deeper understanding of these old problems by shedding a new light on them. These problems are significant, even if they cannot be fully resolved.

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³ Contemporary Challenges and Values 3: Value Plurality and Relativism/ Współczesne wyzwania i wartości 3: Wielość wartości i relatywizm (15-16.V.2024), <https://www.umcs.pl/pl/wspolczesne-wyzwania-i-wartosci-3-wielosc-wartosci-i-relatywizm-15-16-v-2024-,30079.htm> (accessed: 20.12.2024).