

## **Morals and war. Epistemological foundations of moral choice**

In this paper, I would like to emphasize the importance of knowing the historical and philosophical background of ethical arguments, in particular, knowing the hidden epistemological foundations of ethical arguments, which actually act as implicit premises.

*The problem of relativism of ethical arguments.* For some time, I have been giving graduate students a course of lectures on the topic: "Ethics of the teacher and scientist" and I found that the vast majority of them were convinced that all ethical values and norms were relative and there were no universal human values. The historical conditionality of ethical arguments is already suggested by the very terms "ethics" and "morality". These terms come, respectively, from the Greek noun *ethos* and the Latin *mos*, which mean "custom", "habit", "character", i.e. something that is ultimately shaped by the social environment and changes under its influence. Ethical relativism, i.e. recognition of the relative nature of ethical values and norms, is very common in today's world, especially in many post-Soviet countries, where stereotypes of totalitarian consciousness still dominate. Such a belief in the historical conditionality and relativity of moral ideas calls into question the very possibility of talking about universal moral values and objectivity of ethical arguments. Therefore, the question naturally arises whether such an ethical argument is possible, that could change the motives and norms of human behavior.

This question is extremely important in our time, when information wars have become a decisive factor in global wars. This war between Ukraine and Russia is interesting because each of the warring parties tries to justify their actions from a moral point of view. Such conflict situations, when both sides successfully justify the morality of their view, once again emphasize the helplessness and even the danger of ethical relativism. They also point to the failure of a pragmatic approach to resolving these kinds of conflicts. I do not intend to challenge the existence of various forms of mentality and moral consciousness. I also do not challenge the historical conditionality and the relativity of the ethical norms. This is a fact that would be foolish to deny. I just want to point out one very important problem that relativism inevitably faces and needs to be solved: if moral arguments are not capable of changing

the motives of human behavior, then the question is why do we need such a morality that is not capable of fulfilling its main normative function. Why do we need the laws of the state, which are devoid of moral grounds? Why do we need states that educate criminals, who consider the murder of dissidents to be their moral duty. The existence of criminal states is not a product of my imagination. Unfortunately, this is our current reality. It is a question of how such an ethical argument is possible, which is able to change the motives of behavior radically.

*Historical Parallel: Solving the Problem in Ancient India.* In search of an answer to this question, I propose to turn to history of Indian philosophical thought, where this question was not only raised, but also successfully resolved. In particular, I would like to draw a parallel between the current situation in which Ukraine found itself and the situation in which India found itself, according to legend, in the 4th millennium before the birth of Christ, when the famous Battle of Kurukshetra took place. This battle was the culmination of the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas. two clans of the same tribe, who had a common history and blood ties. This war was described in the Indian epic “Mahabharata”. The philosophical analysis and ethical evaluation of this battle were given in the Bhagavad Gita.

This classical work of Indian religious and philosophical thought reproduces a conversation between Arjuna, a kshatriya warrior who has to fight against his relatives, and the god Krishna himself. The first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita begins with Arjuna refusing to go into battle and fight his enemies. The reason for this refusal was a spiritual conflict, which is based on different ethical grounds. On the one hand, Arjuna is a warrior who must protect his people, his king and his right to own the lands belonging to his people. On the other hand, in the camp of his enemies were his friends, close relatives and teachers, who, according to the laws of the tribe, were forbidden to kill. This is a conflict between the principles of tribal morality, which prohibit blood-related war and sees it as the biggest sin, and social moral principles, which require their citizens to fulfill their civic duty.

Why in this conflict between the principles of tribal morality and civic duty does Arjuna give preference to the principles of tribal morality? It should also be noted that Arjuna considers this war to be just, because it is a war against a treacherous enemy who had violated the agreement and encroached on the foreign lands. Besides, Arjuna

realizes that his enemy is guided solely by self-interest and therefore consciously commits an immoral act. But, despite the fact that this war is fair, Arjuna refuses to fight against blood relatives, friends and teachers, because he puts the tribal laws above not only honor, glory, power and wealth, but also his own life.

His refusal to fight Arjuna explains by saying that murder of blood relatives is a sin (pāpa), a crime (doṣa). He supports his refusing with arguments which explain why the preservation of the tribe is the most important for him. We are dealing here with an argument system in which each subsequent argument confirms the previous one. This chain of arguments looks like this: With the death of the tribe, the eternal laws of the tribe are destroyed (kuladharmā: sanātanā:); with the destruction of the tribal laws, lawlessness (adharma) reigns in the tribe. The lawlessness leads to a mixture of castes (varṇasaṅkara:). The mixture of castes leads to the fact that the ancestors are deprived of their victims and because of this they fall into hell (naraka). Following the ancestors, both the tribe itself and its enemies fall into hell. Why is the chain of arguments constructed in this way? What determines its sequence? Answering these questions will help us understand the meaning of this argument in general. But the answer requires additional knowledge that will help us to uncover the hidden premises which determine the meaning of this extended argument. This knowledge can also help us find such counterarguments that would make it possible to change the decision of Arjuna.

*Epistemological foundations of the ethical argument.* First of all, I would like to point out that the Vedic religion is one of the so-called magical religions. In it we find neither God's commandments nor vows. It is based on the ritual of sacrifice, which is aimed primarily at making the gods grant them material benefits\_(harvest, wealth, offspring, victory, etc.) In fact, we are dealing here with sacred magic rather than with religion. And this is not only because the purpose of the ritual is directed mainly to receive material benefits and the ritual itself is coercive. By its nature, religious knowledge is fundamentally different from magical knowledge. Despite the fact that there are no divine precepts in the Vedas, this religion contains ritual prescriptions that have moral content. Moreover, this moral content received an ideological and epistemological justification. Many signs point to the fact that we are dealing here with a religious system that is well philosophically

grounded. This is a system of worldview knowledge, which was specially developed by the priests in order to determine the motives of human behavior.

In the Vedic religion, the world is divided into two parts: Rita and Naraka. Rita is the cosmos, an ordered part of the universe. Naraka is chaos, a formless, bottomless and disordered part, which becomes synonymous with hell. The Sanskrit word "Ṛta" means - 1) truth, 2) order, 3) law 4) justice; 5) donation. This cosmic order did not always exist. In the Rigveda (10ᄒ 90) we meet the myth that the Gods sacrificed the giant man Purusha and the cosmos arose from his parts. As a result of this act of sacrifice, they became gods and achieved immortality. The cosmos is a giant man, and man is a microcosm. The idea of the unity of macrocosm and microcosm is very ancient. The cosmos is a living and intelligent whole. The cosmos is a living and intelligent whole. It contains all the vital forces that a man has. The gods represented the vital (magical) forces of the cosmos and acted as guardians of the universal law Rita. Due to this function, the gods cannot violate the law of Rita, in other words, act immorally and violate the moral order of the cosmos, but a person, due to his imperfection, can violate the law of Rita. Thanks to the ritual of sacrifice a man is a participant in this cosmic process. He can not only influence the cosmic processes and the gods, but also become equal to the gods. A man acts rightly (ṛtam – justly, morally) if he is guided by the rules of a ritual, and he acts wrong (anṛtam - immorally) if he is guided not by a ritual, but by his own desires and selfish motives.

Selfish actions are considered immoral because they destroy world order and bring disorder into the cosmos. If a man gives preference to his egoistic goals, then this means that he takes the side of the asuras (demons) and helps them turn the cosmos into chaos. The presented picture of the world is an arena of battle between gods and demons, cosmos and chaos, in which a person acts as a third party. Immoral action is associated here with selfish action, and moral action with sacrificial action. The law of Ṛta is therefore understood as the law of sacrifice. But Arjuna himself, if he enters the war for power and wealth, will be no different from his enemies, since his actions will be selfish and lead to chaos, to the destruction of the cosmos. If he dies without violating the eternal laws of the family, he will end up in the world of his ancestors, which is located within the cosmos next to the world of

the gods. If he kills his relatives, he, as an ally of the demons, will be out of space, in a world of chaos, in hell.

*Is it possible and how is it possible to refute an ethical argument that has worldview grounds?* We see that any ethical argument is not just a statement or a series of statements logically related to each other. Behind each such argument is a tradition that relies on a certain worldview, that was formed not spontaneously, but consciously. The Indian religion was also created by the Brahmins, i.e. by philosophers. And its creation was not a spontaneous process, but the result of a collective argumentative discourse. In order to refute such an “ethical” argument and force a person to change motives of his behavior, it was necessary to undermine the foundations of the dominant worldview system. To do this, it was necessary to find a weak link either in this system of arguments, or in the implicit premises underlying it. Such weak link in the system of magical knowledge turned out to be its naturalistic idea of man. If we consider nature as a whole, and man as a part of material nature, then we accept those implicit premises on which all magical and naturalistic systems of knowledge are based. An analysis of the texts of the Upanishads shows that the main question that led to the emergence of a new type of religious knowledge was the *question of the end sense of life*. If a man is only a body, then a man's life is senseless, because the body is mortal. Human life acquires sense only if there is something immortal in a man.

We find something similar, yet different, also in the European philosophic tradition. To prove the immortality of the soul, Plato discovered for us the world of incorporeal ideas. For him, only the incorporeal can be eternal. It is impossible to overcome naturalism from naturalistic positions. But he did it in order to prove the immortality of the soul. Everything in nature is changeable and impermanent. Incorporeal (out of nature) ideas are that eternal that is accessible only to the rational part of the human soul. Although they are inaccessible to sensory perception, according to Plato, they exist: acting as ideals and paradigms, ideas make it possible for us not only to know this world, but also to make social and moral progress. He proves the impossibility of obtaining ideas by experience in order to substantiate the immortality of the soul: for only an incorporeal and immortal essence can be a receptacle for ideas. For Plato, knowledge based on assumptions is opinion or myth. Unlike myth and opinion, philosophy is

epistemologically based knowledge. Despite the fact that Plato's ideas are the highest values, even they receive an epistemological justification. Plato's ethics is also based on an epistemological basis, which determines the meaning of human life. Plato was able to overcome relativism because his concept of episteme was identified with the knowledge of something eternal, i.e. being. But this was not a hypothesis about the existence of something eternal in the world, based on faith, but knowledge of something consistently conceivable, which, by definition, cannot be refuted by experience. So eternal, accessible only to the mind, are incorporeal ideas and relationships between concepts.

*What does this have to do with Russia?* Modern Russia, like the Soviet Union, is an ideocracy, but of a fundamentally different type. The state of this type sees its main goal not in increasing the welfare and happiness of citizens, but in the implementation of some great idea. If for the Soviet Union such an idea was the dictatorship of the world proletariat, then for modern Russia it is the so-called "Russian idea". Such states are, by definition, totalitarian, based on the military, police and officials, united around the leader and his party. The citizens of such a state act as a means for the realization of this great idea. Not only are they not indignant, but they even like to be a tool in the hands of ideologists and officials, because this fills their senseless life with meaning. They see themselves as part of a great whole, which is aimed at the realization of some higher noble goal.

Totalitarian consciousness is guided by the principle: "The goal justifies the means." A great goal justifies any actions of their leader, no matter how bloody they may be. Of course, there can be no question of any moral principles here. Conformity, devotion and commitment to the idea - this is what replaces the principles of morality. The words "morality" and "democracy" imply the value of human life, freedom of choice and awareness of oneself as a person. But it is precisely all this that destroys their unity, hinders the achievement of a great goal and deprives them of the meaning of life. Ideological totalitarianism is the most terrible kind of totalitarianism, because it makes citizens a voluntary tool in the hands of the state bureaucratic machine. To die for a great fatherland, for a great idea becomes the highest meaning of life. Any ethical arguments that ignore this great idea are useless. Any religious arguments are not effective either, because in totalitarian ideocracies the church and religion serve to implement this idea.

Is it possible to refute this totalitarian “system of morals”? Yes, it is possible, but only on the basis of a critical analysis of the epistemological foundations of the “Russian idea”. Unity for the sake of unity is impossible. Unity is always based on either common interests and goals, or ideas. If we are talking about national unity as the highest value, then this is nationalism, which quickly develops into Nazism when the rights of national minorities begin to be infringed upon. If the “Russian idea” is understood as the union of “small peoples” under the protectorate of the “great Russian people”, then this is the idea of a colonial empire, which was founded by the Chinese legalists in the 8th century BC, if not earlier. Russia's war against Ukraine clearly shows that we are dealing with precisely this understanding of the “Russian idea” in its worst, Nazi interpretation, when Russian troops are trying to liberate Ukraine from Ukrainians and their territory, although they were not asked to do so and fiercely resist the liberators.

The main strategy of the argument should be that such an understanding of this idea leads to the exact opposite result, namely, to the collapse of Russia, because this legalist idea, which was guided by Stalin and is guided by Putin, is anti-people. It involves a war between the ruler (government) and the people, the lack of freedom of speech and other rights and freedoms, constant “small” wars and, as a result, a low standard of living and education, since the main funds go to the maintenance of a huge police and bureaucratic apparatus (for war against the internal enemy – Russian dissidents) and the army (to fight the external enemy (small peoples that are not yet under the protectorate of Russia)). Any improvement in the financial situation is temporary and the prosperity of the people can only be heard on TV. Education of youth on the examples of the “great past” ultimately leads to the fact that people begin to think in terms of the great past and live in a parallel reality. Russian people do not notice how the country is turning into a zombie farm for the production of cannon fodder, they themselves are becoming crazy, and the whole world is an enemy of the fatherland. Unfortunately, these are not insulting words imbued with hatred for the enemy, but the bitter truth. And the sooner Putin's criminal regime falls, and the fascist ideology in any form is condemned, the better for the Russians and other peoples.