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Philosophical Marginalia

Abdusalam GUSEYNOV

The reflections presented herein make no claim to be witty, aphoristic, or didactic. They have nothing in the way of an underlying system; nor were they written to any plan. They would come into existence spontaneously, on occasion, whenever I would be reading texts or listening to presentations, or in my hours of leisure. I would then record them in the margins of notes, or in work-related notebooks. I bring them to the readers' judgment in full awareness of their exploratory nature; the only thing I can count on is that they, being the results of associative trains of thought, or attempts to counter other people's assertions, may someday provide someone with an impetus to do some original thinking of their own. I regret having been unable to reconstruct the chronology of these notes with any precision or find any other formal principle for organising these ideas, which is why I have decided to group them into the following four tentative categories, namely, philosophy, ethics, morality, morality and politics.

I

If freedom is a characteristic of reason (as the "cognized necessity"), evil is a mistake. If it is a characteristic of will (as in "freedom of will"), then evil is a natural defect. In either case freedom does not merely fail to serve as the basis for morality—it rules morality out altogether. Realized as the cognized necessity, freedom is a pertinent and committed action, but in no way could it be a moral action (for in that case everything has been worked out in advance, and risk is no longer a part of the equation). Realized as free will, freedom translates as arbitrary actions—deeds in and of themselves that may be classified as anything but moral, for they do not imply any responsibility. Only the convergence of reason and will (as reasoned will) makes it possible to understand freedom as a category of human existence.

* * *

Truth and values. The difference between "is" and "is not" is recorded as a truth or a falsehood only when the former is perceived as a "yes" (the positivity

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of an action, or good) and recognized as something to aspire to, and the latter is defined as a "no" (the negativity of an action, or evil)—something to be avoided. The distinction between good and evil is the voice of existence itself, separated from non-existence (with its "is-truth," which counters the "is-not-falsehood"). To put it another way, via this distinction a human being entrenches in existence, takes responsibility for existence, becomes immersed in existence.

* * *

Sir Francis Bacon refers to "universal instances" in reality. It is a great and profound idea—one that we must by all means take into account in ethics, even though this is an area where it presents the greatest challenge. After all, ethics is based on the principle of equality (or sameness) of people inasmuch as their moral worth is concerned, and *eo ipso* denies the presence among them of a "universal instance" (at least as measured by this criterion). Therefore, moral equality should only be understood as a condition—a prerequisite necessary for seeing (and cultivating) the true inequality of individuals (by every other criterion, the above being the single exception). This very understanding of moral equality provides a basis for the idea of negative ethics, which associates the absolute nature of moral aspirations with a number of universal taboos (against killing and telling lies in particular), and uses those to establish moral boundaries.

* * *

Good, truth and beauty are three rays cast by a common source of light. They represent three different modes of expression (or existence) of the very same thing. The truth which claims that what is, is, and what is not, is not, represents the border between life and non-life. Good with its fundamental taboo on violence and non-life defines life as the singular object of human activity. Beauty is the yearning for life seen as the epitome of beauty and the repulsion for non-life. The philosophical definition of the convergence and common source of good, truth and beauty was given a very long time ago by Parmenides in his famous tautology: "Being is, and not-being is not." Truth is the knowledge of being. Good is the assertion of being. Beauty is the yearning for being.

* * *

Nietzsche did not merely live and think. His thinking was his life. To him, thought had attained a meaning that was not exclusively emotional—it was close to physical. Thinking was not something he did from 5 to 9 AM like Kant—it was what he did in his every waking moment. His manner of writing is such that it is impossible to make a distinction between his personality and his thoughts. This is why it is impossible to quote from Nietzsche—every quotation will be balanced by a counterquotation. His thinking is uniquely his own: thought is highly individual—just like experience; just like fingerprints. Could Nietzsche's concept of eternal return be a result of his recurrent attacks of pain and his nomadic lifestyle that kept bringing him to the same places over and over again?

* * *

I aspire for the best I can do—I intend to become virtuous. But first I have to be aware of what this "best" really is; I need to have some knowledge of virtue. I want to know about the world and how it works—but this entails a desire to find some truth about the world that would be the best for me; something I can find virtue in aspiring to. Good and truth are the same thing—the same path that can be entered from two different ends.

* * *

Humans and gods: a brief history of relations. Pagan (Homeric) gods directed every action of the heroes and plotted everything that would come to pass upon "the Earth" sitting on top of Mount Olympus. The god of Abrahamic religions gave man freedom by giving him access to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, reserving the right to emergency meddling. The godlessness of the modern age can be interpreted as the self-annihilation of God and the elevation of humans to the godly level.

* * *

Why are humans given the knowledge of their mortality—the finite nature of human being? Could it be to prevent them from wasting time? Hardly so. This awareness most likely prevents them from investing their effort in things of a finite nature, for all such effort is inevitably wasted. This knowledge is also a beacon for finding one's own way to infinity—seeing the difference between the infinity of the sequence of natural numbers and the infinity of perfection or completeness. Epicurus defined it well when he said that a single day of bliss was worth a thousand days.

* * *

The ideal doubling of the world that is the characteristic of humans as reasonable beings should not be considered an adaptive mechanism. After all, other living creatures have managed to find their place in the world without it, getting by on instinct behavior and intelligence. The purpose of this doubling is different—more along the lines of rising above the world, becoming detached from it and capable of looking beyond in order to specify a different determination of one's own activity than the one that defines the fragility of human existence. Kant was right—if it was not for goodwill, it would be quite impossible to understand why the human being needs reason.

* * *

Is choice dictated by reason or will? By reason, because we choose between desires. By will, because the choice in this case is one between good and evil, which is the only actual choice, or pure choice—a choice without any reasoning behind it. A moral choice is a choice insofar and inasmuch as it cannot be calculated beforehand—a sighted choice made with one's eyes closed. Is anybody capable of providing a sound explanation of what Adam and Eve did?

* * *

Karen Swassjan coined the term “Fall from Greece,” which was to be used instead of “Fall from Grace.” An excellent example of intelligence and real goodness in a bon mot.

* * *

A scientific rationale for morality. The very notion strikes one as profoundly odd—a rationale rather than a description or an explanation. It does not make any more sense than the notion of the moral justifiability of truth. However, truth requires no moral sanction for being truth. Similarly, morality requires no scientific rationale for being morality.

* * *

Philosophy is the no man's land between science and religion—or, perhaps, theology. What I understand under no man's land should by no means be taken to refer to the domain of those who haven't found a place for themselves in either science or religion (such people have enough to occupy themselves with besides philosophy), but rather the fact that one can access it (fall into it, get bogged down in it, etc.) from either side. The first thing to do for a failed scientist or a theologian gone heretical is to start philosophizing. Philosophy itself, viewed through the prism of either science or religion as the territory that lies in between and belongs to neither discipline, is an impenetrable zone—a black hole. One cannot make use of it with the means of either science (knowledge) or religion (prayer).

* * *

The end of history. This philosophically questionable formula has one peculiar aspect that must have eluded its author altogether. If there is no history, there can be no historical references; one cannot make any claims on behalf of history or use historical purposes as the justification of one's actions.

Individually responsible actions come to the foreground. The end of “history” may well turn out to be the beginning of ethics.

* * *

The supreme and finite objective, be it happiness of an ordinary man or wisdom of a philosopher, cannot be described in any precise or definite terms. It would nonetheless be an error to assume that humanity lacks the knowledge of this objective, seeing as how humans strive for it without a shadow of a doubt of its virtuous nature. This, too, is knowledge—a special kind of knowledge that has not and cannot be proved. It is imprinted on humans and serves them as faith. Faith isn't any kind of knowledge that can be proved—it is what we prove by our very lives. Knowledge is what we have, whereas faith is what we are. Tolstoy's interpretation of faith as awareness of life is in my opinion the most insightful.

* * *

An *intelligent* person is someone capable of seeing with their mind; seeing things that cannot be seen by human eyes—at all, or yet.

A *strong* person is someone who can lift heavy objects and withstand physical pain.

A *kind* person is reluctant to judge. It is someone who forgives enemies though desires to revenge and has an opportunity for revenge.

* * *

I read about it in the paper the other day: a young couple installed a "nanny-cam" to be able to observe the babysitter's behavior secretly while they were away at work. A most emblematic case. The very culture of morality has always been largely based on the difference between one's behavior in public and in private. Modern technology has made privacy extremely difficult. For the meantime, one may still withdraw into oneself and get some inner privacy. However, there is nothing to counter the suggestion that people will eventually be capable of "X-raying" each other's souls. What will happen then?

One of Dostoyevsky's characters said that he did not need a palace of crystal at which one will not be able to put out one's tongue or make a long nose on the sly. Palaces of crystal are still a long way off, but we already appear to be having problems with making a long nose on the sly.

Humans appear more and more externalized; what's more, a person becomes plain one, deprived of depth. We may be at a crossroads—a point of bifurcation which may lead to two different outcomes. One of them is the anthropological elevation of humanity when the norms of conscientiousness and basic human decency (behavior in public) will become the organic qualities of individuals. But the other outcome is just as possible, and, for the meantime, it appears more likely—namely, the rejection of all such norms and the degradation to animal condition (animals have nothing to hide from each other). In this scenario, human behavior will become "natural"—the Western culture has been yearning for it ever since Rousseau.

* * *

Humans have a threefold nature: it has a physical, a sociocultural and a moral aspect. This idea was voiced as early as the days of Plato—namely, in his famous myth from *Protagoras*: when Epimetheus was conferring natural abilities, he forgot to give mankind anything, leaving humans naked and vulnerable. His brother Prometheus taught mankind to speak, make fire and forge tools in order to rectify Epimetheus' mistake. However, this proved insufficient for humans to coexist, and so Zeus had to send Hermes to distribute shame and truth among human beings—equally, barring none. The idea of threefold human nature was developed in Stoic philosophy: humans are a part of nature, for they have urges; they are social, for they can satisfy them duly; they are moral, for they have a higher wisdom, which makes them indifferent to anything but virtue. The main stress points of human existence lie along the lines of how these three aspects correlate. The second (sociocultural) nature acts as the organizational center of the entire structure, so the crucial factor is whether it is directed to grounding the moral nature or to elevating the physical one.

* * *

Ancient philosophy had three components, namely, physics, logic and ethics, and three stages: natural, classical and Hellenistic. Could there be any inner correspondence between them? In the first stage philosophers thought that humans could become virtuous as natural beings; in the second stage, humans were believed to become virtuous as good citizens of their *polis*, and in the third, as sages.

* * *

The organizational principles of culture. The Western culture can be likened to a fountain (different streams coming from a single source); the Chinese is like a rice field (spatial separation of domains), and the Muslim, like a mountain range (a hierarchy of levels).

* * *

What is truth? We have three words here. The *what* conceals a certain bewilderment with the force that drives man towards an unknown final goal. *Truth* stands for this goal itself that man feels such an organic affinity with that the very thought of existing without it gives him a feeling of vulnerability. *Is* represents the central element of the statement, which claims that man may know nothing of the truth that holds him so firmly within its gravity field apart from the very fact of its existence. So what exactly is this *is?* What is *is?* What is *is is*? This chain can be continued *ad infinitum*. Philosophers have saved people by terminating this chain with the following maxim: being is, adding that being and cogitating are the same thing. The thing that pulls me towards itself is a thought, the right kind of thought. Basically, it is only a thought inasmuch as it is the right kind of thought, or the kind that pulls me towards itself, and does this invariably.

When the philosophers' responses proved to be insufficient and the philosophers were incapable of creating a mental picture of the being that would inspire anyone but themselves, when people grew desperate and this question took on the hopeless intonation of Pontius Pilate, Jesus came and said, "I am the truth."

* * *

Newton used to say, "Physics, beware of metaphysics." But physicists aren't the only ones intimidated by philosophy. Students also tend to perceive it as something imposed on them arbitrarily. One must strive for a philosophy that will intimidate people no longer. I believe this can be implemented by creating a philosophy for oneself—for oneself first and foremost, and not for the others—not just for the others. It has to represent my own truth as expressed by me personally and not just the truth in and of itself. Philosophy comprises one's attitude and one's way of life—at least in its primordial conception and finite corollaries. Perceived in this manner, it will no longer be something to beware of—it will no longer intimidate.

* * *

Philosophy stands between science and religion. It is "scientific" in its approach to the subject of religion since it interprets the last as the denial of the subject of science—as nothing. Hegel passes from "nothing" to "something." Actually, Hegel's point of departure requires some inversion—nothing is what remains if we transcend the limits of "something." The only thing a philosopher is entitled to say about "nothing" is that it is not "something." This is how philosophy asserts science, or the scientific outlook; it does it each and every time it proves that "something," whatever it is, is not "nothing." It does not deny "nothing"—it merely claims that it is not "something" and that it lays on the other side, being quite opaque to scientific methods.

Philosophy is "religious" in the way it handles the subject of science. Philosophy considers it in conjunction with the "nothing," trying to find out whether it (the "nothing") could still be discovered in the "something." Philosophy is interested in physics inasmuch as it is required for metaphysics to come about.

One uses the mundane eye for looking at the world beyond in order to keep confirming that the mundane eye can see nothing there. One uses the otherworldly sight to examine the mundane in order to find otherworldly symbols therein, debunk them and search for new ones, constantly keeping the problem of the world's metaworldly purposes in sight.

* * *

When people speak of the absolute (truth, morality or God), they become filled with some inexplicable and impenetrable certainty of the absolute truthfulness of their assertions for the very reason that they speak of the absolute truth.

* * *

Absolute morality is similar to the absolute truth: the latter is the sum of relative truths, likewise, the former only exists as a diversity of relative moral standards. Anyone who tries to find the absolute in individual norms fail to realize that they *eo ipso* deny it, which would be tantamount to somebody claiming that God existed because they had seen Him. Yet this obviously does not render the idea of absolute morality a pure fiction. At the very least, it is necessary for us to stay aware of the relativity of all the actual moral standards that morality manifests in, and to refrain from declaring any one of them the absolute one.

It goes without saying that morality is a form of practical consciousness, and, unlike gnoseology, it can not conceive the absolute as a theoretical postulate only. Morality ought to find for it some place in the world of actions. This is where the paradoxical nature of morality manifests—it requires absolute actions, which are impossible in and of themselves. Hence the necessity for negative ethics, which associates a morally absolute action with compliance to a taboo, or something one refrains from doing—a negative action. Therefore, an absolute moral action exists in its nonexistence as something I did not do, the only reason for my not doing it being the taboo in question.

II

Who has the right to make claims on behalf of morality in general? Is anybody competent enough? No such authorities have been found to date, even though there has never been any shortage of those who would assume such roles. They all reveal themselves as impostors eventually. Russian literature serves as an interesting illustration. There are in Leo Tolstoy's novels positive heroes (such as Pierre Bezukhov), villains (Anatole Kuragin), and author, who keeps reinforcing the idea of the positivity of the former and the negativity of the latter in his readers. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's characters are also connected with certain poles of good and evil (Alyosha Karamazov and Pavel Smerdyakov, respectively), albeit less rigidly so than their Tolstovian counterparts, but the author's judgement is no longer there—we see no explicit ethical judgement. Now let us consider Venedikt Yerofeyev and Aleksandr Zinovyev: here we see good and evil fused together in every character, and we can no longer identify anyone as either a hero or a villain. Could this tendency conceal the idea that the right of ethical and moral judgement is to be relegated to the individual level?

* * *

According to Aristotle, prudence is similar to the feeling in mathematics that makes one consider a triangle to be the last moment in the procedure of confining the plane with a broken line. And Aristotle calls prudence the instance of correct ethical judgements (something we could refer to as moral reason). Could this mean that moral knowledge is an intellectual feeling of sorts—one that represents the last (limitation) of reasoned reality?

* * *

Socrates barred the way to cognition by making knowledge dependent on virtue. Plato broke the spell by singling out the sages as a class—he divided the people into those who know and those who do not.

* * *

Socrates was in the right claiming that knowledge of virtue is tantamount to being virtuous. Indeed, if a person is not virtuous, there is no real way of making sure he or she really knows what being virtuous stands for.

* * *

Happiness cannot be reproduced; it cannot be rendered to technology or instruments, and it cannot be controlled. It cannot be calculated or conform to a methodology. The understanding of happiness goes hand in hand with the postulate of destiny, which is why it has found no place in the ethics of the modern age (at the very least, the modern age is when happiness was chased away from the ethical throne that it had occupied during the antiquity and the Middle Ages). One of Kant's arguments against the ethics of eudaemonism was that one may not assume one's responsibility for happiness, which is why he distinguishes between the notions of happiness and worthiness of being happy.

* * *

The unconditional nature of duty assumes that it should also cover one's wishes (not merely "thou shalt not commit adultery," but also "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"). However, duty is powerless before desires—it loses its unconditionality, as George Edward Moore pointed out when he suggested that we should distinguish between the rules of duty and ideal rules. Could it be that the specific nature of morality has got nothing to do with unconditional duty? Could it have nothing to do with duty altogether?

* * *

According to Alain Badiou, "Evil is possible only through an encounter with the Good." The part about the encounter is perfectly correct, but one might assume that the actual order should be reversed. Good is a possibility that is revealed only when we do no evil. Good is manifest as actions within a space defined by moral taboos.

* * *

A decision is only moral inasmuch as one can say, “I decided it.” This *I* is the only foundation under the decision in question. Whenever I wish to satisfy my hunger or thirst, or defend a thesis etc, the actions I take are not my own—I am acting as a conduit for all sorts of laws and norms. In the former case, the “*I*” is the causal source; in the latter, a link in a causal chain.

“You must!”

“I want!”

Can wanting be made a duty? The philosophers of the hedonistic school of Aristippus appear to have tried this. How about wanting something that is one’s duty? Kant strove to solve this problem by singling out and formulating a special kind of respect for the moral imperative in humans.

* * *

The Stoic Adiaphora: objects of pursuit and likewise categories (health, disease, wealth, poverty, success, fame, etc) are placed in a zone of ethical neutrality. They relate to morality in the same way as dice relate to a game: we play with dice, but not for the sake of dice. If the dice roll in our favor, that’s great. But from the point of view of the game it is also perfectly fine if the dice are against us, even when they roll the worst possible number. The game accommodates that as well—moreover, the only reason it is possible in the first place is that the dice may roll in any way at all. Otherwise, the game would have been something else entirely—a business or a swindle (which is what a large portion of games have become in our day and age).

* * *

Interpretation of morality as *practical reason* is the common denominator of the European philosophical ethics. Even Spinoza can be defined in these terms. Practical reason does not refer to the way reason affects one’s practices or the external manifestations of reason. It’s all about the ability of human practices to be reasonable, or how reason can become efficacious as human practices. Through the notion of practical reason morality is identified with the activities of humans in its specifically human (reasonable, or humane) and humanly perfect expression. Hence the definition of ethics as practical philosophy.

The ambiguity of the notion of practical reason manifests as follows:

1) practice is always individualized. Actions are singular to the point of being unique (Mikhail Bakhtin)—reason is a generalising source that can only grasp the principle or a general rule of an action;

2) practice is what links an individual to the world and expresses one’s dependence on the world, the necessity to fit into it actively, practice has substantiality and occurs in real time and space, and reason is both the

source and the expression of an individual's autonomy and independence from the world (one's unique and individual world, at the very least).

A thinking individual dissolves in thought, coinciding with it and finding their subjectness therein. These contradictions give rise to the fundamental problems of morality and ethics, i.e., in what way can go together

1) happiness and virtue, and
2) actuality (or "arbitrariness") of individual decisions and the common relevance of the ethical law.

* * *

God only can know who is God. The question of an actual person's (X's) personality is answered by his introspectiveness. This knowledge is essentially subjective and singular. X himself only could define who is X. But he can not do it either for he is not identical to himself. He is larger than himself. X talking about his own personality content is already different from the X that he is referring to.

* * *

The categorical imperative in the light of negative ethics. If someone breaks a certain norm it undoubtedly means that this someone obviously does not wish to regard this norm as a universal law. Infringements, likewise imperatives, also appear to be categorical and hypothetical. Only a taboo may be broken categorically (in an obvious and unconditional way).

* * *

Morality as the restriction of human activity is not only applicable to its universal principles (such as the restrictions of the Decalogue), but its particular manifestations as well: valor as not being a coward, friendship as never betraying.

* * *

Victor Hugo's "Torquemada": "Day after day, from the very dawn, we're heading towards demise." The same is true of animals—they also "head towards demise" starting from "the very dawn." Demise is an only given in human life, and it is perfectly natural. One needs no effort of reason to reach this end—only, perhaps, to make it come faster. When demise, or death, becomes the aim and the subject of one's reflections, it signifies a misapplication of one's reason. The ultimate aim to organise and direct one's life can only be immortality. Death does not fall into the domain of one's individually responsible behavior and thus may not serve as an aim—other entities but us will take care of it, as it were. Immortality is the only sane aim because it would make no sense whatsoever without us, our reason, our efforts to reach the ideal.

* * *

Morality is not what we must do as people. It is what makes us people and entitles us to talk about ourselves in the first person.

* * *

The reason why morality cannot be dissected with the application of the truth/falsehood criterion is not its alleged excessive subjectivity or the lack of any objective reality that it would correspond to. On the contrary, it is too objective as it represents one of the most fundamental dimensions of human existence. Truth is a certain content of assertions that does not depend on whoever makes these assertions. What we have in mind here is the correspondence of consciousness with reality. Nobody can say that moral assertions can be viewed independently from the person who makes them. On the contrary, their validity is directly related to how much whoever makes such claims views them as binding. What we are referring to here is the congruity of one's reality to one's consciousness.

* * *

"How immoral does one have to be to discuss morality?!" Could these words, which are based on some sound observations, be applied to those who have made ethics their speciality as well? They do apply to a certain extent, and not merely in the sense that surgeons who specialize in open heart surgery are believed to require a certain degree of "heartlessness." But it should really be interpreted more along the lines of "How godless does one have to be in order to make assertions about God and believe that he knows what God had really said." After all, any study of morality questions it to a certain extent.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein says that one should pass over morality, likewise religion, in silence. If one speaks of what one believes is best passed over in silence, it means that it is impossible to trust what one says. Could this apply to Wittgenstein as well? After all, when he claims that morality is to be passed over in silence, he *does say* something about it.

* * *

Some stellar reflections of morality.

Confucius: "Virtuous rule is like the lodestar that hangs immobile with all the other stars revolving around it."

Aristotle: "Justice is more astonishing than the evening or the morning star."

Kant: "The starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

III

The idea of progress implies some injustice with respect to the previous generations. It fosters the illusion that we are somehow better than those who lived before us. A certain orientation towards the past (a yearning for the Golden Age, or the paradise lost) is a more morally wholesome position.

* * *

In the *Republic*, Plato writes that our notions of good and just are formed at a very early age and borrowed from our parents. Our notions of morality are borrowed and not developed. They are always based on the power of some authority or example—at the very least, we absorb them before we find out what they really are.

Moral upbringing is not localized in time and space. It cannot be dissected with the application of the traditional educational criteria such as teacher/pupil and end/means. It does not exist as any particular activity and cannot be considered education in the strict sense of the word.

* * *

Humanism wasn't tantamount to a mere discovery of humans. Humanism was a discovery of the human humaneness. What one finds sorely lacking here is the amazing wordplay that exists between the multiple meanings of the German word *Menschheit* which stands for both humanity and humaneness.

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The more individually oriented norm is the more universal one.

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Morality can be considered the very first form of awareness of historical dimension in humans, since it opens one's eyes to a long perspective of the infinite perfection.

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The logic of ethno-national consciousness: not everyone was fortunate enough to be born like us. Humanist ethics may therefore lead one to the conclusion that the representatives of other ethnic groups are to be treated with emphasized compassion and respect, similarly to how we treat people with disabilities when we help them cross the road.

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Socrates: it is not life as such that we value, but rather the good life.

Schweitzer: Reverence for life.

The entire history of European spirituality can be represented as the reverse motion from the good life to life per se. This can be perceived and justified intellectually in the sense that humanity has become so powerful that life per se can occur only as rationally organized (or “good”) life. To put it another way, life as the result of human social activity becomes the natural prerequisite of human existence.

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Warm and morally obliging relations with one’s nearest and dearest are a constant background for our daily communication with these people. Apart from this, we remember their birthdays and take every opportunity to emphasize the respect that we feel for them. Our kind feelings towards other people may be concealed in everyday life, but they surface on birthdays. Similarly, morality as a specific characteristic of a person permeates the entire diversity of their deliberate actions. At the same time, strict taboos and general guidelines for being a moral person emphasize morality and establish it as a specific goal of one’s conscious aspirations.

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If virtue is its own reward, what is the purpose of bonuses, medals, promotions to senior ranks and so on? They appear to be serving vice, after all.

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When a man chooses a wife, one pays attention to all sorts of factors such as moral and physical qualities, origin, dowry and so on. However, all of those are superfluous and of little importance. The only thing that really matters is a given woman’s readiness and ability to be a wife—your wife. This situation looks like our relation to our children. We would like them to be good-looking, gifted and healthy, but we accept them the way they are, be they ginger, club-footed or whatever. The only thing that’s truly important, primal, necessary and sufficient is that it is *your* child.

There is the notion of the sacrament of marriage; entering into a marriage is accompanied with vows. This is not merely for the sake of ritual. There is a certain mystery to a union of this sort. The very fact that two people form a married couple becomes pivotal and comes before their biographies or personal qualities. But this notion of marriage appears to be lost to us today.

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Nikolay Martynov, the man who killed the Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, was handsome, good-natured, jolly and ambitious; he was an old acquaintance of Lermontov's and a fellow man of the letters, albeit an amateur. When questioned about the duel 28 years after that tragic event, he replied: "Evil fate made me the instrument of Providence's will in Lermontov's death. I find myself unable to utter a single word of condemnation against him." (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 31 July 2001). Honest words. Nobody can really be completely certain about who had done what and why. The precise and responsible estimates can only concern that which was never done.

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Love as a yearning to change. Not as in "change into a bird" (or a cloud), but change within the framework, and in accordance with the logic of human evolution—what one may become by overcoming oneself, a superhuman. Hence one's identification with the heroic ethos as a passion oriented towards embracing one's own identity in one's divine half, likewise the Christian urge to become just as perfect as the Heavenly Father. The same is true for love between individuals as deification of the beloved person. Without this apparent folly, which, of course, is in fact authentic and felicitous enlightenment, there can be no love.

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Two aspects of morality are at odds with reality. First, it denies actual behavioral patterns as imperfect. Second, it establishes standards that cannot be met.

* * *

Andrey Tarkovsky. Excerpt from a diary (*Kontinent*. No. 57. Page 176).

"Decency is inherent in a person. *Morality* is external; an invention aimed at replacing decency. Where there is no decency, *morality* reigns supreme in its *misery* and *squalor*. Where there is decency, morality is extraneous." This view is shared by many thinking Russians and appears to express some primordial feature of Russian mentality. It may be explained by the fact that the Russians experience liberty as an internal phenomenon mainly—one that has somehow managed to coexist with outward servility in a very peculiar and often perfectly peaceful manner. The Russian craving for liberty has been satisfied by such islands of privacy as the famed "kitchen sessions" of the Russian intelligentsia in the 1960s—and this experience of inner liberty was cultivated by the representatives of this milieu. Incidentally, Tarkovsky, who lived abroad in the last years of his life, claimed that he had felt a greater personal freedom in the Soviet Union than he did in the West. This must be the context of his ascribing two different meanings to the words "decency" and "morality."

One might point out that, apart from Russian, another language to have a native word for "morality" is German (*Sittlichkeit*)—after all, Germans are also partial to introspection and prone to immersion into profound spiritual and intellectual concepts. Similarly, Germans were more interested in the absolute idea than in a separation of powers.

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Fate and luck. They doubtlessly affect an individual's life to an enormous extent. Some people are considered lucky, others, unlucky. If you flip a coin, you cannot predict whether it will come up heads or tails. You could speak here of luck. However, if you flip it a thousand times, tails will come up more or less as often as heads. The same rule applies to an individual's life. If we refer to certain short episodes or periods of life, we can definitely say that some people are lucky and others are not. However, if we consider one's life in the diversity of events that took place over a substantial stretch of time, the instances when we can say an individual has had good or bad luck ("heads" and "tails") will even each other out. Basically, it would be erroneous to claim that some have better luck than others. In general, people differ in their attitudes to lucks and misfortunes. It is just that some are capable of using a fortuitous occurrence (luck) to their advantage and pulling themselves together to get through periods of bad luck, and others are not. Fate is blind, and perhaps due to this fact it is just, like the goddess of justice. Rejecting it is as unwise as blaming it for one's misfortunes.

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When theologians declared divine foreordination an inconceivable mystery, they must have been guided by something beyond the necessity to adhere to formal consistency in their reasoning. The ethical aspect must have been equally important. What it represents is a de facto interdiction of giving anybody the right to divide people into chosen ones and everybody else. However, Calvinism goes against logic in this case and treads on dubious moral ground by proclaiming one's ability to believe that one has been chosen by God to be the supreme manifestation of faith. Why would that be? Could it be the contrary—the decline of faith? One might argue that the supreme manifestation of faith (faith in the absolute God) is one's refusal to make assumptions about being chosen by a higher power.

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Morality in social life is like air in biological life. No one notices or values it while it is there, but once it disappears, every link shatters and the society dies. It is in such moments, when everything falls apart, that people realize that their human existence is only possible in an environment where moral taboos are functioning.

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Hesiod (Works and Days, 1, 40): "Fools! They know not how much more the half is than the whole..." So laconic and so true! Aristotle's idea of justice as proportional equality only reiterates Hesiod's formulation; none of the subsequent political philosophers came up with anything better, nor could they. This truth is the only possible foundation for the entire theory of justice. Yet there are people who claim that philosophy has no axioms!

IV

Social laws and people's activities: this formula is fraught with the danger of social duplicity. How does one draw a line between conforming to objective historical laws and demagogical expatiation on history's behalf? Apparently, social laws cannot be interpreted as the basis that determines the course of people's activities, no matter how objective they might be. Such laws are the result of people's activities. This qualification (the result as opposed to the basis) might seem to be insignificant, and yet it is tremendously important. In this interpretation, the moral coordinates of individual human actions retain their value. At any rate, one can no longer justify moral crimes by reference to objective laws, historical logic etc.

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Totalitarianism is based on the idea that humans are good and decent (at least potentially so). Totalitarianism proceeds from the assumption that it is the environment that corrupts people, so it is that very environment that it seeks to transform in such a way that the very conditions of social life would be organized rationally enough to allow people to manifest their moral essence in an appropriate way. Democracy relies on the idea that humans are capable of evil, deeming it sufficient to merely hold the evil at bay by curbing the socially destructive facets of human behavior and removing the associated risks. As D. A., a professor from the USA, pointed out in a conversation with me, American democracy is held together by three levels of distrust: the citizens distrusting each other, the citizens distrusting the government and the various government branches distrusting one another.

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Someone who possesses the knowledge of social laws and uses them for reference in his own words and deeds is like a parapsychologist or a mage whose associates are invisible powers. What does a person with such knowledge of social laws feel? How can such a person exist? Someone of this sort would probably be unbearably arrogant from a moral point of view. In order to avoid this and keep whoever has the knowledge of the objective social laws morally sound, these laws should either be thoroughly immoral, enough so to make one anything but proud of this knowledge—or their moral nature must embrace, among other things, a ban on conceit.

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One should never try to reduce morality to politics and consider actual politics manifest as class struggle, liberalism, democracy and so on as a moral criterion. However, one should also be wary of narrowing politics down to morality and considering moral criteria as limitation of politics. Morality and politics are related in another manner, and this relation is of much greater complexity. It may conform to the model of the Hegelian nodal line of measures: water turns into ice at zero degrees centigrade, and, likewise, morality gives way to politics once we make a transition from the individual level to that of society. In this interpretation we may consider morality the politics of individual existence whereas politics would be the morality of a state and collective life.

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Anti-Semitism in the USA and the USSR: it is bad enough when people are worse than the state, and it is downright execrable when the state is worse than people.

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The polis as a qualitatively different condition from that of the tribe. One that is essentially different. Different in its underlying concepts. A polis does not replace a tribe—it relegates it to the domain of private life.

The most representative works of political philosophy of the modern age are the following two short books: Thomas More's *Utopia* and Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. More does not presuppose any distance between the being and the ought, thus elevating being to the level of ought. He postulates a moral political reality as something accomplished. Machiavelli does not presuppose any distance between them, either, since he relegates the ought to the level of being, thus demonstrating that political reality can only assert itself (or be successful) if it is immoral. Could these two extremes be but different projections of the same process of alienation between the individual and the state put into practice by Western Christianity ("Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's")?

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Vittorio Hösle writes the following in his enormous monograph that is over a thousand pages long (*Moral und Politik*. München, 1997. S. 192): "Even someone who considers the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki egregiously immoral could not judge Leó Szilárd for urging Einstein to write the famous letter to Roosevelt about the necessity of researching nuclear weapons." Such amazing omniscience! The meaning of the phrase is also strange enough—for does it make a great difference when somebody blames or condemns somebody else? Morality is concerned with other matters. Besides, there have been in fact plenty of accusations heaped upon both scientists.

He also writes that Gorbachev was wrong to have declined to sign the New Union Treaty in the first half of 1991 and that Shimon Peres made a mistake by deciding to hold the election in May 1996 (it is presumed that he would have done better to hold them immediately after Yitzhak Rabin's assassination or somewhat later, so as to get the peace process underway in due time). How can a philosopher make such claims?! What qualifies him to utter such things? Why can not he conceive that if Gorbachev and Peres had followed his retroactive advice, the consequences they both had to face could have been even direr? Indeed, one should not write any lengthy books.

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Violence is morally tolerable when it is impersonal, that is why it is put into such shape in the state.

* * *

Defectors are very often those who had once professed their undying love for their motherland and urged everybody else to do the same. Obviously enough, this does not mean that they defected because they professed their patriotism. And it certainly should not mean that anyone who appeals to patriotism is a likely defector. But how does one distinguish between the two—real patriotism and the hypocritical variety? Also, is one always aware of being sincere in one's moral attitudes and not lying? Perhaps it would make sense to issue an outright ban on making any claims on behalf of the motherland or the "truly patriotic." Will we love our motherland less if we stop demanding that everybody else should profess their patriotism in public?

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The place of morality in politics is where issues are solved by vote, and where decisions are made by people who sign them with their own names. It has no place where the decisions are taken by competent authority, in accordance to instructions and the laws of professional bureaucratic routine—in each of those cases the only manifestation of morality is in that it is not taken into consideration.

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When one calls politics a dirty business, one makes a negative recognition of the priority of morality over politics.

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Appeals to moral arguments in order to justify violence are but rationalization for a prior decision that violence be used as a means of help. They are nothing but putting a brave face in a sorry business. Intellectual considerations are rather insubstantial in this case. They merely serve a *modus operandi* that serves certain interests. Non-violence is thoroughly different—it can only establish itself as a morally substantiated and consciously chosen position. Of course, violent resistance to injustice and violence used in defence of what one holds true also require an inner effort, but their spiritual and intellectual charge is essentially inferior to the profound internal transformation associated with the ethics of non-violence.

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Morality and politics. Any solution of the problem of how they are related depends on one's definition of politics first and foremost. If we regard it as the technology of power, or a species of management techniques, it may well do without morality (or, at any rate, require it in just about the same extent as any other professional activity). It is an altogether different matter if politics is imbued with an existential meaning and viewed as a worthy organization of life. This will make politics an *a priori* morally charged phenomenon in and of itself.

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Priests consecrate weapons, give their blessings to wars and other violent actions taken by the state. One can justify their behavior in a variety of ways. Thereby they act as good citizens. The only thing I find myself thoroughly unable to understand is how they can do it and consider themselves Christians (and followers of Jesus Christ). How can one proceeding from perfectly clear and unambiguous assumptions such as non-resistance to evil by force or forgiveness of one's enemies construct a line of reasoning that leads to the justification of violence as a means of opposing evil and giving no quarter to the enemy?! I understand it as insulting the thought.

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Yury Andropov claimed that we lacked the knowledge of our own society in reference to the USSR. We can rephrase it today and say that we lack the knowledge of the society that we used to live in. The most amazing thing is that no one really wants to know—neither those who sport red banners and loudly proclaim the necessity of restoring this outstanding system to its former glory, nor indeed the ones who call it a nightmare that needs to be forgotten. The Soviet system seems to conceal some secret that may never be touched, similar to the tree of knowledge. Could this social system have perished as a result of the attempts to learn its true nature?

The fate of Aleksandr Zinovyev and his scientific theory of Soviet communism is most illustrative in this respect. He was originally accused of slandering the Soviet system and found himself in the camp of those who opposed it. Later on he was claimed to be an advocate of the Soviet system and became lumped together with the revivalists. Zinovyev himself made a great effort to maintain that he was neither for, nor against the Soviet system, and tried to get it across that he was a researcher. He told the former group that he had never considered himself a dissident and that the destruction of Soviet communism had never been his scientific or existential goal. He told the latter group that he had never been a Marxist and that the victory of the Soviet communism in the Cold War would have had much graver consequences than the victory of the West. Neither group heeded what he said. Essentially, both groups did not understand him, because they did not want to understand.

Could it be indeed that some things are best left untouched by the scalpel of knowledge?

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Why is Themis portrayed with her eyes closed? Does it mean that it is indifferent to her whether the plaintiff is right or the defendant? That she is equally dispassionate to both? But in this case she would not have to close her eyes. A more reasonable explanation is that she is compassionate and it hurts and grieves her to pronounce a judgement, no matter who happens to be guilty.

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The *Rossiya* newspaper conducted a New Year poll for 2001 where a number of people were asked about the toast they would propose to the President on the New Year's Eve. One of the participants of the survey was Senya, a homeless man from the Three Stations Square in Moscow. His response was: “A toast to Russia: may it survive.” No one can really tell whether Senya was being ironic or whether he spoke in earnest.

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People tame animals—cats, bears, even tigers. An interesting phenomenon, to be sure, and a riveting sight, first and foremost. A tame animal can also be useful—an acquaintance of mine had a dog that would bring his slippers over. But there is also a concealed moral lesson here. Quickness of wit and other adaptive qualities are present in animals as well, and do not make us any different from them.

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Human beings are fundamentally alone—this is how they come into this world and how they depart from it. At the same time, they cannot live without other human beings. They have such physical needs as food, such emotional needs as consolation and such spiritual needs as an interlocutor. Children need adults, young people need their partners, and old people need someone to take care of them. The entire history of human culture can be interpreted as a search for the optimal forms of compatibility between the solitude of human beings and the ways they relate to other humans. Primitive gregariousness and modern individualism are two poles of this process. Philosophers are talking a lot about dialogue, communication, the other, otherness etc. Could it be that the problem has some easier solution, which is encoded in the Russian language, where the words "the other" (*drugoy)* and friend (*drug*) have the same stem? The other has to become a friend.

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An aristocrat is a morally self-sufficient entity. He asserts himself in the unconditional nature of his aristocratic dignity. He knows that he is made of pure gold. Nietzsche said you could tell one by his very bearing. He will not let himself become abased and he will never let anybody else get elevated above him. He has a whip for those below and a rapier for whoever would affront him. He chases the former away and duels with the latter, and that is how he protects his very nature of an aristocrat. Could the actual ability to behave in this fashion be the quintessential attribute of aristocracy? Aristocracy may have met its demise when one started to look for its other attributes besides the above.

Translated by Mikhail Yagupov