

# Welcome by the president of Societas Ethica

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Welcome to Bad Boll, welcome to the conference that is hosted as a cooperation between the Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll and Societas Ethica! My name is Hille Haker, and I serve as the President of Societas Ethica. Herr Wolfgang Mayer-Ernst is our partner from Bad Boll, and I want to thank him and his secretary Conny Matscheko, and the director of Bad Boll and Societas Ethica member Juergen Huebner for partnering with us.

When the General Assembly decided to have a conference on the theme of Ethics and Law a couple of years ago, we could not know how actual and urgent it would become to discuss, once again, the perennial question that binds ethics and law together. What we see today, some argue, is a shift in the international order, caused by several factors: we are confronted with the normative order of global capitalism and a globalized financial market system that has set up its own legal – one might even say: para-legal – norms, due to the naiveté or intentional political non-regulation. Furthermore, it is caused by the proclamation of the war against terror – and who would deny the terrorist acts, committed predominantly in the name of religion, and the terror that paralyzes neighborhoods, cities, and whole countries – resulting in political responses that risk to threaten not only civic rights on a national level but also legitimize so-called exceptional measures of security and surveillance within the public sphere, arrests and targeted killings, and questionable procedures of criminal justice. And the return of authoritative regimes and/or leaders who mock human rights and do not shy away from regional wars, the era of peace has come to an end. The millions of refugees and displaced persons, denied any right in their own states and objects of generosity – or disrespect – rather than subjects of international justice, are caught in the middle of this complex web of international relations. To ask at this moment what the relationship of ethics and law can mean, must not turn into an academic affair that is not affected by the overall situation in which it is raised.

My description so far has been, to say the least, incomplete. It conceals the fact that the post-second world war order was never peaceful; it has almost no place for the historical effects of colonialization, the tolerance of authoritarian states as long as it seemed advantageous, and the multiple internal problems of nation states and/or federations. As Societas Ethica is situated in Europe, we are well aware of the lack of legitimization and democracy in the European Union. Its inability over the last years to live up to its own ethical standards have resulted in the rhetorical utilization of the moral language, as a sophistic play of words – ethics, it often seems, is either the most-ridiculed word or completely ‘other’ to the political system within the European Union that is mostly driven by economic and national interests. No Charter of Human Rights and European Values, no Treaty, and certainly not the tragedies of drowning refugees has

prevented national and nationalistic movements to reemerge. This is one of the contexts, I believe, that we will need to discuss.

We have asked our keynote speakers to offer us several different perspectives to our theme, however. We will start with the complexity of transitional justice; the problem of the political theory of recognition, human rights, and rights of children. We have received multiple responses to our call for papers, and we are happy to offer so many spots in the parallel sections.

For me personally, it is almost a happy irony that we will make the excursion this year to Tübingen. It is a happy coincidence that there is my Alma Mater, the University of Tübingen, often called the university of Schelling, Hölderlin – and Hegel. It is a happy irony for Societas Ethica to go there – and go there in 2016 – because they started off as theologians; 2 became philosophers, the third, no less a philosopher, a writer and poet. They changed the way we think the enlightened modernity profoundly but I sometimes think we are today, with the so-called return of religion in the public sphere that is more precisely a return of religion in the public discourse, in a better position to read them again and learn from them the deep meaning of human freedom and human rights. While the German Idealists were pretty frustrated with the Protestant theology they were supposed to study in Tübingen, today both Protestant and Catholic theology faculties are well known for their radical re-interpretations of the tradition over the last 150 years of scholarship. As you know, one of the most important theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jürgen Moltmann, will join us on Sunday morning – and he did not hesitate for one second when I spoke to him last year, then at the age of 89. We also invited Jürgen Habermas who like almost nobody in German philosophy has promoted work on the relation of ethics and law, never shying away from what I have called the situated responses, which Habermas sometimes calls ‘interventions’. His health did not allow him to come to our conference – but he told me in his response letter that he welcomes Societas Ethica taking up the theme, and wishes us every success.

We have been able to offer junior scholars a reduced conference fee, not the least because we received funding for it by Bishop Gebhard Fürst of the Catholic Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. We are also grateful for the Protestant Church of Germany from whom we received funding for this conference.

Societas Ethica brings together philosophers and theologians who both research in ethics is apt. We will strive, as always, to overcome the alienation and non-communication that characterizes so often our two disciplines. You, the speakers, will present your work that stems from both thought traditions, examines historical arguments as well as contemporary contexts. We, the participants, will discuss and debate your theses, and together, I hope, we will learn from each other.

With this, let me start the conference with an introduction of our first speaker, Klaus Günther. Professor Günther will speak on the topic of Transitional Justice. Thank you very much for accepting our invitation, especially in the middle of August.