

Dissertation Abstract

“In Defense of Values. Recovering the Original Meaning in a Modern Context.”

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The dissertation aims to defend values in their real (formal) meaning by reference to Greek philosophy, Sacred Scripture and Church Teaching, on the one hand, and 20th Century Catholic phenomenology, especially the work of Józef Tischner, on the other. Once we grasp the manner in which values lost their intrinsic and unifying sense and became subjective and artificially imposed upon each other, we can also propose the following solutions: first, instead of rejecting and losing values, we need to go back to the classical tradition and relearn what the word “value” means. The language of values as properly understood could also be effectively used in dialogue with other religions and serve as a common ground for those pondering the more profound dimensions of reality. **Chapter One** presents the critique of the notion of values as well as “the language of values” based primarily on the works of Iain Benson, who references many other contemporary thinkers in his writing. In response to his critique, we explore the existence of values, their objectivity, and their hierarchical order as well as the way in which they are received. This is meant to lead us to understand how the meaning of value has changed since ancient times and how value-language became a meaningless form of empty words, or as Nietzsche observed, *re-valuation* or even *trans-valuation*. Benson’s solution for this state of crisis of values is to restore “virtue language,” abandoning the terminology of values to the sphere of economics. This critique of the notion of “values” becomes the foundation on which we will attempt to retrieve the primary and fundamental notion of value. **Chapter Two** explores the Church’s appropriation of the language of values, principally in the pontificate of John Paul II. The Pope uses this language to describe the mission of Christ as well as to talk about the human person, i.e. the “personalistic” or “moral” value. John Paul II very often calls for a return to values. In this regard, he repeatedly uses the adjective “authentic” to refer to certain values, which indicates his awareness of the ambiguity of the language of values. **Chapter Three** provides a summary of Fr. Józef Tischner’s theory of values. As a thinker who was a contemporary of John Paul II, Tischner developed a philosophy that embraced a phenomenological return to the nature of things in order to see their intrinsic and objective value. This approach corresponds to the ancient use of the term “value.” Tischner does not simply refer to “value language” as a modern concept (with a new modern understanding of value itself) but rather attempts to recover the original notion of value and apply it to our perception of things, world, and man. In the last part of this chapter, however, we recognize Tischner’s shift into agathology as a complement to his axiology. Such a move represents a result of his in-depth studies and shows values to be based upon virtues. Tischner notes that values are insufficient in isolation from goods and have to be understood on the foundation of the good. **Appendix A** provides an in-depth etymological study of the word “value” in English, Latin, French, Polish, and German, which supplies the background for judgments made in the body of the dissertation. We also examine closely the Greek term *ἀξιο* and its meaning in the Sacred Scripture and classical philosophy. Finally, the **Appendix B** provides a selection of illustrative texts from an essay *Etyka wartości i nadziei* by Fr. Tischner in English translation.