

VALUES AS POLITICAL ARGUMENTS? ALTERNATIVES IN EUROPE'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

I. VALUES AS THE HERITAGE OF EUROPE

The fact that Europe is not simply an association of national states for the sake of economic and political advantages is already shown in the Consolidated version of the Treaty on the European Union, which lists a number of values on which Europe is built: *The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail*¹.

It is an uncontested fact that Europe is and should also remain a community of values if it wants to preserve its identity. These values also constitute the spiritual and cultural heritage of our continent. However, this point of view also opens up a huge problem as among others Hans Joas has pointed out: *[D]ie Rhetorik der Wertegemeinschaft [kann] durchaus zum Argwohn Anlass geben, dass damit bestimmte ideologische Vorstellungen vor dem, was Europa ausmacht, festgeschrieben werden sollen, in der mehr oder weniger offenkundigen Absicht, damit andere vom Projekt Europa' auszuschließen oder ihnen die legitime Identifizierung mit Europa abzusprechen*².

Especially in political debates, it sometimes becomes visible that behind the argumentation based on these values, other intentions can be hidden. The Polish philosopher Krzysztof Michalski, who passed away in 2013, presented this problem of values used as political arguments referring to and critically analysing the response of the European Union to the possibility of the formation of a new government in Austria, which would also include the right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Michalski's key question was whether values could also be regarded as political arguments.

¹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the European Union, "Official Journal of European Union", C 326, Vol. 55, 26.10.2012, p. 17.

² H. Joas, C. Mandry, *Europa als Werte- und Kulturgemeinschaft*, [in:] *Europawissenschaft*, Schuppert, G.H. (i.a.), Baden-Baden 2005, p. 542. As cited [in:] M. Schreiber, *Kirche und Europa. Protestantische Ekklesiologie im Horizont europäischer Zivilgesellschaft*, Berlin-Boston 2012, p. 40.

2. ARE VALUES SUITABLE AS POLITICAL ARGUMENTS?

On 31 January 2000 the *Statement from the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union on behalf of XIV Member States*³ was published and announced that sanctions would be imposed on Austria if the newly elected parties would form a coalition government together with the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). This decision was basically levelled against the hostility towards foreigners and the racism displayed by Jörg Haider, the chairman of the FPÖ. At the same time, the statement was meant as a signal for all right-wing populist and right-wing extremist movements inside the European Union⁴.

However, this statement did not only give rise to scepticism among some European and – above all – Austrian politicians, but also caused an avalanche of official, semi-official, and private reactions, which disagreed with the decision of the 14 states⁵. One of the many reactions was the “Erklärung Pro Österreich”⁶, written by Karl von Schwarzenberg, Lord Weidenfeld and Krzysztof Michalski, which was signed by 25 well-known public figures from the Austrian public life. Their statement was published in various international journals⁷. Krzysztof Michalski, the last of the three initiators, was worried about the sanctions for three reasons. Firstly, they turned against the consequences and not the causes of the election results. Secondly, by making a devil out of Heider, the situation was portrayed as being a hopeless one. And finally, *by thinking of a political crisis in terms of values, its actors – often unintentionally – conceal even from themselves their own aims and interests which they are in fact motivated by*⁸. A few years later, he added that this action of the European Union was not only unjust and irresponsible, but it also contributed to the Heider’s popularity⁹. He identified a similar behaviour pattern among the Austrian opposition at that time: They did not ask why Heider had received so many votes, but rather they attempted to describe Heider’s party in moral categories. The party which only recently had governed Austria was painting the picture of a returning Hitler-Heider, instead of correcting their own mistakes¹⁰.

Of course, Michalski did not want to defend Heider. Already in the “Erklärung Pro Österreich” it was made clear that Heider’s rhetoric was unacceptable. However, the sanctions meant an isolation of Austria, which weakened those social and political forces who would have been able to react to possible dangers¹¹. What signified the main problem for Michalski though was the fact

³ Cf. W. Hummer, A. Pelinka, *Österreich unter “EU-Quarantäne”. Die „Maßnahme der 14“ gegen die österreichische Bundesregierung aus politikwissenschaftlicher und juristischer Sicht. Chronologie, Kommentar, Dokumentation*, Wien 2002, p. 185.

⁴ Cf. M. Kopeing, Ch. Kotanko, *Eine europäische Affäre. Der Weissen-Bericht und die Sanktionen gegen Österreich*, Wien 2000, p. 19.

⁵ Cf. W. Hummer, A. Pelinka, *Österreich unter „EU-Quarantäne“*..., pp. 186–280.

⁶ Cf. W. Hummer, A. Pelinka, *Österreich unter “EU-Quarantäne”*, pp. 274–275; English version: L. Bondy, *Austria & Europe*, “The New York Review of Books”, 27 April 2000, Vol. 47, No 7, Retrieved 3 July 2017, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/04/27/austria-europe/> [15 VI 2017].

⁷ Cf. *IWM Newsletter* 68, ed. Ch. Hartnack (February 2000 – April 2000), p. 29.

⁸ K. Michalski, *Politics and Values*, [in:] *Man and his Enemies. Essays on Carl Schmitt*, eds. S. Minkov, P. Nowak, Białystok 2008, pp. 188–196, 190.

⁹ Cf. K. Michalski, *Nie ma IV Rzeczpospolitej. Wywiad z S. Sierakowski*, „Dziennik Polska-Europa-Świat”, Dodatek: *Europa*, nr. 24:167, 16.06.2007, pp. 13–15, 13.

¹⁰ Cf. K. Michalski, *Nie ma IV Rzeczpospolitej*..., p. 13.

¹¹ Cf. L. Bondy, *Austria & Europe*...

that this conflict was being fought out in terms of “values”, in other words: Austria was punished with sanctions for moral reasons, because many people had voted for a party which did not respect the ‘European values’:¹² *Yet I think that perceiving this conflict first and foremost in terms of values confuses the issue, covering up the causes and the real interest and creating an unworkable situation. A conflict of interests may be explained and solved, a conflict of values can only be described. It cannot be solved without eliminating one of the parties*¹³.

The situation faced in Austria in the year 2000 is just one example. According to Michalski, the same behaviour pattern could also be found in the Eastern European debates on joining the European Union or in the debates on how to deal with the communist past. This kind of instrumentalisation of ethics was already known to Max Weber who was quoted by Michalski, and who, behind such debates, saw rather the hope for political advantages than a serious feeling of political responsibility. Based on these considerations, Michalski draws a conclusion that using values for the sake of argumentation is not an adequate way to solve political challenges or conflicts¹⁴. Similar situations can also be identified today: Values exist in Warsaw and in Brussels, in Moscow and in Kiev, in Berlin and in Istanbul. However, these values are very often inconsistent with each other. Each side wants to defend their own values and claims that the other side is injuring the generally valid and traditional values on which our system is built.

3. VALUES BETWEEN OSSIFICATION AND MODIFICATION

Within this context, it would indeed be hard to deny that politics have something to do with values. Values – as Michalski notes – are a space in which we move, a grid that defines a particular culture or a group of people. However, because the values define the community, the system cannot go without the exclusion of the “others” which do not share our values. In other words, it cannot go without defending our own values against the “others”. There exist “us” and “them”, and those who do not fit into our community must be excluded¹⁵.

The situation is even more complex if we consider, following Michalski, that the present European culture is built on “equality” as its highest value. European culture is in fact deactivating the aforementioned exclusion mechanisms and is trying to integrate the “excluded”. Whether it is about black people or women, other religions or worldviews, sexual orientation or lifestyle: the urge for equality is getting bigger and bigger. However, every inclusion of the excluded *requires a revision of current rules of cohabitation and current “values,” and thus questions them. By the same token, every attempt at integration carries with itself a deadly risk for a given community – a risk of losing their identity and, as a result, of disintegration. But the risk is unavoidable*¹⁶.

In the end, it becomes clear that European culture exists in a field of tension: on the one hand there are some necessary mechanisms of exclusion, but on the other hand, we try to reduce them. The lesson that Michalski draws from this fact consists in the recognition that the meaning of “us”

¹² Cf. K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 190.

¹³ K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 190.

¹⁴ Cf. K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 191.

¹⁵ Cf. K. Michalski, *Nie ma IV Rzeczpospolitej...*, p. 14.

¹⁶ K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 192.

is not given once and for all. The meaning of “us” is always the result of a process and of politics¹⁷. In a different context, Michalski coined a sentence that can also be applied to this debate: *My identity is becoming, is constantly overcoming itself; no state of identity, Nietzsche maintains, is final*¹⁸ or in another place: “Identität ist nicht, sie wird”¹⁹.

The problem could also be described by stating that actually we cannot definitively define what our values are. How should we set up a catalogue of values that make up our culture and which cannot be modified? Michalski therefore comes to a conclusion that *our knowledge of life-shaping values is out of necessity temporary, open to revision, perhaps even to radical eye-opening and a radical change*²⁰. Of course, our values are the foundation of social coexistence and that of politics, but – according to Michalski – they can never be finally defined. What it means to be a “European” or a “Pole” cannot be described like the properties of a triangle. Another aspect is added to this: values – as Nietzsche already realised – always have something to do with a claim to power. If my values are correct, yours – if you do not share my values – can only be wrong. For Michalski, this fact relates to the disappearance of God: before the early modern period, everything in the world had its place and meaning. In the early modern period, the world – detached from God and dominated by the natural sciences – became a value-free space²¹. In other words, there is no single meaning, no single content left that could cover everything²². In such a world, values have to be negotiated and settled. Because this process leads to conflict, the task of politics is to search for the solution of these conflicts²³.

In summary, the modern world for Michalski is a world of a variety of values that are not built on a final foundation (such as God) but are set by the people themselves. However, as those values are not simply shared by all, there is a need for an authority which can solve the existing conflicts arising from this constellation. In Michalski’s opinion, this is the task of politics. For the conflicts to be solved, values have to be viewed from another point of view than the moral one, they have to be regarded from a distance. His solution, therefore, is the following: *That is why human cohabitation should be regulated by the established (for whatever reason) objective norms. Perceiving conflicts in moral terms we see them from the agent’s perspective, otherwise their moral character is not intelligible. Conflicts seen this way become unresolvable, unless that is we accept that the solution is a victory of one set of values (and their followers) over another*²⁴.

According to Michalski, values have to be transformed into norms. Only then can they regulate social life. In conflicts of values, therefore, both *politics (the art of living among differences)* and *law (the art of handling differences from a distance)*²⁵ are essential factors. Saying this, Michalski does not mean that politics and the law can do without values, but that they protect so-

¹⁷ Cf. K. Michalski, *Nie ma IV Rzeczpospolitej...*, p. 14.

¹⁸ K. Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity. An Interpretation of Nietzsche's Thought*, trans. Benjamin Paloff, Princeton and Oxford 2012, p. 53.

¹⁹ K. Michalski, *Nihilismus: Ein Ort für Gott*, [in:] *Transit. Europäische Revue* 33 (Sommer 2007), Frankfurt am Main 2007, pp. 176–180, 184.

²⁰ K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 193.

²¹ Cf. K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, pp. 193–195.

²² Cf. K. Michalski, *The Flame...*, p. 172.

²³ Cf. K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 195.

²⁴ K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 196.

²⁵ K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 196.

ciety from a dangerous conflict, which can arise from a clash of different values²⁶. If, for example, the dramatic incidents of Paris are described in moral categories as “Islamic culture” versus “Christian culture”, the tensions cannot be solved. The situation is different if instead we try to look for norms that allow the coexistence of groups with different values²⁷.

Michalski's text about politics and values was directed against the improper use of values in politics, especially where someone wanted to legitimize their own interests by invoking values. Ten years later, Michalski confirmed his opinion and added that values are indeed the basis of our coexistence, but have to be placed in a wider context: in the context of the future. Of course, our past is very important, but it cannot become a museum: it can and must allow us to look forward to the future. In this sense, the values also carry within them a promise of a new future, of a new life²⁸.

However, Michalski's solution to solve conflicts not with values, but with norms (by means of politics and the law) appears to be relatively optimistic. Let us take an example from contemporary politics: President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris climate agreement. With this decision not only a value was challenged – and here Michalski is right that a solution cannot be achieved through the argument “values against values” – but, although the agreement had been voluntarily signed, also certain norms (that is the law) were violated. Every kind of negotiation with Trump was unsuccessful. This example shows that in certain situations neither values nor norms nor politics can provide a solution. Nevertheless, this statement was not meant to show that all three do not have a role to play, but that one should not place all hope on them. Michalski would probably respond to this by quoting Max Weber, who wrote that we should steel ourselves *mit jener Festigkeit des Herzens, die auch dem Scheitern aller Hoffnungen gewachsen ist, jetzt schon, sonst werden [wir] nicht imstande sein, auch nur durchzusetzen, was heute möglich ist. Nur wer sicher ist, dass er daran nicht zerbricht, wenn die Welt, von einem Standpunkt aus gesehen, zu dumm oder zu gemein ist für das, was er ihr bieten will, dass er all dem gegenüber: ,dennoch!' zu sagen vermag, nur der hat den ‚Beruf‘ zur Politik*²⁹.

Hope alone, however, does not seem enough to meet the challenges of a particular time. From history we can learn that both politics and law can at times be corrupted. Michalski showed convincingly that values are no basis for the successful argumentation. If this is the case, what is left over?

A helpful reference to this question can be provided by the latest developments in the field of moral theology. In the recent history of moral theological debates, a strong shift from the discussion of normative ethics to the discussion of the ethics of virtues can be detected. Here, virtues are described as arrangements or particular attitudes (*hexeis*) that are formed and performed by an individual and who also appeal to the emotional level and contribute to the development of one's personality. At the same time, it is becoming clear that structural and external interventions

²⁶ Cf. K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 196.

²⁷ Cf. K. Michalski, *Nie ma IV Rzeczpospolitej...*, p. 14.

²⁸ Cf. K. Michalski, *Polityka i wartości: Postscriptum*, [in:] *Zrozumieć przemijanie*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 459–463, 459–461.

²⁹ Weber in the German Version was quoted in: K. Michalski, *Politik und Werte*, [in:] *Transit. Europäische Review* (Sommer 2001), Frankfurt am Main 2001, No. 21, pp. 208–217, 217. In English an abbreviated version of this quote: *We ought to rather arm ourselves [...] with a steadfast heart which can withstand also a destruction of all hope. We ought to do it now, without waiting. Otherwise we won't be able to achieve even that which is possible today*. In: K. Michalski, *Politics and Values...*, p. 196.

can only have a very limited impact on life³⁰. With this in mind, one can either deplore the loss of traditional values and try to restore them (which is traditionally doomed to fail) or try to promote the attitudes and virtues of the individuals. Pope Francis also goes in this direction, in the following revolutionary statement: *We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them*³¹.

If, however, since the early modern period there no longer exists – as already stated – a definite authority to appeal to, who or what should determine which virtues or attitudes are “right”? If neither the Bible nor the Vatican, nor Brussels or Washington have the last word, where can we find the common thread that can give orientation to our attitudes? Here historical scholarship can play an important role. If we set out to identify a common thread in European cultural history, it becomes possible to define four pillars on which Europe has been built.

4. THE COMMON THREAD IN EUROPEAN CULTURAL HISTORY

In one of his “Speeches to the Youth” the first post-war president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Theodor Heuss, defined three principles on which Europe is built. He did so using a metaphor of three hills: Golgota, the Acropolis and the Capitoline Hill representing Christianity, Greek philosophy and Roman law. *Es gibt drei Hügel, von denen das Abendland seinen Ausgang genommen hat: Golgatha, die Akropolis in Athen, das Capitol in Rom. Aus allen ist das Abendland geistig gewirkt, und man darf alle drei, man muß sie als Einheit sehen*³².

A similar definition can be found in Pope Benedict XVI’s speech to the German Bundestag in 2011: *The culture of Europe arose from the encounter between Jerusalem, Athens and Rome – from the encounter between Israel’s monotheism, the philosophical reason of the Greeks and Roman law. This three-way encounter has shaped the inner identity of Europe*³³.

It is these three aspects which are often presented through the image of the three hills or three pillars: Christianity, Greek philosophy and Roman law (but how often nowadays abused by the right-wing populists and right-wing movements!). And they were articulated even more clearly by Pope Benedict in his famous speech at the University of Regensburg: *This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history – it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe*³⁴.

³⁰ Cf. K. Hilpert, *Tugend III. Theologisch-ethisch*, [in:] LThK³ Bd. 10, Freiburg in Br. 2001, pp. 297–300, 299.

³¹ Pope Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia on Love in the Family*, Point 37.

³² T. Heuss, *Reden an die Jugend*, Tübingen 1956, p. 32. As cited in: J. Motschmann, *Die geistigen Grundlagen Europas*, Retrieved July 09, 2017, <http://www.gemeindenetzwerk.de/?p=10313> [15 VI 2017].

³³ Benedict XVI., *Apostolic journey to Germany 22–25 September 2011. Visit to the Bundestag, Reichstag Building in Berlin on 22. September 2011*.

³⁴ Benedict XVI., *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections, Lecture of the Holy Father in Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg*, 12. September 2006, Retrieved 10 July 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html [15 VI 2017].

In addition to these famous three pillars, another dimension could be added which generally is not appreciated by the Europeans in the same way as the other three, namely European history. The three pillars testify in a sense to the power of the Europeans, to their might and their civilisation achievements. But at the same time, Europe is a continent which has seen an enormous extent of wars and crime – often also in the name of Christianity. John Paul II pointed out this painful aspect of European history in his homily during the Eucharist celebration for the faithful of the diocese of Włocławek in 1991: *Tak, oczywiście, Europa to są także dzieje wielkich kryzysów, dzieje kryzysu europejskiego, który ma wiele korzeni, który trwa i rozwija się, i w naszych czasach ma także swój dalszy ciąg, w tym stuleciu niestety tragiczny dalszy ciąg. [...] To wszystko jest także dziedzictwo europejskie, ale z tego się mamy wyzwalać! Europa potrzebuje odkupienia!*³⁵ (Translation by the author: *Yes, of course, Europe is also a story of great crises, the history of the European crisis, which has many roots that continue and develop, and in our day it also has its own continuity, this tragic succession in this century. This is also the European heritage, but we have to free ourselves from it! Europe needs redemption!*).

On the one hand this statement is a reminder that we need to be conscious also of the dark side of Europe. On the other hand, it can also be read in the sense of Johann Baptist Metz's *Memoria Passionis*, that is, as the remembrance of the suffering of others. This remembrance obliges us to act, to live *Compassion*: *Diese gerechtigkeitssuchende Compassion ist das Schlüsselwort für das Weltprogramm des Christentums im Zeitalter der Globalisierung. Sie ist in meinen Augen die biblische Mitgift für den europäischen Geist, so wie die theoretische Neugierde die griechische Mitgift und das Rechtsdenken die römische Mitgift für Europa ist*³⁶.

Even though Metz equates this practical consequence of *Compassion* with the Jewish-Christian tradition, it is nevertheless worthwhile to consider the “fourth” column separately – also for practical reasons: The German priest Manfred Daeseler often repeated in the spiritual exercises, which he led at the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Oświęcim, that the beginning of Auschwitz was not a moment when the first barracks were built, but a moment when one man or one nation begins to understand themselves as “something better”. Therefore, the dark side of Europe can always remind us of the fact that we are not “something better” and at the same time ensure that certain practical questions are being heard: What is our self-image compared to “the other”? What is the language I use? For example, a certain language used in the social media and even some political debates with reference to the refugee crisis generates doubts as to the argumentation that European cultures are built on Christianity, Reason, and Law.

As mentioned before, these four pillars cannot simply have the function of a signboard. They are rather the common thread, which helps us to identify concrete solutions. As Michalski has shown, values cannot be a convincing argument in a political dispute. As norms and politics cannot always solve the problems either, it has been proposed to promote new attitudes or a new mentality. The four pillars of Europe can be principles that give orientation in this process.

³⁵ Jan Paweł II, *Homilia w czasie Mszy św., Włocławek 7. Czerwca 1991*, [in:] Jan Paweł II, *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny. Przemówienia, homilie*, Kraków 2005, p. 692.

³⁶ J. B. Metz, *Zu einem Weltprogramm des Christentums im Zeitalter des Pluralismus der Religionen und Kulturen*, [in:] *Compassion. Weltprogramm des Christentums. Soziale Verantwortung lernen*, ed. J. B. Metz, i.a., Freiburg (i.a.) 2000, p. 9–18, 13.

Of course, the proposed solution can be denounced for certain naivety: after all, it is directed at individuals and can therefore only appeal to the individual. But the individual is not alone. Together they build up a society that can become a civil society which can actually influence the world. The term “civil society” cannot be easily defined, but a brief description of this term by Krzysztof Michalski can give a first idea: *Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft ist der vom Staat nicht beherrschte Rest des gesellschaftlichen Lebens, den es zu erweitern gilt*³⁷. Integral parts of the civil society are: *familiale, religiöse, kulturelle, intellektuelle oder sportliche Institutionen, soziale Klassen, ethnische Gruppen, Nationalitäten sowie deren Aktivitäten*³⁸. In order for these groups to become the civil society, they must fulfil a critical function towards the state. They do not only exert influence by means of their opinions, but also through activities and relationships that are oriented towards public welfare³⁹.

In order to fulfil these functions, the society needs convinced individuals who are able to live according to a new mentality and corresponding attitudes. Only such individuals are able to build a society which can become a critical-corrective civil society. To use and fight with values as “arguments” in a political debate is a path which is not only not expedient but could also have catastrophic consequences for Europe: Getting stuck in our ossified understanding of these values. Krzysztof Michalski believed that Europe is not simply something found, but a task: *Die Frage: Was ist Europa? – ist eine Frage, die ständig aufs Neue gestellt werden muss und nie abschließend beantwortet werden kann – solange Europa Gegenwart ist, nicht bloß Vergangenheit*⁴⁰. Therefore, contemporary questions and problems cannot simply be answered according to a „list of values“, but only through the development of a particular attitude which moves between history and the present, according to the principles, which the four pillars suggest.

I would like to thank Ms. Julia Kling for the critical reading and linguistic corrections of this text.

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³⁷ K. Michalski, *Vorwort*, [in:] *Europa und die Civil Society. Castelgandolfo-Gespräche 1989*, ed. K. Michalski, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 7–10, 8.

³⁸ Cf. E. Shils, *Was ist Civil Society?*, [in:] *Europa und die Civil Society. Castelgandolfo-Gespräche 1989*, ed. K. Michalski, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 13–51, 13.

³⁹ Cf. E. Shils, *Was ist Civil Society?*..., p. 14–15.

⁴⁰ K. Michalski, *Die Einheit Europas ist eine Aufgabe*, [in:] *Anstöße für ein Europa der Bürger. 39. Theodor-Heuss-Preis 2004*, eds A. Cherbuliez, B. Reinhardt, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 32–40, 38.

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