

# CONTRIBUTION OF ETHICS EDUCATION IN VALUES TO ELIMINATE HATE SPEECHES

## Contribución de la educación ética en valores para eliminar los discursos de odio

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### Abstract

Hate speech has increased with social media and it constitutes a social scourge insofar as it fuels discrimination and violence towards some individuals because they belong to certain stigmatized groups. The aim of this paper is to analyze the extent to which a values-based philosophy of education can contribute to the elimination of hate speech. It denounces the technocratic confusion of attempting to solve ethical problems with technological innovation without addressing the underlying intrinsic values that should guide our actions. To carry out the study, hermeneutic methodology has been used insofar as it seeks to adequately understand the axiological dimension in people's actions and character building. Among the main results obtained is that the philosophy of ethical education in values allows us to recognize the need for intrinsic values as a guide for instrumental values. The main conclusion is that ethical education in values does not consist of theoretical learning of moral values but rather the ethical realization of values. Thus, in the face of the problems of moral disconnection, ethical education in values conceives freedom of expression as linked to personal responsibility.

### Keywords

Hate Speech, Philosophy, Education, Ethics, Value, Responsibility.

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### Resumen

Los discursos de odio han aumentado con la llegada de las redes sociales y constituyen una lacra social en la medida que alimentan la discriminación y la violencia hacia las personas por su pertenencia a determinados colectivos estigmatizados. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar en qué medida la filosofía de la educación centrada en los valores puede contribuir a la eliminación de los discursos de odio. Se denuncia la confusión tecnocrática de pretender solucionar los problemas éticos con la innovación tecnológica sin atender al fondo de los valores intrínsecos como guía de la acción. Para llevar a cabo el estudio se ha empleado la metodología hermenéutica en la medida que se trata de comprender adecuadamente la dimensión axiológica en las acciones y en la forja del carácter de las personas. Entre los principales resultados obtenidos está que la filosofía de la educación ética en valores permite reconocer la necesidad de valores intrínsecos como guía de los valores instrumentales. La principal conclusión es que la educación ética en valores no consiste en un aprendizaje teórico de valores morales, sino en la realización ética de los valores. Así, frente a los problemas de la desconexión moral, la educación ética en valores concibe a la libertad de expresión como vinculada con la responsabilidad de las personas.

### Palabras clave

Discurso de odio, filosofía, educación, ética, valor, responsabilidad.



## Introduction

In a global context marked by polarization, mistrust, and the resurgence of extremist ideologies, hate speech has become a serious threat to democratic coexistence. In recent years, with the rise of social media, its presence in society has grown, making it necessary to analyze it in order to find ways to eradicate it. This discourse is not simply controversial opinion, but rather a form of language that dehumanizes, stigmatizes, or incites violence against individuals or groups based on their origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, etc. It is often disguised as freedom of expression, but in reality it seeks to exclude and reinforce social hierarchies of domination.

Given the harmful repercussions of hate speech on the social context and the development of individuals and communities, it is necessary to stop and analyze it in order to gain a good understanding of its origins and why it is so prevalent with the social media. We need to move forward and explore possible ways to eradicate hate speech. Are technical advances in algorithms that detect and eliminate hate speech on social media sufficient? Does the solution lie in technical issues, or is it necessary to analyze and consider the reality of the values behind this problem? In this regard, what solutions can be offered from the philosophy of education? Can ethical education in values be an answer that contributes to eliminating hate speech? But what exactly is ethical education in values?

Because there is often confusion about what values are or should be and whether they are valid in themselves or depend on individual taste.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on whether ethical education in values can be a good ally in eliminating hate speech. It questions the technocratic confusion that attempts to solve ethical problems through technological innovation, without considering the intrinsic values that should guide human action. A hermeneutic methodology has been used to develop the study, given that its purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of the axiological dimension present in people's actions and character formation. The section begins by emphasizing the ethical foundation of education. We then turn our attention to hate speech as social scourge, its definition, and meaning.

## Hate speech as social scourge



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Before delving into the possible ethical and educational ways of addressing hate speech, it is necessary to understand precisely what it consists of and what its main characteristics are. This section will analyze the concept of hate speech, its evolution, and the different definitions proposed by international organizations and academic literature. This theoretical framework will allow us to define the nature of the phenomenon and recognize its social, political, and moral implications, which is an essential starting point for subsequently addressing its ethical and educational dimensions.

### *Definition and meaning of hate speech*

There are various definitions of what is known as hate speech. The concept comes from the English term *hate speech*, but the Spanish translation itself is problematic.<sup>1</sup> However, over time it has become established as the expression that frames the reality of hate messages directed at people belonging to a series of groups that have traditionally been stigmatized (this is also how it is described in the UNESCO thesaurus) and for this reason it is the expression we will use in this article.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, in its General Policy Recommendation No. 15, defines hate speech as:

The encouragement, promotion, or instigation, in any form, of hatred, humiliation, or contempt for a person or group of people, as well as harassment, discrediting, dissemination of negative stereotypes, stigmatization, or threats against such a person or group of people, and the

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justification of such manifestations on grounds of «race,» color, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics or conditions (ECRI, 2016, p. 3).

Cabo Isasi and García Juanatey (2017) differentiate between two trends in defining hate speech, depending on whether such hate messages directly or indirectly incite acts of discrimination or violence based on racial hatred, xenophobia, sexual orientation, or other forms of intolerance. The first of these trends is very closely linked to what is known and already classified in the legal code as «hate crimes.» However, the concept of hate speech is often applied more broadly, extending also to expressions that promote prejudice or intolerance, considering that such expressions indirectly contribute to creating a climate of hostility that may eventually lead to discriminatory acts or violent attacks (Gagliardone *et al.* 2015).

Among the main characteristics that define hate speech are the following:

- Victims are not attacked for their personal identity, but for belonging to a particular group with a characteristic that incites the aggressor to feel revulsion and contempt.
- Hate speech stigmatizes or denigrates a group by attributing to it acts considered harmful to society, even when it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove.
- It turns the group in question into a target of hatred on the basis of prejudiced narratives, or black legends, which seek to justify incitement to contempt and believe that society should feel toward its targets.
- Those who promote hate messages and commit hate crimes are convinced that there is structural inequality between themselves and the victim.
- These types of messages often take the form of diatribes in which no effort is made to provide coherent arguments, but rather the emphasis is on expressing contempt and encouraging others to spread the message (Hare & Weinstein, 2009; Cortina, 2017).

In most articles, hate speech on social media is associated with four types: religious, cyber racism, political insults, and misogyny (Castaño Pulgarín *et al.*, 2021). Lingiardi *et al.* (2020) also include a fifth type, referring to attacks on the LGTBIQ+ community.

In recent years, the confluence of various crises—including those related to refugees, migration flows, economic and health emergencies—together with the intensive use of the internet and social media, has highlighted the power of hate speech to promote social polarization and systematically violate the rights of certain groups, particularly those of migrant origin (Observatorio Español del Racismo y la Xenofobia, 2024). As García González (2022) points out, it is important to emphasize that the proliferation of a culture of hate and, specifically, hostile messages such as hate speech, can be understood as a concrete manifestation of «necropolitics,» in the terms developed by authors such as Judith Butler (2006, 2010) and Achille Mbembe (2011, 2018). This logic of necropolitics operates by deliberately generating feelings of animosity towards certain populations, which are represented as latent threats, in order to legitimize certain models of sociopolitical construction based on the exclusion and domination (and even subjugation) of others.

### *Discovering the ethical values behind technical solutions*

Traditional media such as television and opinion journalism can also serve as channels for hate speech. However, it has been with the emergence of the internet, and especially with the rapid dissemination of information and greater permissiveness facilitated by social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, that hate speech has had an increasingly far-reaching social impact. This is mainly due to the impact that social media has had on notions of democracy and respect for human rights (Daniels, 2013; Matamoros Fernández & Farkas, 2021).

As Cabo Isasi and García Juanatey (2017) point out, online hate speech adds a number of features that make it an uncontrolled phenomenon with even greater potential for harm. First, there is communicative overabundance, where what were once private messages now occupy social media spaces, to the point of being sent in mass. Secondly, the decentralization of communication, in the sense that anyone can send a message with enormous audience potential, giving rise to what is metaphorically referred to as «viralization.» To all this must be added other characteristics such as the permanence of content, roaming between different platforms, the use of pseudonyms, anonymity, and transnationality.

The presence of ethics in digital spaces, and especially in social media, is a requirement that is being demanded by various authorities. It is true that regulation of the ethical use of social media and AI often lags behind, with misuse of these spaces occurring first and regulation coming

later to alleviate the problems caused (Poveda *et al.*, 2025). However, to the extent that social media also constitute elements of socialization, it is necessary to implement these ethical measures that preserve democracy and the values defended by human rights. After conducting an extensive systematic literature review (Gracia Calandín & Suárez Montoya, 2023), it is clear that studies on hate speech do not delve into a sufficiently detailed ethical analysis and are often reduced solely to technical issues.

The European Union Parliament has highlighted the potential benefits and dangers of artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to the repression of human rights and democracy. Ünver (2024) points out how AI can be used as a «weapon of repression» and its impact on human rights. He therefore advocates the need to establish a global standard for AI ethics and human rights to protect people from digital authoritarianism both within and beyond their borders (UNESCO, 2024). In this regard, he points to some policy recommendations as a strategic resource for possible European Parliament initiatives to develop a strategic policy to counteract algorithmic control abuses.

In light of recent studies by Lee *et al.* (2024) on racism suffered by the African American community in the United States, it is clear that the solution is not for algorithms or public authorities to silence the experiences of victims of such hate speech. Indeed, in order to implement inclusion and equity in these online spaces, the solution is not silencing, but rather the detection and recognition of such discourse taking place on social media. Therefore, implementing practices with moderated content or even «counter-narratives» can help foster more inclusive and productive conversations (Poole *et al.*, 2019). The research carried out by these authors once again highlights the urgent need to rethink content moderation guidelines and the algorithms that apply them so that they accurately reflect the values of inclusivity and equity.

Alkiviadou (2022) points out the delicate situation of simply applying AI on platforms to eliminate hate speech. Automated mechanisms may have biased data sets and be unable to detect certain nuances in language. Therefore, they should not cease to be supervised in their application to hate speech, as this could lead to violations of the right to expression and the right to non-discrimination.

For his part, Venkateshwarlu (2025) points out that in order to tackle hate speech, ethical concepts must be preserved in the design and application of AI-based systems, and policies that promote responsible innovation without undermining fundamental democratic values must be defended. Indeed, the way to overcome the scourge of hate speech is



by creating inclusive digital spaces and defending rights and freedoms for socially responsible development, inclusiveness, and respect for individual freedoms.

In terms of philosophy and the ethics of values, technology is an instrumental value, which is not the same as «morally neutral.» It is important to remember this because recognizing technical value as a means implies that we must not lose sight of the ends for which that means will be used. And when this occurs, as in the case of technocratic society (a society in which science and technology become ideology), then technical values, which are pure means, are converted into ends, as Gracia Guillén (2011) points out:

Instrumental values are always at the service of other intrinsic values. Seeing them only as instrumental values, therefore, without their relationship to intrinsic values, is already perverse, because it deprives them of their necessary reference. By separating them from intrinsic values, we absolutize them and thus convert them into intrinsic values themselves. By proclaiming the neutrality of technology, we are elevating it, usually unconsciously, to the category of intrinsic value (p. 155).



Therefore, even taking into account the contribution of technological innovation and the latest artificial intelligence tools, it is essential not to lose sight of the foundation of ethical values. Once again, for the eradication of hate speech, including online, the key is not only or primarily to implement the most advanced technical and IT tools, but to forge a social and individual *ethos* that embodies the fundamental ethical and civic values that underpin democratic coexistence. With this in mind, we will now delve into the axiological background that frames the phenomenon of the viralization of hate in society. We will then analyze how it is possible to eradicate such hate through ethical education.

## The viralization of hate in society

The viralization of hatred in society requires an understanding of the mechanisms that erode democratic coexistence and transform conflicts into polarized confrontations. This section first analyzes how the affiliation between hatred and fear acts as direct threat to the civic fabric, weakening trust and feeding exclusionary discourses. Second, it addresses the process by which individuals and groups can go from victims to perpetrators through «moral disengagement,» a dynamic that justifies aggression and

dehumanizes the other. Exploring these phenomena reveals the psychosocial roots that drive the current spread of hate.

*The affiliation of hatred and fear as a threat to democratic coexistence*

In the third chapter of *The Monarchy of Fear*, Martha C. Nussbaum (2019) recalls the affiliation of anger with fear. Against the backdrop of the American context, the author highlights the plethora of emotions linked to fear, as well as the consequences of such fear for democracy, fostering policies of exclusion and the rule of envy. Furthermore, as a leading specialist in the classical world, Nussbaum recalls that for the Greeks, fear and anger had pernicious consequences for democracy. Thus, going beyond what she had argued in her 2016 book, *Anger and Forgiveness*, she recognizes «the role of fear as source and accomplice of vengeful anger» (p. 94).

Explicitly, Nussbaum (2019) takes up Lucretius' idea that fear makes everything worse and produces a series of political evils, notably anger. The fear of human vulnerability, the fear of death and of being harmed, is the seed of anger. Unlike the gods, who are perfect and cannot suffer—and therefore cannot feel afflicted—human beings can be hurt, and it is this possibility that causes the gripping and irrational fear that awakens anger in them.

Although Nussbaum (2019) does not dwell on this point, fear can certainly be understood as a principle of caution and prudence, and it is reasonable that, given the vulnerable human condition and the immense power of technological advancement, people should act under a principle of caution to avoid possible damage or loss of valued goods. The best example in this regard is the «principle of responsibility» developed by Hans Jonas (1995), which has been so widely seen in applied ethics. But here we are referring to another type of fear, which is irrational and paralyzing, and which complicitly nullifies one's ability to act and allows oneself to be overcome by hatred and vengeful anger.

Fear becomes irrational and pernicious when it feeds hatred toward others. In several of his works—for example, in the field of education, *Not for Profit*—Nussbaum (2010) has studied how hatred can originate as a form of «projected disgust» toward certain groups. Disgust, in itself, is an instinctive response with evolutionary roots that serves as a form of self-protection against potentially contaminating elements such as organic waste or bodily fluids (blood, vomit, mucus, urine, among others). But it becomes a social scourge when this emotion is displaced toward specific



individuals or communities, thus generating processes of stigmatization and rejection. In such cases, certain people come to be perceived as «dirty,» impure, or contaminating, which fuels attitudes of segregation and prevents contact or integration.

Nussbaum (2019) emphasizes in the fourth chapter of *The Monarchy of Fear* that fear, being at the root of the most basic disgust, acts as a psychological reinforcement in this type of projected revulsion, jeopardizing fundamental principles such as equality and respect between individuals. These types of emotional dynamics lead to contexts of marginalization. For this reason, the author proposes excluding expressions of disgust from public discourse when they are directed at people for reasons related to their ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, among other factors.

More specifically, in the educational environment—even from an early age—it is possible to identify behaviors that anticipate this logic of exclusion and stigmatization. A clear example of disgust projected in the school context is the game known as «the lice hunter,» where a child is symbolically linked to something considered repulsive, such as parasites. This practice creates a direct association between the child and a characteristic perceived as unpleasant or undesirable, thus promoting their social isolation (Nussbaum, 2010).

In the face of this lethal alliance of hatred and fear for democratic coexistence, we propose the courage of ethical education in values. An ethical education in values that shapes people's character and allows them to inhabit a world in which it is possible to develop their own humanity, while fostering a fruitful synergy between philosophy, ethics, and education that promotes attitudes of respect, justice, and recognition towards others.

### *From victims to perpetrators through «moral disengagement»*

As Carolin Emcke reminds us in her work *Against Hate* (2017), hate is a highly contagious virus, so that those who seek to confront it with more hate have already fallen into its tentacles, being engulfed by it and paradoxically becoming what they denounce. Hate leads to a dynamic of destruction, where, far from feeding a sense of justice and the purpose of building a better world, it ends up blaming certain individuals and groups for the ills that face societies. Rather than being an obstacle that is easy to overcome, hate has a toxic magnetism that ultimately blinds people's critical, reflective, and deliberative potential, fueling attitudes of exclusion and stigmatization.

Hate breeds more hate, and as some studies show, a large proportion of young people who have been the targets of hate speech are the ones who later become perpetrators of hate speech against others. In this regard, Patchin and Hinduja (2019) explore how family background and parenting practices influence the likelihood of a teenager engaging in hate speech, whether online or in real life.

Hate spreads very quickly through social media. As Reichelman *et al.* (2020) show, there is a transfer of aggression and an escalation in violent behavior in digital environments, which is then also transferred outside of social media. Thus, as Kowalski *et al.* (2013) point out, adolescents who suffered, participated in, or observed *cyberbullying* were the ones who most reproduced these behaviors inside and outside social media, as hate speech has a negative effect on adolescents' self-esteem and mental health.

Likewise, according to longitudinal studies reviewed by Lozano *et al.* (2020), adolescents experience situations of bullying in which they are first cyber victims and then become cyberbullies. One distinction between bullying and cyberbullying is that in the latter case, an adolescent is more likely to be both a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. The longitudinal study by Falla *et al.* (2020) shows how adolescents who were victims of school bullying were more likely to develop bullying behaviors in the future.

In view of all this, Gómez Tabares and Correa Duque (2022) emphasize that the transition from victim to perpetrator takes place through a cognitive restructuring that legitimizes these behaviors as an acceptable alternative or normative trait in peer relationships, leading to future intimidation or bullying behaviors. To explain this transition from victim to perpetrator, they draw on Bandura's (1999, 2016) theory of «moral disengagement,» which is worth pausing to consider. Moral disengagement refers to the sociocognitive strategies that people use to restructure their understanding of an immoral, violent, or cruel action, thereby avoiding moral self-censorship and isolating the negative feelings associated with acts that violate a society's moral standards (Thornberg *et al.*, 2015; Gómez & Durán, 2017) violent, or cruel action and thus avoid moral self-censorship, isolating the negative feelings associated with acts that violate a society's moral standards (Thornberg *et al.*, 2015; Gómez & Durán, 2021).

For their part, as Bakioğlu and Çapan (2019) point out, it is worth considering the empathic tendency as an element that can mediate and moderate the effects of moral disengagement on cyberbullying. This highlights that both bullying and cyberbullying behaviors are influenced



by moral, emotional, and relational factors. Thus, in light of the research by Oberman (2010) and Gini *et al.* (2014), in contrast to bullies and victims—who show a moral disengagement that tends to justify abusive behavior—children who assume the role of defenders showed high moral sensitivity and empathic reactivity toward their peers, aspects that have been associated with prosocial behavior and prosocial moral reasoning.

## Preventing and mediating to avoid hate speech

Returning to Emcke's approach (2017), the root of the problem lies in the fact that those who hate have lost the ability to truly question and to discern properly. They feel so sure of themselves that they are incapable of questioning their own ideas. Entrenched in stereotypes fueled by their projected disgust toward certain people, they have lost all capacity for criticism and self-criticism.

As aggressive and violent behavior, hate speech is classified in schools as acts of bullying and cyberbullying. In light of research on bullying and cyberbullying (Thornberg *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2021; Bakioğlu & Çapan, 2019), the relevance of emotional and personality factors in shaping moral agency and understanding different behaviors and roles is key. Anger associated with moral disengagement is a predictor of acts of bullying. In contrast, a high degree of empathy, understood more as «ethical compassion» (Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Orts García, 2023 and 2025), is a protective factor that moderates the association between moral disengagement, bullying, and cyberbullying.

Elsewhere (Gracia Calandín & Suárez Montoya, 2023; Gracia Calandín, 2024), we have proposed various ways to eradicate so-called hate speech. Among them, the cultivation of ethical compassion and critical thinking play key role. Of course, technology can be an ally in the effort to eliminate hate speech insofar as it allows for the detection of certain behaviors classified as such. But digital media, as seen, far from facilitating and simplifying the problem, have led to an increase in the number of cases of cyberbullying and hate speech on social media in recent years. Nor is it enough to think that responsibility lies solely with politicians, leaving citizens in the background.

Therefore, the question of the keys to eradicating hate speech is far from being exhausted, and below we propose to analyze and question whether ethical education in values can be a fundamental ally in the effort to eliminate it. Beyond whether it refers to religious, aesthetic,



logical, epistemological, or moral issues, to the extent that values are rooted in the character or *ethos* of individuals and peoples, values are always ethical and therefore have implications for social and civic coexistence. This is what primarily concerns us, and it is at this point that ethics and education are intrinsically connected (Tamarit López, 2025). Each seeks and needs the other in order to fulfill its own purpose. On the one hand, ethics, insofar as it refers to the malleable dimension of people, i.e., their *ethos* or character, directly alludes to education. On the other hand, education, insofar as it is not instruction or indoctrination, or even mere teaching, assumes that it is not dealing with programmed machines but with educable people (therefore, with a malleable way of being or character). At this point, to speak of unethical education would be to fall into a gross oxymoron (Gracia Calandín, 2025).



By introducing a third element, that of value, alongside education and ethics, the proposal is to adopt a specific approach, that of axiology, which allows us to philosophically ground the intrinsic connection between ethics and education. This is in order to explore the extent to which the question of value can be crucial to developing a well-founded type of education that contributes to the eradication of hate speech. The philosophy of values education fulfills this function because it allows us to highlight the value of ethical education and to provide a foundation for the goal of eliminating hate speech and rooting fundamental values for coexistence in people's *ethos*, such as equal human dignity, respect for different identities, responsibility for one's own actions, and solidarity with the most disadvantaged.

### *The courage to care about building values*

Julián Marías (2000) recalled that the main meaning of the term «value» is «courage» and that it is more courageous than valuable. Without a minimum of courage, without a minimum of bravery, all other values collapse. Indeed, it takes a good dose of courage to address the issue of values. This is because they are such elusive and unstable qualities that they have been relegated throughout the history of thought, escaping philosophical analysis, as José Ortega y Gasset (2007) pointed out in his substantial «Discourse for the Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences» in 1918.

Indeed, throughout Antiquity and Modernity, philosophy has focused on being, good, and duty. It was not until well into the 19th century with Lotze and Brentano, and especially at the beginning of the 20th century with philosophers such as Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartman, and

José Ortega y Gasset, that value took its rightful place in the history of philosophy (Marías, 2000; Gracia Guillén, 2011).

But concern for value is central to the task at hand, because value is inherent in the human capacity for estimation, and the world we inhabit is a world steeped in values. Valuing values is not only an act of courage, but also an eminently vital issue in confronting social scourges such as hate speech, which seeks to exploit fear and paralyzes our capacity for estimation. Thus, silent fear spreads its tentacles to paralyze the creative sources of human beings and ultimately diminish their capacity to desire, prefer, and estimate. With these sources blinded, the subject becomes passive and reactive, blurring into the masses, losing the contours of their own character and identity, feeding stereotypes, and nullifying individuality. As seen, this is precisely one of the characteristics of hate speech: individual identity is eliminated and the prejudice of a group that is denigrated is projected onto the person.

The courage to build values seeks to break and overcome this spiral of hatred and fear that nullifies personality and paralyzes human growth. In the face of this, the value of the values that shape people's character is vindicated. Without the construction of these values, it would be impossible to undertake the full development of personality, which is the ultimate goal of education (Gracia Calandín, 2020). In the face of fear and hatred, which stifle the creative forces of human beings and lead them to barbaric destruction, education in values is based on the assumption that human beings are builders of a world of values, where the key is no longer to survive in terms of passive adaptation (*adaptation to the environment*), but rather to seek above all to «build a valuable life» (*adaptation of the environment to our life project*) (Gracia Calandín, 2020).

For this well-established philosophy of value, it is not enough to refer to being, nor to establish imperatives, nor even to allude to goods. More fundamentally, the key lies in discovering the humanly «vital» aspect of value, i.e., recognizing the essence of life that nourishes estimation as a constitutive of the human way of life and which is reflected in the everyday language we use to communicate with each other.

All this is an argument in favor of a type of estimative or «cordial» rationality, as José Ortega y Gasset calls it, in unequivocal contrast to Kantian pure rationality.



### *Returning to the fundamental philosophical question of value as the ethical foundation of education*

It is essential that educational philosophy reflect on the values and principles that guide educational activity, allowing for a deeper understanding of the values that all educators, especially educational institutions, should promote. Thus, axiology refers to reflection and analysis of the values and value judgments that constitute and shape the human person. And while it is true that axiology can encompass various branches such as aesthetics or the philosophy of religion, what is unavoidable is the constitutive dimension of axiology for ethics. Because it is ethics that seeks to analyze the values and norms that shape the character of individuals and peoples. In this sense, ethics must be understood as the foundation of education (Gracia Calandín, 2025).

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The philosophy of education is a branch of knowledge that, among other things, offers a critical and reasoned understanding of the foundations of education. Various branches have proposed different types of these foundations: philosophical, worldview, epistemological, logical, sociological, or axiological, which, in one way or another, guide educational work and «consolidate the ethical bases that must be within the educational process with which the horizon of the type of personal and social formation that is to be achieved is proposed» (Aguilar Gordón & Collado Ruano, 2025, 83).

In this regard, it would be a mistake to consider that it is possible to understand and explain people's behavior from an axiologically neutral point of view, as positivist approaches have attempted in various ways. Therefore, despite the positivism or positivisms in vogue that tout axiological neutrality everywhere, if we want to understand human beings properly, we must focus on the values that shape their way of being, i.e., their *ethos*. José Ortega y Gasset (2009) eloquently argues:

Every man, every people, every era is, first and foremost, a certain system of preferences, to which the rest of their being is devoted. Life is always a gamble with certain values, and that is why every life has a style—good or bad, personal or vulgar—created originally or received from the environment (Ortega y Gasset, 2009, p. 901).<sup>3</sup>

In the case of José Ortega y Gasset, the concern for value is fundamental, and his assessment as a starting point can provide clues to discovering that morality is not a performance that is added as a secondary quality to being, but is embedded in the very core of human praxis. And

perhaps the centrality of value in José Ortega y Gasset's work has not been sufficiently understood, even by some of his main interpreters, for whom estimation is merely an «occasional» issue, especially in the third stage of his work since 1924. However, in light of more recent research (Echeverría Ezponda & García Pérez, 2017; Expósito Roper, 2020 and 2021), we find that the question of value in José Ortega y Gasset (2007) occupies a central place (as it does in other great philosophers such as Max Scheler or Nicolai Hartmann) insofar as it is value that is given to us, but not as a being, nor as a good, but as something more radically original than good or even duty. In this regard, the central thesis of his famous «Discourse for the Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences» is that the world of value (or of action) is not and cannot be reduced to the world of being. «The consciousness of value is as general and primitive as the consciousness of objects [...] perhaps what *is* seems to us *to be* worthless, and on the other hand, what *is* not imposes itself on us as maximum value» (pp. 710-711). In doing so, he effectively takes up the Husserlian thesis expressed in 1913, in *Ideas I*, and also developed more prolifically that same year by Max Scheler in his work *Formalism in Ethics*, namely, the thesis that the world of values is given to us with the same immediacy, originality, and foundational character as the world of things, and that being and value should not be confused with each other.

The characteristic feature of the philosophy of value proposed from the phenomenological-hermeneutical approach as the foundation of ethics and education is that it seeks to overcome both ancient realism and modern subjectivism. It is here that the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach must avoid, on the one hand, the Scylla of ancient metaphysical realism and, on the other, the Charybdis of modern subjectivism and relativism. Of these two extremes, it is undoubtedly the latter that continues to wreak havoc today, leading to a diminished and deficient view of values. Faced with this and following Ortega's assessment and authors of the ethics of values who are heirs to the phenomenological-hermeneutic tradition, we will seek to overcome the subjectivist and relativist conception of values in order to rediscover the fundamental potential of value as a regulator of behavior.

*Overcoming the relativist conception of values  
without falling into absolutism*

As heirs to the phenomenological-hermeneutic tradition of values, and especially to the Spanish tradition—we refer primarily to authors such

as José Ortega y Gasset (2005, 2007), Manuel García Morente, and, above all, Xavier Zubiri and Pedro Laín Entralgo— Diego Gracia Guillén (2011) affirms that the question of values is above all a «vital» question, embedded in biology. The fact is that no one can live without valuing, and we value because, as humans, we cannot help but do so. *Biologically, we are predisposed to value*, and estimation shapes the way we access reality. Valuation is not an arbitrary addition to our access to the world; it is a mental process specifically geared towards achieving the main biological objective, namely survival. By virtue of the nervous system, human beings interact with the environment, receiving not only neutral data, but also a series of emotions and estimates that shape their conception of reality. As Gracia Guillén (2010) points out:



The function of intelligence is projective; it serves to project and carry out the modification of the environment based on assessments and preferences, and that project necessarily has a moment of assessment. We project what can improve our lives, i.e., what can add value to them. Hence, assessment is a biological necessity. [...] In fact, the realization of the project has no other purpose than to add value to things. Culture is that repository of value (p. 11).

Indeed, human beings need to plan in order to fulfill themselves as people; they themselves are projects, i.e., they are propelled forward (*project*) by their aspirations and goals. The human project is shaped by emotions, but above all by intelligence, an intelligence that is embedded in the affections and therefore sentient. An intelligence that projects and allows nature to be improved to the point of transforming the natural environment into a world imbued with values. Values, therefore, are not empty intellectualizations, lacking in active and performative power, but quite the contrary, they are qualities that are constructed by realizing them, and by realizing them, human beings themselves are also realized.

The projective nature of the axiological dimension of human beings has often been criticized, detecting in it the seed of relativism.<sup>4</sup> This philosophical question has very relevant implications for education, because if we accept the premise that values depend on subjective tastes and it is not possible to mediate on whether the value we attribute to something is objective<sup>5</sup>—but rather that they ultimately depend on the pleasure it causes in the subject— then it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find in values the foundation we seek for education.

In relation to hate speech, we can glimpse the effects and influences of the deflationary subjectivist conception of values. If values fall on

the side of subjective tastes and it is not possible to refer to anything objective that allows us to agree, then is any opinion equally valuable, even that of someone who makes derogatory judgments about others? Once again, does value lie in the liking or disliking that something produces in the subject? What if the effects of liking and disliking vary from person to person? Then, if we find someone detestable and consequently make disparaging remarks about them, can this not be denounced as something objectively wrong?

Recognizing the objectivity of values puts us on guard against subjectivism and relativism. It gives way to what should rightly be called «intrinsic values,» i.e., values that are valid regardless of whether individuals develop sufficient sensitivity to recognize them. Based on this well-established philosophical tradition, we can maintain that values are truly valid and are not purely subjective inventions. It is not an arbitrary invention, but a discovery, and in this sense it is worth remembering Antonio Machado's (1964) words: «every fool confuses value and price» (p. 264).<sup>6</sup> For although we do assign a price to things, their value is intrinsic to them.

But unlike a Platonic approach, which would argue that values are absolute and have reality in themselves, the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach we defend is that values are dynamic and not static. In other words, they contain a potential that only human creativity can discover. It is by virtue of this human creativity that an incredible number of possibilities and new worlds are designed, bringing to light values that are valuable in themselves but have remained hidden for generations. It should be added that once these values are discovered, we find them indispensable because they enable us to inhabit a better, more humane world. Thus, the historical construction of values should not be confused with the relativism that prevails in modernity. Because value, although not a physical quality, is nonetheless real, i.e., it becomes reality (Gracia Guillén, 2011).

In the case of hate speech, the value of respect for the physical and moral integrity of individuals is not a social invention that could be as valid as discrimination or social denigration through defamatory messages. If this were the case, then the value would be deprived of its validity and everything would be worth the same, which is the same as saying that nothing would be worth anything in and of itself. On the contrary, if the former (respect for human dignity) is a value and its opposite (lack of respect for human dignity) is a disvalue, then we must conclude that values are not only relative or merely subjective, but that they are values because they contain a validity that transcends relativism.

The ethical problem that frequently arises is at the level of application when situations arise in which two or more values conflict with each other and it is necessary to analyze and make a decision to resolve practical issues. Thus, in order to legitimize the possibility that people can express their opinions even when they may be offensive or derogatory to some groups, the American tradition appeals to the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The preference for freedom of expression over respect for different identities is evident in a whole philosophical tradition that has advocated for the lesser evil of offending others if this preserves the principle of freedom of expression (Toscano, 2022). This differs from the European tradition, which includes the Spanish Constitution, which limits freedom of expression and restricts it when other values such as the right to honor are at stake (Valiente Martínez, 2020, 2022).

By giving freedom of expression primacy over other values, it opens up the possibility of undermining respect for different identities by violating people's right to honor or self-esteem. This leads to situations that ultimately undermine social coexistence and fuel prejudice and stigmatization of certain groups. This granting of absolute value to freedom of expression has been characteristic of a certain liberal or libertarian tradition (as some prefer to call it).

*Recognition of the absolute value of every person based on the pedagogical and humanistic sense of culture*

As seen, axiological relativism is modulated as a modern derivation of the subjectivist conception of value. If cultures are taken in the ethnographic sense and also considered as an absolute value, then the problem encountered is that of the instrumentalization of the person for the purposes of that culture (understood in the nineteenth-century terms of ethnicity), reducing culture to ideology (in the Marxist sense of a false consciousness of reality). Again, it is one thing to maintain that culture as the repository of human values constitutes an intrinsic good, but this should not be confused with culture (nor education, which is but one aspect of culture) constituting an absolute value.

Therefore, as I have pointed out in various places, we must recover the genitive of the pedagogical and original meaning of culture, emphasizing the *cultura animi*, which is how José Ortega y Gasset prefers to use it in various places, albeit with clear vitalist overtones. In other words, culture as the repository of values should not be absolutized to the point of becoming disconnected from the «cultivation and formation» of the



human being. The pedagogical question is again key here in order not to confuse the terms. Indeed, the approach that best illuminates this pedagogical and humanistic reality of culture is the hermeneutic one, and this can be seen in authors such as Ortega y Gasset, Gadamer, and Taylor.

The value of culture is not absolute but relative to the person. So, is there anything or anyone that can be taken as not only an intrinsic but even an absolute value? Is the human being an absolute value in such a way that nothing can override their own worth? Indeed, this idea of the human being as an absolute and not relative value is what is captured in the term «human dignity,» at least since Kant (1992), which is nothing more than the recognition of the unconditional worth of the human being. It is this absolute value of human beings that establishes an unequivocal limit so that human beings cannot be exploited. Recognizing the dignity of a person means recognizing that human person as «an end in themselves and never at the same time merely as a means,» as expressed in the well-known second formulation of the categorical or unconditional imperative (p. 65).

The discovery of human dignity is hugely relevant to the eradication of hate speech, which is the subject of this article. Recognizing and respecting the dignity of every human being, regardless of whether they belong to one group or another, is the best antidote to hate speech.

Recognizing the absolute value of human beings is a necessary complement to the ethics of values. From the perspective of the ethics of values, human beings have been characterized not only as repositories of values but also as projectors and creators of values. This capacity to discover new values, and even more so to be both the agent and the repository of those values, which transform the natural environment into a more humane world, is what gives human beings a special status compared to other beings. As indicated above, it is not a question of advocating pure reason as the foundation of this dignity, but rather of recognizing that sentient and courageous intelligence is the driving force behind all humanization of individuals and societies. In contrast to a «duty» disconnected from life projects, the ethics of values points to a duty as the realization and embodiment of these life projects imbued with values.

*The importance of reflection, internalization,  
and ethical realization of values*

From the point of view of philosophical reflection, values are often separated in order to analyze them. However, the world of values is not



alien to the subject's life experience. On the contrary, it is nourished by experience itself and comes to life in the actions that agents carry out. Let us remember what has been said above about values not being something added to reality from outside, but rather a constitutive part of human experience, and it is important to emphasize that the reality of values depends on this realization. That is why when we say «add value» in terms of the constructivist approach, what we are saying is that human life consists of «realizing values»; only in this way can we speak of «moral good.» The realization of moral value is not humanly optional, but rather a human duty, even more so, the duty to become human.

Moral values are not just other values, but rather, insofar as they are the values that connect with people's character, they have a more fundamental status. Ethical value lies in the internalization or embodiment of other values, thus carrying within itself the inextricable link between theory and practice, discourse and action. Needless to say, discourse is already a form of action (communicative act) and there is no better sermon than example. This does not minimize the importance of the reflective dimension or nullify the objective content of values. What it points to is that ethical value resists empty theorizing and warns against the hypocrisy of preaching without corresponding example. In other words, moral goodness directly connects discourse about good with practice.

Scheler (2001) astutely focused on this point, characterizing moral value as a value «behind the intention» (Maliandi, 2002). The key is not in wanting to appear good to oneself and others, as the Pharisee in the parable does.<sup>9</sup> Moral goodness is the very realization of all other extramoral values. To put it another way, moral values are not «preferable,» and therefore it is not morally permissible to «try» them. Phariseism consists of thinking that moral value consists in the realization of certain values (the so-called moral ones) independently of the realization of other extramoral values, which translates into separating ethics from the realization of other non-moral values. Would it be possible to realize moral values while disregarding other non-moral values (vital, aesthetic, legal, social)? The danger that Scheler himself already foresaw is that attempting to remove «good» and «bad» from the world of values, i.e., as a kind of segregation of these values from the rest, leads to a kind of pharisaism, which is very harmful to society. In Scheler's opinion (2001):

Any attempt to establish a common standard, outside the sphere of values, to define «the good and the bad,» for example, leads not only to an error of knowledge in the theoretical sense, but also to a very serious moral deception. [...] whenever, therefore, there has been talk of «the

good and the just» or «the bad and the unjust» as if they constituted an objectively definable and determinable class, it has necessarily fallen into a kind of «pharisaism,» which confuses the possible *depositories* of «good» and the characteristics common to *them* (as mere depositories) with the values themselves and with the essence of the values of which they are merely depositories (p. 59).

In light of this eloquent quote, it can be said that it is not fair those who try to be fair and say so in their hearts, but those who strive to do the right thing and put their zeal into achieving it, without creating the dichotomy of the righteous and the unrighteous. This dichotomy leads to social segregation that ultimately eliminates values, considering goodness or evil to be an attribute of a certain type of person and not of every human being as a possible repository of values.

This has important applications for this topic because, as we seen at the beginning of this article, one of the main characteristics of hate speech is that it nullifies the personal identity of victims by considering them part of a certain group. This group is given a trait that leads the aggressor to feel contempt for it. All this even though it can never be proven that this group committed the harmful act attributed to it. Those who engage in hate speech participate in the hypocrisy denounced by Scheler by dividing reality into good and bad, eliminating the intrinsic connection between moral goodness and the realization of other values.

In the face of such hypocrisy, education in ethical values must be understood rather as an ethical education in values, where people, every human being, are the repositories and realizers of values, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or sexual orientation.

## Ethical education in values as the key to moral reconnection and confronting hate speech

Above, we referred to Albert Bandura's (1999 and 2016) theory of «moral disengagement» as an explanation of the psychological process by which individuals justify cyberhate and hate speech, and how a person can go from victim to perpetrator. Moral disengagement explains the mechanisms that people develop to engage in immoral behavior without experiencing guilt or remorse. These mechanisms, such as moral justification, diffusion of responsibility, or dehumanization, operate to deactivate moral self-regulation mechanisms, allowing people to perform actions that they would normally (if they were morally connected) consider unacceptable.

In contrast, ethical education in values focuses on shaping people's character. It is the person —as the builder of values—who is conceived as the subject of values and therefore responsible and empowered in the process of transforming reality to make it more valuable. It is not a question of projecting blame onto others or declining one's own responsibility or capacity by settling for the status quo, but rather of assuming the capacity to realize values, which is nothing more than bringing them to fruition (raising them up and making them a reality). Because discourse is empty when it seeks to confine itself to the realm of theory. But if, instead of hate speech, we nurture reflection, analysis, discernment, internalization, and finally the realization of values, then not only is the hypocrisy denounced by Scheler overcome, but human beings are recognized in their capacity to regulate their emotions and take charge of their intellectual and emotional capacity to humanize their life circumstances.

This proposal for ethical education in values bridges the gap between words and deeds, but not in the sense of inciting violence, as in the case of hate speech, but rather by recognizing the intrinsic value of every human being, considering them as an end in themselves and never at the same time as a mere means to an end (Gracia Calandín, 2020).

Ethical education in values is very closely connected to education in affections because values are not entities, nor ideas of the *cogito*, nor of pure reason. Values are embedded in the capacity to estimate, therefore, they are the correlate of the faculty of estimating and preferring. In this regard, properly educated sentient intelligence must lead to the regulation of emotions (Nussbaum, 2019). Indeed, it is a matter of the person «regulating their feelings constructively, through reasoned and ethical reflection, seeking creative alternatives for the transformation of hate speech» (París 2020, p. 153).

In the case of hate speech, it is not moralization that is pursued in education, as if it were indoctrination into a code of conduct. Education must seek reflection, analysis, and the consequent realization of values. When it comes to situations where there is a conflict of values, such as in hate speech between freedom of expression and respect for honor, ethical character education must delve philosophically into critical and self-critical thinking, questioning stereotypes and stigmatization. It is necessary to situate oneself and understand the context to exercise good discernment in order to determine where the real value lies, i.e., how to make these values a reality through the actions of individuals.



## Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to analyze the extent to which a value-centered philosophy of education can contribute to the elimination of such hate speech. Hate feeds on fear, ignorance, and mistrust, so overcoming it requires creating spaces where people can listen to each other, recognize each other, and question their own certainties. Therefore, in the face of the silent fear and moral disconnection that hate speech exploits, the ethical commitment to value implies, first and foremost, the courage to value values, based on the human potential to build and shape a world of values. Thus, in the face of moral disconnection, which is not only incapable of confronting hate speech but even fuels the spiral of hatred by turning victims into perpetrators, ethical education in values constitutes a plea to empower individuals as agents and implementers of values. Fear gives way to courage, and hatred gives way to the ethical construction of a personal and social world of values.

This article has achieved its objective of analyzing the extent to which a values-centered philosophy of education can contribute to the elimination of hate speech. The ethical cultivation of values is based on a philosophy of value education in which the most fundamental element is no longer being, good, or even duty, but rather values, insofar as they are objective qualities constructed by human beings, but which are not adrift in modern subjectivism and relativism. In this main task, we have avoided both the pitfalls of absolutism of values and cultural relativism. Between the two, a third way has been defended, which is the recognition of humanly created but intrinsic value, i.e., values that are valuable in and of themselves. In this way, the link between value and validity has been restored, overcoming one of the main limitations of axiological relativism.



## Notes

- 1 «Hate speech» is usually the translation of the English expression *hate speech*, but elsewhere we have already highlighted the limitations of this translation, because both the term «speech» and «hate» do not adequately reflect the reality to which this term refers (Gracia Calandín & Suárez Montoya, 2023).
- 2 José Ortega y Gasset (2007) states: «In contrast to Kant, we will argue that if there is a 'practical reason', it will not be an intellectual reason but a [...] *raison du coeur*, as Pascal vaguely supposed. Scheler already alludes to this in his *Formalismus der Ethik*. And, in fact, what I understand by *Estimativa* would be a system of cordial 'reason'» (p. 709). Later, in another note, Ortega accuses Kant of the mistake of not having been able to distinguish between «values» and «things that are valuable,» reducing happiness to an ideal of the imagination of a purely empirical nature,

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which is nothing more than a drift toward modern subjectivism, which also affects the concept of value.

- 3 It is very significant that this text belongs to Ortega y Gasset's essay on Velázquez, which dates from 1947. This shows that the importance of values in Ortega y Gasset's work is not limited to 1927—as some interpreters of his work, such as Lasaga Medina (2006), have argued—but rather, as more recent research by Noé Expósito Ropero (2020, 2021) has defended.
- 4 The author considers this to be a possible derivation from Nietzsche's *umwertung der werte* (we do not discuss here whether this interpretation of Nietzsche's thesis is adequate or not). There is no doubt that human meaning is constitutive of reality, but the thesis of the inversion or transvaluation of values leaves us on the brink of relativism. Perhaps the only possible foothold as a fundamental criterion would be *life*, but not understood in the Darwinian sense, rather life as *wille zur macht*. Whether there are sufficient guarantees to prevent this from leading to «abuse of power»—according to the law of the strongest—is another matter that would deserve careful analysis; an issue that, as can be assumed, has clear implications for the topic of hate speech that concerns us here.
- 5 This is Ortega y Gasset's (2005) well-known criticism of Meinong and Ehrenfels' subjectivism. Meinong would have argued that values are pleasant things and Ehrenfels that values are desirable things. Both approaches are criticized for being burdened with modern subjectivism since «values are something objective and not subjective.»
- 6 It is worth remembering that this famous proverb by the poet Antonio Machado was originally published in 1917, in the revised edition of *Campos de Castilla*. In it, the poet includes a series of «Proverbs and Songs» dedicated to Ortega y Gasset, among which the above quote stands out. These poems reflect the intellectual dialogue between the two (poetry and philosophy) on topics such as truth, value, time, and authenticity.
- 7 As is well known, the neologism is due to Cicero, who, in search of a definition of philosophy, came up with this expression of *cultura animi*. The metaphor of the human mind as a field to be «cultivated» has great expressive power for pedagogy and points to a kind of humanism, insofar as it places the human being at the center rather than culture. «Just as a field, however fertile it may be, cannot be fruitful without cultivation, so too the mind without education and theoretical training. But the cultivation of the mind [*cultura animi*] is philosophy: it extracts vices at their root and prepares the mind to receive the seeds, entrusting it, so to speak, with the sowing of those things which, once developed, will produce abundant fruit» (*Tusculan Disputations*, II, 13). I have dwelled on this passage before (Gracia Calandín, 2020, 75 ff.).
- 8 «Moral evil» is distinct from physical evil. Good and evil in the moral sense are always related to human projects, and more specifically to the moment of realization or implementation of those projects. Ethics has to do with the decisions we make, and therefore with what we do and do not do. Our obligation is always the same: to 'add value' to things; therefore, to 'realize' values. When this does not happen, when we are able to do so but do not, the concept of 'moral evil' arises. Moral good, on the other hand, is the intelligent, emotionally projected, and voluntarily desired increase in the value of things» (Gracia Guillén, 2011).
- 9 Recall the famous parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in chapter 18 of the Gospel of Luke, from which Scheler also takes it.



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