

## VALUES AND IDENTITY

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**Abstract.** *The end of the 19th century questioned not only the defining elements of modernity (through the harsh arguments between „postmodernism” and „modernism”, but also the style of thought, the modern spirit, overcome by the obsession of an irretrievable „tiredness”.*

**Keywords:** values, identity, education, modernism, devalued.

### 1. Introduction

It was the moment when Nietzsche drew attention on „global devaluation” by explaining the term *nihilism*: „What is „nihilism”, he wondered (in 80s of the 19th century) and he noted „*Nihilism*: lacks the goal, lacks the answer for the question „why?” – What does nihilism mean? – the fact that *the supreme values are devalued*” [1]. This is a cue urging to meditation, not only in Europe, but in the whole wide world, because, the great philosopher put it, in order to pass over nihilism „first, we have to live the value itself of these „values”, „to touch” the consequences „of our great values and ideals”. „Touching these consequences lies in our way and environment of living, a way grounded through culture and created through education”.

Because education – educating is the process of personal training, by cultural conveyance and social integration [2], the values in themselves, treasured, representing the potential, real-virtual in the individual’s becoming, while their cultural conveyance refers to transforming it into acts of cultures and through these, in existential conducts (real-accomplished); a process though which cultures render human, the human individual becomes social, while the society itself is axiological re-organized.

Although my professional training is that of a mathematician, more often than not, issues have entered in my investigating area and into the horizon of knowledge, issues defined, in their essence, as being philosophical, especially those of integrating value into the universe specific to the educational sciences. The reasons are many, especially if we take into consideration the fact that the great mathematicians and physicians in different historical eras were also philosophers; Pythagoras, Thales din Millet, Descartes, Leibniz, Newton, Kepler, Lobachevski, Bolyai, Riemann, Einstein, Bourbaki, Whitehead etc. are examples contradicting the positivist-utilitarian fragmentation of knowledge. Maybe, precisely for this reason, my approaches in the domain of education have combined the rigour and precision of interferences with tendencies articulated in overcoming the nihilism and relativist positivism.

The present study aims at finding a proper answer to the question: why the contemporary education is affected by nihilism?

## 2. *Why are values devalued?*

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in the early quarter of this century, the questions which fret us are roughly the same. They refer to *truth and the values* and “together with the technique mark the new horizons of creation and human self-statement”: The new socio-cultural context, the revolutionary progress in science, art, technique or in reorganizing the human life itself favour an emancipation from now on, all the more bringing about amazement and worriedness, yielding here and there even blockages in feelings and comprehension” [3]. A genuine historical conscience is crystalized through which not the abstract individual existence is taken under ration control, but the existence historically conditioned, attempting at answers for the metaphysical question “What is the human being?” This conditioning of the ontic is emphasized by W. Dilthey exceptionally: “What is the human being and what he wants is to be found in the developing of his essence along the millennia” [4]. It seems obvious that in this process of human essence development, new values are required, new ways of re-calibration, of “re-discovering” the human out of the crisis situation in which he finds himself in certain historical moments. The free will of the human being on which J.J. Rousseau talked, a will which cannot be trespassed the first moment it enters “the moral order” (an order in which “we took the second step toward the human” [5]) represent both an immanent desire of our development essence and a benchmark of shaping and re-shaping the human coordinate. More precisely, new values are required, yet the historical conscience invites to the invariable imperative of the choice: *reasoning*; reasoning which claims association between the freedom of choice (the individual’s free will) and the responsibility of choice (the assumed outcome of the free will).

Maybe by raising the idea of moral order to the rank of generality, Hegel has captured both the desire toward self-accomplishment of the individual and also the impasse in front of the imminent need for *new values*: “The human has to honour himself and consider himself worthy of everything loftier. About the greatness of the spirit, he could never have big enough thoughts” [6].

In the complex answer which I am elaborating for the question “Why the contemporary education is affected by nihilism?” I also bring two general explanations: that of the meaning “that’s how the history goes” by A. Toynbee, seen as “ascension and disaggregation of cultures” and that synthetized in the concept “the new existential matrix” [7].

The first explanation emphasizes the axiological coordinate itself of the human being, a coordinate which absorbs the shock of the universality principle of any action, “representing he will of a free being” [8] and which contains the main support of the historical consciousness “you cannot avoid it”.

As a consequence, the free will cannot be ...of the responsibility of “how the history goes”, and “the ascension” and “disaggregation” of cultures; for two reasons:

- Because, as a human phenomenon, “the emergence of the creative forces of the human being, the culture may be real only in a certain historical period and by unfolding its ages” [9];
- Because the free will has always searched for new values, thus making the immanent new a “recipient” which (in many cases) “melts” the reasoning of

choices (“the new” is not only the potential reserve of the boom, of the cultures’ ascension, but also the potential reserve of decadence, disaggregation of cultures).

The second explanation lies in the devaluation of both social character and educational capital, being described under the real influence of the phenomenon consequences, called by Fr. Fukuyama, *The Great Rupture*.

The values does not belong either to sensible or empirical objects, not to those intelligible or metaphysical. They belong to a special class, called *the class of the ideal objects* [10]. This first ontological determination of the values is only temporary, since, although through analogy with the ideal objects, the axiological subject gets much closer to the essence of values; they being different from the mathematical patterns or physics patterns (ideal as they are, as well), which as it is the case of the concepts, they have a significance only at the level of rational-discursive knowledge. However, there are characteristics of the ideal objects common with those of values. We are speaking about *the unreality* (they represent the essence without being at the same time), *non-temporality and objectivity of values.*.,

The world of the ideal objects exists only through the spirit and for the spirit. For example, the mathematical patterns does not exist apart from the mathematical thought or the theoretical patterns in physics does not exist apart from the scientific discourse of physicians. Something similar occurs also in the in the universe of values. Whether in the universe were not anything else but matter, under different forms of organization, there would not be ideal objects either, or values. Without spirit, the freedom, beauty, good, sublime and all the other values would be unconceivable” [11].

The spirit has the axiological subject as an ontological support (the human being) seen as the creator of the moral order, living the value of the things which establishes the respective order.

The axiological subject values the ideal objects, giving them or not a meaning by comparing them with their own desires. Valuation is thus an appreciation relation, a relation between the valuing subject and the valued object. One can comprehend from here that the values are objective, dependant from the concrete individual object; which would be erroneous, since the fundamental feature of the values is the *validity*; and the validity of the values is established not based on the empirical subject, but on the subject, generally speaking, subject called by Kant and (neo-Kantian’s followers) *an axiological transcendental subject*.

The following endeavour is enlightening in understanding what I have said previously: “From ontological point of view, the values are situated in the proximity of the ideal objects. They have to be distinguished yet from the mathematical objects and from the other elements of this aggregate. The fundamental feature of the values is validity. The ideal objects, which have as a presupposition the spirit in its hypothesis of the axiological ego, are the values. It follows that the values, although they address only to the spirit, they are not subjective in the sense they do not depend on the individual subject. They are ex-centric, comparatively to the empiric ego. The values are objective in the sense they are acknowledged by any spiritual being. Comparatively to the other ideal objects, the values are correlated and included to the emotional sphere of the spirit” [12].

The explanation of the values through via *the axiological transcendental subject* to the axiological ontology and subjectivity, those though currents included identifying the essence of the value with the "agreeable" or with the "desire" [13].

We accept the transcendence here initially in the variant proposed by Heinrich Rickert [14], in the sense that it can be emphasized only through the analysis of the reasoning (which is the fundamental act of knowledge, and any knowledge represent an *acknowledgement* of a value or rejection of a non-value). Nonetheless the value is transcendent in the sense that “it is a value without considering something already existent (by which the value itself is required and acknowledged), this and nothing else we would like to be comprehended through its transcendence” [15].

Rickert’s analysis is of great sophistication, yet I consider some specifications are worth mentioning, since the *validity* of values enters the equation. This fact claims two distinct considerations. The first of them refers to the axiological transcendental subject that is the generic human subject, not the concrete empirical subject. The second refers specifically to the transcendence of the values: they are transcendent both to the concrete individual and to the valued object. Yet the validity of the values lies in the relation of appreciation, in the *meaning* given by the generic human subject (who values) the features of the ideal (valued) subjects.

As this is the case, both the historic conscience and the free will manifested in choices and rationality of choices, as well as devaluation of values in time (and implicitly the needed of new values) remain in the incomprehensible area. Whereas the validity expresses the acceptance degree of values, the period in which they have a certain signification for the generic subject, their correspondence with the subject’s wishes (not at all with the concrete individual’s wishes).

The validity of the values – as a longer validity – generates the cultures ascension and the individual accomplishment of the man in the respective axiological system; losing the validity brings about the disaggregation of cultures, the conflict of values, the negative sense for the man in which the “history goes”.

Finally, when there is no goal, we have no answer for the question “why?”, the values which used to be sacred and “supreme” devalues. That is the *nihilism* makes its way; the individual, the community are no longer able to live “what used to be the value itself of these *values*”, as Nietzsche emphasized.

### 3. A conclusion: culture disaggregation through losing the language identity

Axiology claims that when the spirit “is not supported” to free itself from the matter which “enslaves it” this becomes itself a destructive factor transforming the values in non-values. In its relations with the environment, the Truth, the Good, the Beautiful does not represent abstract concepts any longer: each of them becomes animated. The response given to a subject asking what he has to do for life to gain meaning, may be the one elaborated by J. Hessen: “Help the Truth, the Good, the Beautiful and the Sacred to be animated through your personality! The values claim you! They claim accomplishment through you. Be thus a value maker, a value bearer, a value man! The values claim you! Although not all of them claim you as loud and clear or as persistently, not all of them with the same unconditioned request! [16]

Indeed not all the values call us with the same “unconditionally”, yet there are values – as the moral ones, which *have to be achieved unconditionally*. Because “the man as a human...represent the place and opportunity for the values to emerge” [17], he is the unique factor giving meaning not only to his life, but his existence, at large, bearing thus a cosmic responsibility” [18].

A question arises: to what extent keeping one's identity of the national language devolve upon moral values, that is have to be achieved unconditionally?

A people's language comprises indisputable primordially values of knowledge. We may say that the characteristic of these values is unconditionally (even if in some opinions, the knowledge values do not have to be achieved unconditionally!).

Nonetheless, as J. Burckhardt (*Thoughts about culture and art* – 1903), „Any culture begins with a miracle of the spirit: the language...” The language is at the same time the culture support and the culture phenomenon, a makes its “learning” a process of theoretical valuation (achievement of values from theoretic point of view while keeping it is a process of moral valuation (achievement of moral values). Assimilation of neologisms is inevitable for any language, especially under the conditions of globalization. Yet the neologisms incorporated in the body of the national language are justified only in the situations when the language performances cannot provide a semantic deficit, as the fund of words is insufficient. That is the neologisms cover a lack for that language. On the contrary, when the linguistic performance is high, adopting the neologisms alters the language contents, destroys its identity. They suffocate uselessly the language with parallel words (words and phrases with a correspondent in that language, abuses it and alters it uselessly, dispersing the culture which began with the “miracle” called language. Is the Romanian language in peril? It appears it is!

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