

## **Primary Moral Values in Social-Ethical Discourse**

In this paper I intend to present my view of moral values by distinguishing primary moral values and their implication in the analysis of social-ethical issues. The question is how to provide integral representation of ethical knowledge bridging usual methodological and cognitive gaps between different “branches” of ethics. There is a lack of inner coherence and integrity in ethics at the level of scholarship and discussions as well as education, and specifically, a lack of the ethical component in education for professions. A threat to integrity of ethics is mostly shown from the side of applied ethics which, owing to its interdisciplinary character, frequently gives rise to conceptualizations in terms of an adjacent discipline, while the ethical content is reduced to common moral intuitions without convincing relevance to philosophical reflection.

### **I**

The concept of morality is ultimately and essentially a philosophical one. “Morality” is, figuratively speaking, a secondary, derivative concept: it was developed in Modern philosophy

(from the last third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century till the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) through rethinking and generalization of basic ethical notions, such as “virtue”/“vice,” “justice,” “good”/“evil,” “benefaction”/“malefaction.” The concept of morality was gradually conceptualized in the works of English and Scottish philosophers.<sup>1</sup> “Morality” is a specific concept of European culture. No other culture has produced such lexical and semantic generalization and thus has such a concept, though the notions generalized in “morality” in this or that form are present in all cultures. Understanding of this intellectual circumstance is a key for possible reconstruction and justification of the concept “morality.” However, the scholars of morality have rarely taken it into consideration and, consequently, lacked awareness regarding the absence of direct ties between the integral idea of morality and the particular phenomena reflected in it.

The idea of “*caritas*,” substantially embodied in the Commandment of Love (Math. 22:37-39),<sup>2</sup> was one of the basic normative sources of the concept of morality. As one can witness from the history of philosophy, all attempts of positive interpretation of morality (but not of its criticism) have led to ideas relative to the idea of “*caritas*”: unity or integrity of human interests, interpersonal togetherness, unification of the individual with the world, Nature, and God. In today’s secular ethics “*caritas*” is expressed by the idea of “care.”

I consider morality as a particular kind of values and corresponding demands, aimed to harmonize various partial interests<sup>3</sup> for the sake of the good of individuals and community, as well as decisions, actions, and policies estimated according to these values and demands.<sup>4</sup> Morality requires one not to impede others’ legitimate interests, to coordinate one’s own interests with the interests of others, and to promote the latter in the most zealous way.

Actions are recognized as most valuable, if they are aimed to support and promote the others’ good. However, morality should not be reduced to the good or an inclination towards it. Recognition of the value of the good requires particular actions which, owing to their orientation to the good of individuals, community or society, are appreciated and, hence, qualified as values. For an agent’s actions aimed to the good of others to be successful, an agent should have particular qualities and capacities, which, in turn, present kinds of values as well.

Practical and cognitive experience of such actions is reflected in values represented in culture through various ideas. These values are: *non-harming*, *recognition*, *solidarity*, and *care*. Consequently, the actions confirming these values are valuable. To some extent, these values are instrumental in so far as they are not only associated with the good or directed to the good, but also determine the actions and are performed in actions aimed at promoting the good. They seem to be “abstract” and “ideal,” but they are quite practical owing to their imperative modality. They are given as demands, which correspond to the above distinguished values: *cause no harm to others*, *recognize others*, *help others* and *care for others*. In communication these demands may take a form of expectation, recommendation, insistence, order, etc., mutually expressed by agents. At communitarian and social levels they may be presented as norms (rules), in particular, arranged in codes.

So far the above values are imperative and in their performance they assume or even form an agent ready to perceive them and apply them into live moral practice. To be adequate to these values, an agent should have certain mental, communicative, and behavioral capacities. *Virtues* are the capacities owing to which an agent becomes morally responsible, i.e. open to values and responsive to their imperative power. As character features and capacities,

virtues require consolidation and improvement. The vector of individual moral development is set up by the value of *personal perfection*. The values of virtue and perfection are also expressed in the corresponding demands – *to be virtuous* and *to be perfect*.

The distinguished values shape the value framework of morality expressing its main functions: a) to promote communication (and beneficent interrelation between moral agents, including potential moral agents), b) to promote perfection (and the agent's moral ascent).<sup>5</sup>

“Communicative” values – non-harming, recognition, solidarity, care – indicate the levels of moral saturation of interpersonal relations in their imaginative approach towards the ideal. Non-causing harm is the least of what could be expected from a moral agent. However, as a demand it is absolute. Love and care manifest the highest attitude towards others and they are the most of what could be expected from a moral agent. Meanwhile, care is only recommended and as a demand it is indeed gentle. Causing harm is definitely forbidden, carefulness – is expected and recommended.

## II

The mentioned values are largely abstractions. Historically, they were formed and reflected as principles of individual behaviour and interpersonal relations and were not associated directly with actions and policies in public context. In the Encyclical letter, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out “the strong links between life ethics and social ethics.”<sup>6</sup> Taking into consideration the heterogeneity of morality and the differences between the spheres of moral experience, one may ask about the nature of these links and the measure of closeness between life ethics and social ethics. The inner integrity of morality is provided by the set of values common to its different spheres.

At the same time, one should not miss the differences between life ethics and social ethics. Firstly, at the level of society, moral values maintain their validity by dint of specific values of general good<sup>7</sup> and human rights. Secondly, the main socio-cultural function of morality – coordination of private interests – is specifically maintained by adjusting the attitudes of community members (individual and collective) towards the whole and the community's attitude towards its members (individual and collective). Thirdly, the differences between individual and public morality are much more visible in the character of the moral responsibility, the process of decision making, the ways of sanctioning proper behaviour, etc. Fourthly, the primary values are applied through different normative and behavioural practices. Fifthly, in the sphere of social ethics, unlike life ethics, moral values are actualized by virtue of social institutions rather than directly in actions of moral agents.

At the level of society the matter of moral concern are such specific issues as, for instance, capital punishment and punishment in general, as well as execution of a punishment, distribution of social goods, usage of public income, nationalization and privatization, public and state aid, political and administrative decision making, policies regarding natural resources and cultural and historical heritage, confessional and cultural pluralism, etc. All such issues in their ethical aspect require a different approach compared with issues of life ethics, like moral destination, responsibility, obligation, etc.

Say, in discussions on capital punishment some argue against it appealing to the high value of every human life and the ability of everyone, even those who committed a lapse or wrongdoing, to uplift, change and morally transform. Thus, it is implicit that, although capital punishment may be considered under certain conditions as a relative good (which is more or less clearly assumed by

capital punishment advocates), the dignity of human life *per se* and personal moral excellence are overriding. I will leave aloof anthropological and ethical aspects of this argument, but from the social-ethical point of view, there are more significant points regarding capital punishment, namely, the necessity of a special infrastructure to administer this institution: judges to pass sentences on taking a delinquent's life, executioners to enforce a writ, officers and staff to escort condemned persons during the period from the passing of a death sentence till its execution. Though this group may be not very large in quantity, all participants of this process appear to be accessorial to radical violence under the condition of no actual danger to their own lives and wealth. The existence of such a category of people is a matter of significant social and ethical concern directly related to the general good. So, it is necessary to discriminate between the goals and tasks relevant to the individual and those relevant to the society, to be aware of the peculiarity of an ethical (broader, value, deontological or praxeological) approach to these matters and, hence, not to confuse frameworks of discussion on life ethics and social ethics, to put this in *Caritas in Veritate* terms.

Further I will concentrate on four communicative moral values and try to present briefly their implication to the particular field of moral practice in which they are most relevant.

### III

*Non-harming*, or *not causing harm* opposes actions which diminish the status of an object of action (whether an agent or a community). The question is about abstaining from causing unjustified harm rather than about causing harm as such. Causing no harm means not to commit acts of violence, i.e. not to dimin-

ish illegitimately the other's moral (spiritual), social (including legal), and life status and not to threaten doing this. Illegitimacy should be understood in the direct sense of the word – inconsistency with legal order. "Legitimacy" is the point of view of law. Today, the basis of law in the form of fundamental human rights and freedoms is provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted by the UN in 1948) and other international human rights normative documents. "Diminishing the status" means by depriving of life and property, causing harm to health and life conditions, disturbance or disorder to personal identity. It is clear that by depriving a wrongdoer of rights, property, freedom, and life a court definitely causes harm to the wrongdoer, but as legitimate action this should not be interpreted as violence. Nonviolence is opposite to violence in the sense that it confirms the *status-quo*. In nonviolent attitude to the other, an agent does not cause harm and violate the other's rights. However, nonviolence is not carefulness, beneficence, charity nor respect. It is just non-harming. If it is appropriate to speak of an inherent value of the person as the object of relation, then only in the terms of autonomy and sovereignty.

Nonviolence is a paramount moral principle, a starting point of morality, a moral attitude to the other. It is more insistent than beneficence, charity and care: to be moral one should first of all be nonviolent and only then beneficent, charitable and careful. Such order in moral duties guarantees that the other's rights and dignity will not be violated in actions motivated by beneficence and care. The precedence of the principle of nonviolence to the principles of beneficence and care signifies the priority in moral tasks: resistance to evil is more urgent than promotion of the good.

In causing no harm and nonviolence one recognizes the other's sovereignty. In recognizing the other in his/her own stand,

i.e. besides possible relations of reciprocal advantage, domination/subordination, competition, or struggle, one shows respect to the other's rights, dignity, self-esteem, capacity for decision making and acting. Recognition does not presuppose necessarily positive attitude towards the other in the sense of meeting the other's expectations or contributing to the other's good. For instance, the one who committed a crime proven by court should be recognized as guilty and, according to the law, be sentenced to punishment. As a criminal he/she cannot be an object of care peculiar to friendship or beneficence relations. But a prisoner or a punished one should not be deprived of rights above the measure of the punishment he/she is sentenced to.

The issue of recognition deals in all cases with treatment of the other according to dignity and merit. Justice is a special case of recognition: it proves some of the human rights and translates them into practical relations of (re)distribution of material, social, and spiritual goods.

Recognition is a particular issue for public relations, specifically between the society and the state. The relations between these super-agents are unbalanced. Society and some of its representatives can disregard the state, though consistent non-recognition in practice is possible only in the form of total escapism and non-participation. Otherwise non-recognition takes only symbolic forms. Citizens pay taxes, address the state offices, their life in many aspects is mediated by the state activity. The state is different in its attitude to citizens and society. It can execute its functions regarding the population and at the same time ignore and disdain its commitments regarding citizens, their associations, their declared expectations and demands. Non-recognition of such sort may provoke political tension and discontent from a part of the society and ultimately an outcry of indignation, easily transformed

into clashes of protesting citizens with the state, at least as represented by police forces.

Meanwhile, recognition is a basis of social integrity and a hindrance to social fragmentation. Recognition is the first step towards solidarity and public consolidation.

*Solidarity* is expressed in one's feelings of sympathy and unity with others and in practical contribution to the others' good. Solidarity is raised on the basis of empathy, compassion, and involvement. It starts with relations of friendship or neighborhood and continues in relations within and between communities, between peoples and nations. Nations show solidarity by international aid, by sharing scientific knowledge, technologies, and know-hows, specifically related to environment, climate change, distribution of fresh water and other common resources, energy, food production, etc. Though solidarity is clear as a feeling and aspiration, it is difficult as a practical task, because it contradicts the every-day experiences of individuals as agents of partial interests; solidarity is out of tune with habits and stereotypes in market relations, particularly under conditions when transnational corporations dominate in the global economic order. A distinct practical and theoretical ethical issue in this regard is solidarity with future generations, recognition of their rights, and justice in relation to them, specifically in the face of climate change and broader environmental challenges. Pope Benedict XVI paid special concern to this issue in the Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*: "...projects for integral human development cannot ignore coming generations, but need to be *marked by solidarity and inter-generational justice*, while taking into account a variety of contexts: ecological, juridical, economic, political and cultural."<sup>8</sup>

The lack of solidarity between the state and society, between different social strata, and between different agents of economic

activity leads to serious difficulties in societies. In regard to this, Pope Benedict XVI mentioned in *Caritas in Veritate*: “In fact, if the market is governed solely by the principle of the equivalence in value of exchanged goods, it cannot produce the social cohesion that it requires in order to function well.”<sup>9</sup> Solidarity is opposed not only by indifference, but also by unequal relations fraught by their participation in alienation, resentment, social apathy or, on the contrary, social annoyance, which usually feeds social phobia, hostility, and hatred.

Beneficence and charity are a practical embodiment of solidarity. Charity provides junction of the values of solidarity and care. As a social institution charity is an instrument of redistribution of social goods put to support individuals or some social and professional groups. Charity is akin to both practical mercy, or alms-giving, and government aid, and in this way it stands out as a form of redistribution of goods.

There is certainly a difference between private charity and government aid. The latter, as John Stuart Mill showed, is ultimately oriented to the state interests and ignores individual interests. Incredible as it may seem, the significance of government aid is that it may be impersonal (what is often interpreted as heartlessness), but at the same time it is indispensable. It should be indispensable. The provision of the deprived should be guaranteed by law and independent from arbitrary selection and preferences of private charity.<sup>10</sup> There is no difference between government aid and private charity in terms of scale and character for providing assistance. The difference is rather ethical: unlike obligatory government aid (according to the law and within the available state resources), charity is voluntary. Government aid is formal in determining the recipients, while private charity may admit selection according to principles established on the basis of various criteria

and sometimes contingent. Government aid is an embodiment of social justice; charity is an embodiment of merciful love.

At the same time, charity differs from alms-giving by its institutional and project basis, the engagement of authorized agents, and public character; it is largely operated through offices and done by hired staff. All these define some formal criteria of charitable activity to make it socially responsible, efficient, responsive to the good of those in need, and relevant to the good of a society. Mill proposed strict criteria for charity efficacy, which could be interpreted as a kind of pragmatic rule of charity. The essence of this rule is in making the provided assistance relevant to the actual economic condition of the assisted. According to Mill, “if assistance is given in such a manner that the condition of the person helped is as desirable as that of the person who succeeds in doing the same thing without help, the assistance, if capable of being previously calculated on, is mischievous; but if, while available to everybody, it leaves to everyone a strong motive to do without it if he can, it is then for the most part beneficial.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, charity is publicly useful only under the condition that, while being available for anyone, it stimulates people to manage to do without it.

This criterion establishes the main normative limit to charity, which shows in the best way the peculiarities of care within public activity as compared to the sphere of interpersonal, private relations.

#### IV

Continuing what I have said about the value of non-harming and the demand to cause no harm, I wish to add a few remarks on their specification in ethical constraints to the use of force. In its



entirety, the idea of such constraints has been developed in the so called *just war theory*. Unlike the most known applied-ethical disciplines, such as biomedical ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, which have been in the focus of public and academic attention for the last few decades, the ethics of just (in the sense of justified) war is not so popular. Meanwhile, taking into consideration its advanced theoretical framework, one can mention that it is quite compatible with these applied-ethical disciplines, if not exceeding them.<sup>12</sup> The general ethical significance of just war theory is to give normative resources for ethical understanding of principles of actions and policy applying to the use of force, but even more generally, in any situation, which requires active influence on a counter-party of a conflict or alteration of *status quo*.

There are different versions of normative composition and content of the principles verifying the propriety of the use of force, but I will skip their observation and confine myself to a brief observation of the main just war principles: a) principles of justified decisions on the use of force; b) principles of justified actions using force.

The principles of the first group, which establish the criteria allowing justified decisions to apply force, are the following: 1) The use of force should have a just cause. In case of warfare, the use of force is admissible for the purpose of correction of an already committed injustice, punishment for a committed injustice or preemption of an injustice that is imminently to happen. The use of force is justified for the sake of self-defense, restoration of property to the lawful owner, assistance to a defender or the one who is asserting their rights. 2) Only public institutions have legitimate authority to use force for the sake of just cause. 3) The decision to use force should be made with the right intentions. The real intentions, according to which a legitimate authority makes a decision on using

force, should correspond to the declared just cause. Intentions are right when the use of force ceases once the goals for the sake of which it has been justly used are achieved. 4) Force should not be used if there are no reasonable chances for success in applying it or the chances are very small. The question is, what to consider a success and who passes the judgement. In general, success is defined according to a goal, the achievement of which certifies the success of the force use. 5) The cost of possible evils of resorting to force should be proportional to the injustice anticipated as a result of refraining from using it. 6) The use of force should be considered as the last resort in conflict resolution and in assurance that all other means have been exhausted.

The principles of the second group, which establish the criteria of propriety of actions based on the use of force, are the following: 1) Using force one should discriminate people involved in a conflict from strangers and try not to cause harm to the latter. 2) Only proportional use of force is admissible, so the achievement of the justified goals is not too costly in terms of human and material resources.<sup>13</sup>

Often the very attempt to discuss such sort of normative problems faces intellectual and even ethical opposition. The main objection to just war ethics is that warfare and the use of force in general cannot be just and any discourse on just war principles in fact implies the justification of war. Such objections do not take into consideration that people mostly start using force because of avarice, hatred, and anger. Opponents to just war principles negate the difference between conflict situations and the ways of conflict resolution. By absolute denial of legitimacy of using force in resistance to evil they, in fact, open the door to connivance with evil, in situations when no other means of resistance to evil is possible.

Another kind of objection points to the fact that there has been no war in history which would correspond to these principles. This issue is subject to further discussion, together with historians of war. However, what is significantly important is that the just war theory allows the public to evaluate on the basis of a set of criteria, at least *post factum*, how legitimate the use of force in a particular case was and how adequate were those who made the decision to resort to force and those who executed it.

And in conclusion, one more point from a different intellectual tradition. The Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954), famous notably for his criticism of Leo Tolstoy’s conception of nonresistance to evil by violence, proposed his own version of the ethics of force. Ilyin, as many others, understood that the use of force is a desperate measure, required in the face of aggressive evil manifested in violent actions. However, the use of force against evil is unable to defeat evil *per se* and to annihilate violence. According to Ilyin, it is impossible “...in this way [of force] to extinguish the evil in one’s soul, it is impossible to reeducate a person or to ennoble his sense and will;” external compulsion and suppression “lead to a diminution of the amount of wrongdoings rather than to augmentation of the good.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Ilyin, the use of force is justified by three goals: a) preventing a particular individual to achieve the goal of an imminent wrongdoing; b) “protecting all other people from a wrongdoing and its toxic impact,”<sup>15</sup> which is needed mainly by children and those, who are weak, defenseless, and sick, as well as all others, because of the mere fact of a threat coming from evil; c) averting from committing evil those who, owing to their spiritual weakness, are evidently tempted by evil. It is appropriate to refer in this relation to Ilyin’s argument concerning judicial punishment. Explaining the necessity of this institution Ilyin asserted: “A legal

threat of rebuff or some heavy consequences certainly do not unify people... The maintenance of external social-legal order as such does not promote flourishing Christian love in human souls, but it establishes in human relations that external rhythm of peacefulness, toleration, and civility, which inevitably, though invisibly, penetrates into human souls...”<sup>16</sup>

These tasks are evidently negative, but they are necessary prepare the ground for positive tasks that will provide unification among people.

Ilyin’s reasoning is ardent and hence lacks delicacy and sophistication in the analysis of preemptive, suppressive, and punitive use of force. However, his justification of the use of force is of particular philosophical interest for he, unlike Hugo Grotius and some other Early Modern European thinkers, entirely relied on Christian tradition and thus felt no need for the natural law concept. In this respect, Ilyin’s approach is philosophically more integral, though his normative arguments were comparatively left less elaborated than the just war theory.

One more aspect of Ilyin’s conception is worth particular attention. Any use of force, even ethically appropriate, is evil. The use of force, especially force causing radical and irreparable harm, cripples a force-user morally and psychologically. Ilyin insisted on special additional exercises prayer practice for a force-user to rid him/her of impurity of resorting to force against humans and to break the damage of experienced evil in committing violence. This lesson from Ivan Ilyin is prominent for all cases of use of force.

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By the above discussion I have tried to show that (a) the analysis of social practice in terms of primary moral values is possible and efficient; (b) such an approach provides coherence in ethical



considerations irrespectively to its particular focus, whether morality is observed and analyzed in philosophical, normative or applied contexts, at either public or individual levels.

I am aware of the fragmentary character of the above discussion. Partly it is a result of incompleteness of the theoretical efforts to constitute the research field marked as social ethics. The advancement in social-ethical analysis on the basis of philosophical ethics will provide sufficient prerequisites for ethically relevant and socially responsible policies as well as refinement of the philosophical concept of morality with its content drawing it nearer to live moral practice.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> It is worth noticing that during the last third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the rule known from Mathew 7:12 assumed in the writings of English theologians the name of the Golden Rule and was conceptualized as such, i.e. as the supreme rule and the main prerequisite of virtue.
- <sup>2</sup> I discussed it in my paper: R.G. Apresyan. "Ot 'druzhby' i 'lubvi' – k 'moral': ob odnom syuzhete v istorii idey," in *Eticheskaya mysl*, ed. A.A. Guseynov (Moscow: IFRAN, 2000), pp. 182-194.
- <sup>3</sup> By "interest" I understand an agent's inclination, disposition, or desire towards something considered as the good.
- <sup>4</sup> This means that even the actions which are not morally motivated can be evaluated from the point of view of moral values.
- <sup>5</sup> In an extended version I presented this idea of morality in: R.G. Apresyan. "Smysl morali," in *Moral. Raznoobrazie ponyatiy i smyslov*, ed. O.P. Zubets (Moscow: Alfa-M, 2014), pp. 35-63.
- <sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [15].
- <sup>7</sup> The notion of general good includes either the idea of common good, public good, or the members of society, cooperated and particular, communities and

organized individuals. In regard to community/society, the good consists in the maintenance of community/society and its members.

- <sup>8</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [48].
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, [35].
- <sup>10</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy Abridged* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004), Book V, Ch. XI, sect. 13, pp. 296-299.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- <sup>12</sup> See: Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
- <sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion of just war principles and their implementation in particular cases see: *Moral Constraints on War: Principles and Cases*, ed. Bruno Coppieters and Nick Fotion, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).
- <sup>14</sup> I.A. Ilyin, "O soprotivlenii zlu siloyu," in Idem, *Put' k ochevidnosti* (Moscow: Respublika, 1993), p. 98.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*