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The Issue of Values, Ethics and Politics*

Abstract

Existence of values is one of the key issues of mankind.

From a historic perspective, there are two viable approaches: one holds that values are absolute, objective and universal, the other claims that values are subjective, variable and dependent on social and historical development.

The values do not exist – they rule, and the dominant spiritual orientation of a culture and its overall social progress depends on the system of values and criteria reflected in science, religion, art, law and politics, ethics and custom.

Every man deserves his destiny by the nature of his ethos, said Heraclitus. Consequently, it's the character which essentially defines man's personality but also the value of his life. In the tradition of the Greek philosophy the very ethos is set upon the rational foundations. The Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were searching for the rational basis of the moral behavior. That rational principle of human behavior was related to their essential rationalistic perception of the human nature by placing the mind as our highest ability. The mind was the instrument for acquiring knowledge through the notions but at the same time the cause of our moral activity. The moral notions are appraised by the running of our mind – the logos, and their origin cannot be out of its procedures. The good and the evil are perceived in our consciousness primarily through the rational verification of their validity and

* The paper is printed as submitted.

not gained through experience, and it is only based on such insights of our mind that we decide to follow the proper behavior which acquires the power of the principle.

The two dominant notions: the virtue and the happiness (*arete/eudaimonia*) will mark the Greek philosophical thought and the discussions on ethical questions. In Socrates' ethical rationalism the virtue was identified with the knowledge. For Plato, the rational perception of the idea of good is the highest virtue. For Aristotle, the virtue was the midpoint between the two extremes. The Stoics considered the life in harmony with the nature (the *logos*) for the highest form of the moral virtue. The basic list of virtues by Socrates and Plato includes: the fairness, the wisdom, the courage, the temperance and the religious belief as the fifth value.

However, the purpose of the virtue (*arete*) was perceived in achieving happiness (*eudaimonia*). The Greek philosophers mainly agree that the life devoted to the virtue, or moral life is at the same time a good life. Socrates cautions that if a man thinks correctly he will understand that the morally good life is the best choice which contributes to the achievement of happiness. If a person acts incorrectly it is because he has not reflected upon it deep enough. The pleasure and the joy that the Epicureans praised as the purpose of life, for Socrates are not sufficient to assure happiness, which for Greeks in the broadest sense have meant the life lived in the moral rightness.

In the ancient Helladic the faith in reason was much emphasized, and as the source of the ethical finding in the rational introspection was placed at the very consciousness. Our capability of bringing forward the right decisions rests on our own appraisals. Aristotle has also found, respecting the experience of life, that the subjective ethical estimation is the source of the moral acting. In that process, we are reasoning morally when we set up the balance between the extreme positions.

In such way, the insufficient clarity in the ideas on moral is seen as crucial for drawing up the wrong conclusions and leads to un-truth, i. e. immoral. Nevertheless, the dominant stand of the Greek philosophers is that of the objectivity of the moral norm. Irrespectively of that it is acknowledged by reason, its' validity and the source are not subjective but objective. The moral norm is the universal category and, therefore, general and common, that leaves no place to the ethical relativism. The leading principle of the Greek philosophy is the objection to the relativisations of the moral phenomena. The idea of good

is the ontological category, as found by Plato, and not the historical and, thus, they are strong opponents to the cultural determinism and to the historical relativism with respect to the moral.

In the Christian ethics the schedule of the virtues is changed in compare to the one of the antique and its' priorities. The contempt of body and the asceticism are becoming the condition of the moral elevation. The Christian anthropology takes the value of moral in its eschatological dimension of the salvation and achievement of the eternal life. The humility, purity, humbleness in front of God are the key virtues of the Christian soteriology, meaning the perfection of man according to the Christian commands. Thus, the ethical principle and love which do not harm to the near one represent the fulfillment of man's life, in which he is able to decide freely about his spiritual integrity by liberating himself from the burdening of the body and from the slaving to the sin.

The sense of the ethical thought in the medieval period is reflected in the idea of the moral purification through the conscious which differs the right from wrong. The religious believe connected with the rationalistic principle, that was the Greek ideal at the time, is the model within which one freely chooses the proper way of doing. According to Augustin, God has donned every man with conscious by which he is able to get to know the moral law.

In the understanding of the new century, the Christian cards are actually those which changed like at Niche. The humbleness and the mercy of moral are exposed to the Niche's congruent critics of the Christian moral. However, Hobs in his *Leviathan* has pointed out the selfish human interests in the natural state and the need for limiting of those drives within the social frame. Thus, the modern ethical philosophy has put the question of moral on basis different from those of the antique and medieval. In the first place, the source of moral is ever more the independent human individual, the more so because the foundation for moral is no longer looked for out of the human nature. Kant will pledge for the stand on autonomy of the moral will, which prescribes and freely follows the moral law. The moral law is the norm the fulfillment of which in every concrete case represents a duty. That excludes the outer determinism, because the moral will acts following the law that one imposes to oneself. The respect of the law is the highest form of freedom, which in its expressing is managed by its own imperatives.

After the deontological ethics of Kant, the theoreticians tackle especially the issue of the moral autonomy and the universality of moral. Various versions of the utilitarianism, the pragmatism, the relativism, the intuitionism arise as moral theories. The utilitarians, such as Mill and Bentham will bring in the front plane the wanted or disadvantaged consequences of the certain act as the criterion of moral. The consideration of the good, in accordance with the consequences which the particular doing produces, will become the dominant principle of the utilitarianism. The intuitionists, such as Rid, will claim that there are evident principles which imply the need for fairness and commitment to the truth. Moreover, Brentano, Seller and Nicholas Hartman will consider the moral value to be part of the general theory on values, to which we have a direct insight.

Especially, different kinds of the skeptical and relativistic theories of our time will seriously put in danger the sense of the universal moral. Montaigne has once expressed his doubt in view of the overall uphold of moral, which will be complemented with the idea of Niche that the moral is intentional mask behind which is hidden the struggle for power. Sartre will develop more consequently the idea that the moral lies on the unprecedented freedom and that the person is the subject who makes the decision abiding to which he wants to live. All we need to do is to reach the decision about what kind of person we want to become and convey that decision in the praxis afterwards. However, the danger of relativism in the area of moral was deeply destabilizing the balance of the values, thus reducing them to the level of the subjective considerations. The man as the measure of all things has become responsible for the project of life but also for the structure of values. Due to the created conditions where every man became capable of articulating values, those same values have become problematic. The phenomenologists, Husserl and Hartman have claimed at their time that the meaning of the world is created by the intentional acts of the subjective consciousness. For Sartre, in the imaginative conscious, therefore in the subject, the sense of objective reality is been conceived. Thus, the moral values are made subjective, which led to only a step from the relativism. The skepticism in question of moral has been reflected through the disorientation and the feeling of looseness of the modern man, which have expressed both the artists and the philosophers. The man has become a stranger to his own self, thrown to the existence which he does not understand. Like on the paintings of Kazimir Malevich, where the white has become the mark for emptiness, or like at Beckett's or Ionesco's drama, in which life is depicted as the farce of life. Being lost in some kind of neo-nihilism, a

man negates, or more correctly, doubts everything, indifferently believing in all but in essence in nothing. As the modern unbeliever, man is being alienated from his own self and from the others, and the loneliness, nothingness and death are becoming the obsessive theme of our time. Furthermore, owing to the substitution of thesis on enhancing of the material fortune, as well as of promotion of cheap hedonism and sensual pleasure instead of acquirement of the spiritual virtues and values, the situation has become almost hopeless.

Deontological dictate

Along with the existence of the whole variety of the relativistic ethical theories, in the Western moral philosophy there is the tradition, initiated by the Kant's ethics of duty which includes believing in the existence of the absolute judgments in moral. The moral norm and the behavior based on it has the absolute and, therefore, obligatory character in all situations. The deontological dictate (from the word *deon* – duty) is opposite to every kind of consequential perception of the consequences of the moral act. The moral behavior includes the existence of certain rules which define our behavior. The norm itself must be objectively valid and cannot depend on the historical or cultural changes. Such a rule is obligatory for all people, as a norm which breaking is not allowed. The right action comes out from the conscious intention to respect the deontological dictate and to execute it as the moral task. Thus, for example, the deontological dictate not to lay points out that the lay is bad by itself, even when it could produce favorable consequences. According to the deontological understanding, we are not as much responsible for foreseeing the consequences of our actions, as we are for the benevolence of the intention to make the morally right act. Opposite to the deontological ethics which considers the question of rightness of a certain action from the point of view of the norm, for the consequentialists the measure of the right action is its optimal consequences. Thus, the avoiding of breaking the deontological dictate in the essence encompasses stressing out the moral rules as the source of the right and avoiding the wrong attempts.

By speaking about the value of the human rights and their respect, we actually express a deontological dictate. The human rights as the deontological dictate represent the objective norm, which breaking cannot be justified in any case. No explanation of the totalitarianism concerning justification of the force in service of the „democracy” cannot provide the legitimacy for law offence. Further less, the rights can be suspended for the sake of some so-called higher causes,

as some utopists project in the future. The sacrificing of millions of people in the brutal practices of the ideologically despotic states of the beginning of the XX century has had devastating consequences. Whether the repression has been executed in the name of the nationalistic or extreme left oriented ideas, as it was the case in the East European countries after the II World War – the outcome stays always the same and is equally morally unjustifiable.

The justifying of the violence is possible, seeing that their promoters always have the historical, the national, the social, the class, the economic, the ethical or some other reasons, but it is essentially unjustifiable, i. e. illegitimate. The legitimacy for the violence does not exist, because the violence by itself suspend every form both the legality and the legitimacy. Only by destroying of the political violence in its rout, as unpermitted in any case, one can influence on the change of the awareness and the replacing of the policy of the force by the policy of the cooperation.

Because the point that we are speaking about here is the deontological understanding of the human rights, as the ontological norm which got the legal form, cannot exist a single argument for their breaking. The political systems that do not respect the rights in praxis are breaking the deep meaning of the human civilization and its values. Therefore, it is not only the legal offense, but also the moral quilt, which makes the whole societal pattern and the mechanisms of management in such the regimes deeply immoral.

The ethics and the politics get in no such relation as on the field of the human rights. The state that is built on the legitimacy of the law and the right is the democratic one. In the same time, it is about fulfilling the moral duties which as the deontological dictate emerge from the idea of the human rights. Nevertheless, the respecting of the human rights as the unquestionable moral dictate would not have the real significance for a man unless it becomes part of the societal organization. The right answer to the nature of the human rights lies in their respect as the universal principles in the deontological sense, but also in their improvement through praxis in the spirit of the consequentialism. The existing of the rights as a value is the moral norm and its exercise and the constant improvement is a legal obligation, which is based on the ethical postulates.

The opposition between the moral relativism and the universalism was present all along by the time of the old Greece. The sophists held that the fair and unfair the same as the beautiful and ugly depend of the society and the customs

which define them and are changing under the influence of the historical circumstances. The relativists found that there is no a universally valid moral. In the contemporary ethics, the meta-ethical relativism and the normative relativism are the standings according to which the moral judgments are not the factual ones, but are dependent of subjective reactions to certain facts and happenings. In the radical versions, the normative relativism grows into nihilism and annulation of every possibility that the objectively grounded ethical principles can exist as such.

The arguments such as that there are differences in the moral findings still do not deny the core of the universal moral code, as the system of values which every reasonable person would accept as justified, moral and true. Certain differences in the cultures with respect to the ethical issues do not put in danger the ontological meaning of the moral norms, but are only pointing out that the different people can have different criteria for evaluating their value. It is assumed, though, that the very principles are general and do not depend of the historical or societal developings.

In such a context, the legitimacy of the human rights as the fact of human life and their universal logic may only be laid upon unchangeable principles, independent from the human desires or interests. To have the right on human rights is the moral imperative, unarguable as is the deontological forbid: „not to kill”! This is more so as by the rights the moral human nature is been confirmed, with its basic right to life in dignity as only decent for a man, and it includes the moral side of the human personality, which makes it both legally and politically untouchable. The dignity demands the respect, which acknowledges our uniqueness in the nature. It belongs to all the people and it represents the basis for a good life, the life sized to a man. From this, it is possible to draw up the conclusion about the system of rights that we are entitled to as the decent and moral individuals, or, about those rights the man is entitled to as the citizen of a certain society, or member of a collectivity. In fact, it is about the rights that the man possesses by himself, more precisely by his human dignity. Thus, the idea of equality is possible the equality being taken among those who are equal by dignity and by rights.

By accepting the attitude that all the people are equal by the dignity and the rights, the basis is been created for the functioning of the human community according to the orders of fairness. The initial step in its creation is the new political culture grounded on the paradigm of respect for the law. That new

awareness, related to the believe about the necessity for the legal and political protection of a man as a citizen, introduces to the scene the need for deeper changes and the new consciousness in regard to the values of the human rights. Thus, the culture of human rights is the mark of the democratic orientation of the society, of its internal transformation. The culture is the state of the spirit of the époque, the way it is perceived by itself – the order which in the deeper levels defines the political life. In the same time, it is the individual consciousness through which every man recognizes that the life in dignity is the highest reach out point in the evolution of the human society, from the rise of civilization until today.

The question of values and the idea of the community

At this point, we can already establish a clear relation between the values, such as the equality, the dignity, the freedom, and the founding of the societal community. Obviously, the values are indispensable for the institutionalization of the societal life, as they become the universally accepted norm. The equality as a value is taken for the ideal value pattern, with respect to which the processes in the society are being managed. In a certain way, the human rights also represent one value concept which precedes in time vertical to the law and the state. But, as the ideal of value the human rights can be achieved only in the political communities or the society, creating within them their democratic potential. This proves that the rights can be respected and protected only in the frame of the system solutions within the legal order of the state.

However, out of where comes the man's ability to set the values and to apply them in the reality? Since philosophy is conceived as the love for wisdom, the philosophers were interested in the question of values and their relation to the reality. The discipline of philosophy, the axiology (axis-values) and logos (science) deals with investigating the area of values. The man is the being that evaluates. We express the estimation of our experiences by notions of the truth and the lay, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. The evaluation of the experience guided by the notion of the truth is a part of logics, the notion of the good is the key issue of ethics while the notion of the beauty is tackled within aesthetics. Therefore, we will measure our experiences by aesthetic criteria at the level of sensual, by the ethical criteria at the level of acting and by the logical criteria at the level of the acquiring knowledge. The notions, as the measure by which the experience is estimated, must contain the necessary generalization and the universality. In some kind of the inner filtration

our consciousness reacts to the external or internal experiences, thus, giving to this evaluation the form of the notion.

Still, do the notions of value belong to the things themselves, or are they just labeling them? This dispute, started back in the old Greece, will become of special importance in the philosophical tradition of the nominalists and the realists. Or the ontological status of the values exists or, like at nominalists, these values are mere language labeling of things to which nothing in the reality corresponds. Whatever this problem is perceived, the correspondence between our notions and the reality remains miraculous and almost incredible. The existing order given in the experience mind can evaluate as true or false, fair or unfair, beautiful or ugly. It is presumed by that that something objectively given in the experience corresponds to our subjective measuring, otherwise it would take us to the complete relativization of our knowledge. In that case, the relativity would become the insuperable limit of our growing in knowledge. We cannot know anything for sure unless we do not perceive the relations in the outer world, which is objective *per se*, by our notions, which are subjective.

However, not less difficult questions awaits for us, about the nature of our agreement regarding the values. Out of where comes the ability to evaluate the things, to set and to follow the values and, of course, how is it possible to fully agree in the matter of evaluation of things? If we say that something represents the value, from this naturally follows that we are adding a certain meaning to something that we take to be of value. For the values one may conclude that they do not exist but are applied to. The validity of the values depends on the meaning, and the meaning depends on the person who evaluates, on his estimations, interests or motives. The drives and the wishes of the one who evaluates play an important role in respecting some value as such. Nevertheless, that does not exclude the objective validity of the values, for if something is a value *per se* it upholds the absolute validity. The criteria of values are subjective, they depend of the one who evaluates, but the very values are unchangeable, eternal and true.

In that sense the values have ontological grounding and they exist as such in the transcendental way, but in the sense of their validity and concrete reality they are immanent to the man and his estimations. We may say: the values exist objectively and are valid subjectively. Within the acting of the humans inspired by values the works that incorporate values are being created. In such

way the culture, the society, the art, the sciences are conceived. The creativity, as particular form of our relation to the world, represents the transposition of the values into the physically noticeable deeds. The spiritualization of the material is enabled for the creators by their acts of value put the values into their creations. The culture or the society are the consequences of introducing the system of values and adding values conception to the nature. In the nature there are the ruling laws, while in the human world the values are at force. Different from the nature in which the values do not apply, the human community is based upon these very values.

The idea of the community in the moral and political sense is enabled by the existence of values upon which it is based. Every community, besides the general-universal values, avail of the system of special values related to the authentic culture, the history, the myths, the religion, the moral and the customs which all make the inner bonding substance of any people. The general or moral values make the spiritual side of every community, the adoption of which is the matter of free choice of its members. Consequently, the values in the social sense represent the norms which reveal what a man should do and why. In some way, the values are the principles fed up with energy, towards which the whole nations or the *époques* orient themselves, as the lighthouses in time which bright up with sense everything they shed their light on.

Every community is built on certain values, having its cultural and spiritual roots which surpass the economy, the law and the politics. That what is nowadays being called the *modern political community* or the *modern society* is created upon certain values applied as the general standards. If we speak about the idea of the united Europe, than its' political, the economic and the legal aspect is assumed, but also the spiritual and cultural roots without which we cannot imagine the European identity. The European identity is shaped by the ideas from the antique, the Christianity, the Enlightenment, which form a strong support to the new age ideal of the humanism and the liberty. The common values make possible the European community as a union, that is consisted of different nations and their cultures, unique if the common values are successfully accepted: the autonomy of the human personality, the human dignity, the human rights, the freedom, the solidarity, but also the culture and its products. The institutional character of the European community of people and the states make sense if it is built on legal-political, but also on the spiritual heritage and tradition, upon which the whole construction of the new Europe can be erected.

On the contrary, we would have the artificial unity which lasting would be very questionable. Aside from all the diversities, it exist a solid spiritual unity among the nations in which the mutual secularity, the economical and the legal regulations are been surpassed. The legal contracts do not make the social community, they rather proclaim it. In the mosaic of the European culture composed of diverse cultural models, the values persist as the common counterpart, which could shape Europe as the community. The idea of Europe is the union of states which commit themselves to the community by agreement-memorandum, but its' true meaning is achieved only when such a gathering is been realized based on the common values. That said, Europe imposes not just as a geographic notion, but the cultural and spiritual reality, which surpasses all possible political solutions. The complexity of the idea of Europe comes from the unity of different identities that form a wholeness where all particular identities stay preserved, but through which the new concept is been conceived, based on the inner spiritual unity. In the historical processes of the erosion, of frequent conflicts, one can firmly state that there has been the constant development depending of the potential of the singular identity. For the first time such European identity tends to be built up not by force, but following the principles of collaboration and by strengthening of the common historical, cultural, religious inheritance. Such a new thinking regarding the unification goes beyond the national frames, due to the idea about the need for the common spiritual core of the European nations and states.

The idea of Europe is inseparable from the normative fundament and from the whole system of values, which constitute the European identity. These values include the individualism, the liberalism, the constitutionalism, the human rights, the equality, the freedom, the rule of law, the democracy, the singular market, the solidarity, the separation of the church and the state, and so on. In the same time, they have the moral character, thus, enabling the forming of the community, which purpose is to make legitimate the ethical system by applying the legal norm.

However, that abstract frame should be based on man as the individual, the citizen to whom the human rights and freedoms are being guaranteed. Every man is a member of a certain society, the community that is ruled by the traditional ethos, by which we confirm ourselves as the members of that same community. In the same time, he is a rational being, a cosmopolites, a member of the universal human community. Thus, on one side we are the members of the moral-political community in which we realize our immediate living

as well as the members of the wider- more encompassing community. The community which, in this case, makes part of the wider European cultural space, which encompasses all the concrete national identities. Between the ethnocentric and the universal it is been carried out what is called the process of unification or the European world, without impairing neither the meaning of the particular ethos or that of the singularity of each citizen of Europe.

The ideal of the community is the striving towards the constitution of the normative system of values, which is universally valid and eventually has the ethical character. Thus, the norm is been perceived as objective, irrespectively from the societal changes, by becoming effective through empiric application and experience. In the Kantian sense, the appreciation of the other as the purpose of moral act in the personal behavior is what makes possible the community. However, this assumes also the moral obligation towards the community, based on the formed customs and tradition. The ethical obligation towards the community in the narrower sense, in which one realizes his immediate living, is been extended on the ethical relation toward the community as the commitment to the wider idea of the European unity. Between what is and what it should be, between the facticity and the *should*, the ethical binding is the intermediary momentum. This indicates that the free individual, as a moral being, may express his self within the constraints of a free society, which guarantees the conditions for the accomplishment of his morality.

The system of values which shapes the spirit of the community and the common European structure includes the universally acceptable ideas of the global peace, the cooperation, the building of the overall good. Those are the ideas that were formed over the centuries, despite the great wars which happened on the European territory. The culture of human rights and dignity that are been guaranteed in the capital EU documents represent one of the fundamental requests for the admission to EU. Thus, the value of freedom has received the legal confirmation in the fundamental documents on human rights, as the freedom that is profiled through rights as the freedom of recognizing the other and his diversities. This means that a man should not have the absolute power in what he does, nor should the state, the more so for the limited power of a state is the counterpart of the society. As the ethical subject the individual is limited in his acting by the rights of the others that are openly recognized, but also by developing the care, i. e. by taking care about the achievement of rights of each and every member of the society.

The idea of the solidarity is the important impetus in establishing the community on the common moral foundations, the solidarity due to which the mere individualism is exceeded, as well as the selfishness and the egoism. This solidarity, which suspends the egocentric self-contentment of the individual is shown in caring about the parts of population most in need. The achievement of the personal freedom is naturally related with our responsibility for the other members of the society. Apart from freedom, the equality and the fairness, the solidarity is one of the major goals of the modern societies, being the duty which directs the political will according to the ethical dictates.

The responsibility towards the other carrying the moral sense has become the contents of the modern understanding of the solidarity. The solidarity, as the value, makes for the community to achieve the character of the moral community. Undoubtedly, it is perceived as the universal value which, as the principle, has the objective validity, thus, exceeding the hermetism of the individual existence. The solidarity includes the responsibility of every member of the society, demanding the common actions, care and assistance to those who are in disadvantaged position. In some way, it is about the divided responsibility, the distributive justice which enables the fairer sharing of the economic and political power in the society, comprising the moral and the freedom. It becomes the indicator of the humanistic orientated society, the fundament for the consolidation of the community on the common values.

Due to the idea of solidarity, the gap between the individual and the community is surpassed, and the alignment between the citizen and the state is established. As the globally valid norm, the solidarity exceeds the social dimension. It becomes the connection with a time-free reality of the moral, which is pulsing in the subject and is aligning the ethical life with the obligations towards the community to which we belong. It is the way to establish the relationship between the universal norms and their application within the concrete conditions of the societal life.

