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Ethics and Its Place in Philosophy

Abdusalam GUSEYNOV

Abstract. This article considers the place of ethics in philosophy. It shows that in accordance with the prevalent trend in European thought, ethics is a peripheral (secondary, derivative) part of philosophy in relation to ontology and epistemology. This approach rules out the justification of the idea of morality as a primary and unconditional value, and makes it impossible to identify it in its difference from related phenomena. The mid-19th century marked a watershed as ethics turned from the teaching of morality into its criticism. The author argues that morality is the basis of conscious human activity and ethics is the first philosophy. This approach has been proposed in Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of the act.

Keywords: ethics, morality, philosophy, Sophists, Socrates, Nietzsche, M. Bakhtin, responsibility.

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The subject of philosophy has been a point of contention since its inception. Summing up the opinions of the ancients on this matter Sextus Empiricus writes that some reduced it to the physical part, others to ethics, still others to the logical part; some distinguished two parts: physical and ethical; physical and logical; ethical and logical. He is inclined to go along with those who “agreed in dividing it into the physical, the logical, and the ethical parts” [12, p. 3]. This idea was first put forward by Plato and was elaborated by the Peripatetics and Stoics to become an established philosophical tradition. “Hence they implausibly compare philosophy with a garden covered in fruit, so that the physical part can be likened to the height of the plants, the ethical part to the succulence of the fruits, and the logical part to the strength of the walls. Others say that it is like an egg; for

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ethics is like the yolk, which some people say is the chick, physics is like the white, which is food for the yolk, and logic is like the outside shell. But since the parts of philosophy are inseparable from one another, whereas plants are considered distinct from their fruit and walls are separate from plants, Posidonius thought it more appropriate to liken philosophy to an animal, the physical part being likened to blood and flesh, the logical part to bones and sinews, and the ethical part to soul [12, p. 6]. Descartes later added to this imagery by likening philosophy to a tree whose roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics and branches are all the other sciences, above all medicine, mechanics and ethics. Within this triple division of philosophy which has become established in the history of philosophical thought and, according to Kant, is exhaustive, the substantive point of contention is which part of philosophy is the principal part and how it relates to the other parts. In my opinion, this is also the key question for understanding the current situation in ethics which has problems with its philosophical birthright and is often (in academic courses and monographs) unable to answer or even to raise the question of why it is considered a philosophical science.

* * *

A symposium published several years ago under the title *Morality: Diversity of Concepts and Meanings* [10] had more than forty specialists (ethics professors) from many countries answer the question, "What is morality?" Opinions turned out to be so disparate and often opposite as if they were not studying morality but guessing what it was. The only thing they all agreed on was that ethics has to do with morality and is anchored in morality. This statement, though short on substance, especially if we bear in mind that ethics and morality etymologically mean the same thing, can provide the starting point for a discussion of the modern state of ethical theory. The link between ethics and morality, however it is interpreted, is not open to question, and it is important for revealing the specificity of ethics. Ethics answers the question: what is morality? And it goes on to say what one should do in order to be moral in the frame of reference that it fixes. The central issue confronting ethics and its *raison d'être* was thus formulated by Kant: what must I do? This is not a Kantian question, but Kant expressed in a concise and lapidary form the main concern of ethics in all its varieties. It is not by chance that with Kant it is the second in the series of basic philosophical questions, which is in line with the prevalent European intellectual tradition. The first question is: what can I know? In fact it means *what must I do on the basis of what I can know?* Presumably a person is faced with this question under certain circumstances when he is of two minds, is ambivalent as to his wishes, in short when a person faces a choice that can be made on the basis of knowledge and rational weighing of various options.

It is essential that in this perspective the question *what must I do?* is perceived not as the ultimate question, but as an ordinary question which one person—who finds himself in a situation of uncertainty and does not see a way out of it—addresses to another person, someone who has the knowledge and competence to

answer it. In this case the ethicist, who deals with moral problems professionally (on behalf of science) acts as the knowledgeable person, the specialist capable of telling truth from delusion.

Philosophy in its ethical part formulates certain normative programs bolstered by the authority of knowledge. These are well known. If you take, say, modern ethics as it is represented in the Western countries and reflected in Russian literature, the prevailing traditions are ethics of virtues, utilitarianism, Kantianism. Over the course of its history philosophy has put forward many other ethical programs, each offering a generalized image of moral and proper (decent) behavior. These ideas are diverse and often challenge and contradict one another, as for example, the Epicurean and Stoic normative traditions. But they still have something in common, which is why we refer to them as philosophical-ethical traditions. I would like to make a point of this. They are one in that they consider the activity of studying morality referred to since Aristotle as practical philosophy, which in a sense is a synonym of philosophical ethics, to be secondary, a derivative of theoretical philosophy. Be that as it may, it is not the first philosophy. Practical philosophy, ethics, follows the teaching about being and epistemology. Each philosophy, proceeding from its own analysis of how people behave and what they end up with, prescribes a reasonable and therefore the best line of behavior. They are all guided by the same logic: deriving what is to be done from the knowledge of what is. This approach to ethics does not merely permit, but in a way even obliges philosophy to act as a teacher of human virtue. Even analytical philosophy stays within the framework of this philosophical tradition, as it argues that it is impossible to pass on from what is to what should be, thus denying morality the status of true knowledge; it considers the impossibility of determining true morality as the truth that paves the way for moral pluralism.

This view of morality, which is a kind of 'theoriticism' considering its objects as if they were objects of the external world, makes morality one of the spheres (areas) of the external world. It covers the world of human acts in their objectified, externally fixed shape and, most importantly, not the whole world of acts, but only a certain part of it. In addition, it is divided within itself according to the criteria of good and evil (virtue and vice) which is an extension (a case) of the epistemological criterion of truth and delusion. This creates a problem. How to isolate morality, separating it from the totality of what a person does and, within morality itself, separate good from evil—this has been and remains one of the main stumbling blocks of ethics. All theoretical traditions face this problem. Take, for instance, the elementary (and therefore inevitable) ethical question which still has no universally proven and recognized solution: what is man morally responsible for? Is it assumed that man is not responsible for all his actions? If so, what actions? Or take the Aristotelian problem of separating voluntary actions from involuntary ones, and whether voluntariness is reason enough for ethical imputation. Another way of referring to the same difficulty is the concept of an ethically neutral zone introduced by the Stoics. Where are its boundaries? One may recall the Russian discussions about morality in the 1960s and 1970s: one line of

theoretical inquiry, which sought to identify morality as a special phenomenon different from other forms of social regulation, above all from law and custom, proved to be an uphill task scholastically, at the abstract level, and an impossible task at the empirical level. The above differences among specialists in defining morality also reflect and are an inevitable consequence of the same wish to specify morality as a distinct area of human activity.

The difficulties of identifying morality stem, in my opinion, from the very approach to morality as something secondary, derivative, from the wish to explain and objectify it. This has become particularly apparent in recent times, when people's moral perceptions have changed dramatically, becoming broader and, as it were, more blurred, losing their normative certainty. According to many modern ideas, the sphere of morality includes animals and even plants. This is not only about the way we treat them, but also about conferring a moral status on them. I recently read in a legal book that Germany has passed a law that bans zoophilia on the grounds that it puts the animal in an unnatural position. This concept goes beyond the framework of ethical normative programs which consider morality to be a *modus vivendi* of rational creatures. Another striking example of changing morality that puts into question the prevalent theoretical schemes in ethics, has to do with the avalanche-like development of applied ethics. I would like to point out just two things: applied ethics has effectively broken out of the framework of philosophical theories and is increasingly being practiced outside their context: in it morality is equated to feasibility and good decisions in concrete spheres of activity.

The idea I am here trying to put across is that the present-day state of ethics, theoretical ethics, philosophical ethics associated with the names of Aristotle, Kant, John Stuart Mill and others, is not sufficient to explain the new moral reality. I am not suggesting that the task is to develop, elaborate and tailor to new realities the main ethical teachings and normative programs. The challenge is to rethink the very foundations on which they were built. A different practical philosophy is needed. A practical philosophy which, while being a moral teaching, is at the same time a teaching of being. In other words, a moral philosophy with a status of first philosophy. Before passing on to the modern and still not fully digested experience, to Mikhail Bakhtin's moral philosophy of the act, a cursory look needs to be taken at the history of the place of ethics within philosophy.

* * *

Early philosophers are commonly thought of as philosophers of nature. The 5th century BC saw a dramatic pivot of philosophical thought which can arguably be called the discovery of man. It was brought home to people that the laws of conscious human activity are fundamentally different from the laws of nature. This pivot was effected by the Sophists and their bold teachings.

Before the Sophist philosophers, usually referred to as Presocratics, considered nature as a single whole, including man, or rather, not excluding man from nature as if he were "a state within a state," as Benedict Spinoza put it. This did

not mean that the ancient philosophers reduced humans to the level of other objects, things and irrational creatures. On the contrary, philosophers sought to understand nature in such a way as to find a place for and explanation of man with his quest for perfection, his reason in quest of the immortal basis (primary basis) of nature which is behind all the things that appear and vanish while itself remaining unchanged. Philosophy (Ancient Greek philosophy, of course) arises as a new intellectual ethos which replaces the heroic ethos, without casting it aside, without giving up its goals, but on the contrary, offering a more adequate way for human nature to fulfill itself. The essence of the heroic ethos was to become like divine ancestors and, since heroes could not do so in the literal sense because they were separated from the gods by an impenetrable wall of their mortality, they tried to be like gods in their acts, following all the precepts of their divine protectors and elevating their wishes to the level of these precepts, thus turning their deeds into feats, into what makes them great and sets them apart from the common run of men. Philosophers inherited from the heroes their yearning for the divine, the great, the ideal of immortality, only unlike the heroes, they put the stake not on bravery and strength, but on reason and knowledge. They set the task of understanding nature in itself, the mystery of its being which may explain man's quest for perfection and which he may achieve by partaking of nature. When Heraclitus sought the logos of nature, establishing its identity with the logos of man and when, as he relates in one of his fragments, he sought himself, he was grappling with the same task. When Anaximander discovers the general turnover of things, he sees that as the basis for justice as an inevitable equal retribution. When Parmenides drew a distinction between the fluid world of opinions and the immutable world of truth and cut these two worlds apart as if with a sword, saying that being is and non-being is not, and identified the limitless "boundaries" of being, adding that being and thinking are the same thing, he was indulging the inquisitiveness of a young man seeking the road of truth. When Empedocles created his image of being as stretching and contracting between Love and Strife like a swing moving alternately in opposite directions, he sought a way of inner purification that connects man with the ontological element of love, as happened to himself when, as legend has it, at the peak of his spiritual powers he stepped into fire-breathing Etna as if into eternity. All of them, Heraclitus, Anaximander, Parmenides and Empedocles, set forth their teaching in works under the same title, *On Nature*. In other words, for the early Greek philosophers, the teaching of nature and the teaching of man were one and the same teaching.

The Sophists broke with that tradition. Moreover, they overturned it through the thesis of their forefather, Protagoras, who maintained that "Man is the measure of all things." The Sophists found that unlike all the natural processes which proceed in all individuals inexorably and uniformly, human institutions (emanating from individuals and mediated by their reason, knowledge and decisions) are arbitrary and relative. They are arbitrary because they do not stem from the essence of things and are not necessary. Antiphon the Sophist argued that if an olive cutting is planted in the soil, an olive tree would grow out of it, but if a bench

made from olive is planted, again an olive tree, but not a bench may (or may not) grow out of it. What turned an olive into a bench is accidental, ephemeral, it may or may not have happened: indeed, a bench does not follow from an olive, which could be used to make many other things or to make none. Human actions are relative: what some people consider to be good others may see as evil, and in general people tend to contradict one another, cultivate “double arguments,” to use the title of a book by an anonymous Sophist. The Protagoras thesis has an elaborating sequel: Man is the measure of existing things that they exist and non-existing things that they do not exist, he is the measure of existence, of being. The Sophists likened Man’s position in the world to the position of people in a besieged city: they know only what happens within the city walls and are ignorant of what happens outside its walls. Human judgments, they argued, do not represent objective truth; they are accidental and subjective. Because they contain no truth, they are valuable not in themselves, but on account of their consequences, the benefits, gains, and pleasures the person who possesses these judgments derives for himself. Therefore man should learn the skills of thinking and speaking, putting both in the service of his interests. Relativism, instrumentalization of truth was directed in the first place towards such ideas and concepts as good, virtue, justice, etc. which later came to be referred to as moral and to be treated as the reference point, a kind of common denominator of what people considered most valuable. The Sophists vehemently denied the unconditional value of these concepts and ideas, arguing that they were valuable not in themselves, but solely due to the benefits that accrued through them. The first to charge considerable fees for instruction in virtue (let us note as matter of curiosity that the best of them charged 100 mines for a course, which was equivalent to the cost of two country estates or a flock of 1000 sheep), they enjoyed huge success instructing people in how to use speech and logical tricks and rhetorical gimmicks to win court cases, get the better of an opponent in an argument, and make a convincing case even when one was wrong.

The teachings of the Sophists, who prized above all the good of the individual, reduced virtue to individual benefit, strength, success, dominance in relations with other individuals, were directed against the polis. They undermined the common ethical basis of the Athenian city-state which was the main arena of their public activities. This line, originated by Protagoras of Abdera, was opposed by Socrates. Socrates shared with the Sophists the concentration on man as the primary, main and worthy object of philosophical inquiry in his own right. But he opposed their relativist moral attitudes. He believed that common ideas of virtue recognized by all reasonable people and underpinning the life of the polis were not conventions, but had a solid epistemological basis. According to Socrates, virtue is knowledge. It is so intimately connected with truth that deliberate (conscious) evil is impossible, and if it were possible then, according to a famous paradox, it would be preferable to unwitting evil. When Socrates says, man cannot knowingly perpetrate evil, this assertion has the same status as Zeno’s aporia. Conscious evil is impossible logically, within the rational view of man. Socrates reduced philosophy to ethics.

His world view was based on the conviction that virtue and justice as its equivalent were the truth and were values in their own right and not because they were associated with various benefits, corporeal or physical goods. They are the main concern of reason. For Socrates, a virtuous life is identical to a reasonable life. To understand the main thrust of his philosophizing one has only to compare his position in the *Alcibiades I* dialog with the approach of Prodicus the Sophist in his work *Choice of Heracles*. Both speak to a youth on the threshold of adulthood. But how different are their messages! Socrates helped Alcibiades to concentrate on himself, to think and proceed from himself, to take care of his soul, reason as its most valuable part and not to be concerned with what he has or possesses. With Prodicus, virtue and vice embodied by two women who are calling Heracles, tell him about the consequences, costs and benefits that would accrue to him depending on the path he chooses.

Having set himself the aim of understanding virtue, Socrates embarked on a road that, if followed consistently, could have ended in anything but his other famous paradox: The only thing I know is that I know nothing. Indeed, what engages his mind when he seeks to understand virtue? Not the question as to whether virtue as the supreme human good exists for its own sake being the most valuable human state. And not the question of why one should be virtuous. He does not question one or the other. A person in his sane mind will not ask the question whether virtue exists and why he should be virtuous. It is as if he began to wonder whether reason exists and why he should be reasonable. For Socrates, virtue is not an unknown X; in asking the question, he already knows that virtue is the best state of man in its own right and that all people seek to be virtuous because they seek the best for themselves. All he wants is to understand and prove the need for virtue. He seeks to understand virtue, to work out the concept of virtue. He seeks to shore up the moral conviction that all people share as reasonable beings with the power of logical coercion. Already the ancients (Sextus Empiricus, for example) believed that Socrates had reduced philosophy to ethics. Indeed, to him knowing virtue is not one type of knowledge, it is knowledge in the proper sense of the world, the knowledge that expresses the reasonableness of existence and is identical to wisdom for the sake of which philosophy exists. In identifying virtue with knowledge Socrates does not just reduce virtue to knowledge, but by the same token elevates knowledge to the level of virtue. For a philosopher who has become immersed in the world of knowledge in order to find the path to wisdom, nothing is more important than knowing virtue, just as in real life nothing is more important than virtue. For Socrates, knowing virtue means to chart a dependent on human being intellectual path toward it. By identifying virtue and knowledge, Socrates comes to the conclusion that he knows nothing, considering not knowing to be the only certain knowledge that he has. For, if the philosopher's only worthwhile knowledge is the knowledge of virtue, then the claim of possessing knowledge would amount to claiming that he is virtuous. But Socrates could not claim to be virtuous either as a person or as a philosopher: as a person he could not do it out of modesty, as a philosopher, because it was logically

impossible. Where knowledge is the criterion of virtue, virtue itself can consist only in being conscious of not knowing. This brings up a question that is critical for understanding the link between epistemology and ethics: if knowledge of virtue is confirmed by the virtuousness of him who knows, does it not mean that it is not knowledge that is the criterion of virtue, but on the contrary, virtue itself is the criterion of knowledge? And does not reason turn from a source of virtue into an organ designed to explain the truth it contains?

According to Aleksey Losev, Socrates belittled truth by demanding proof. Socrates, of course, was dedicated to truth which to him was identical with virtue, but by questioning it and throwing on the scales of reason which is accountable only to itself, he did not only claim philosophy's exclusive rights to ethics, but admitted that ethics could be pushed to the periphery of philosophy and become subordinate to epistemology. This possibility was implemented in the framework of a full-fledged philosophy by his disciple Plato and disciple-once-removed, Aristotle. Both with Plato and Aristotle, ethics is one of the areas (parts) of philosophy. This is particularly apparent with Aristotle who was the first to systemize ethics as a distinct philosophical science and gave it its name. Without going into detail, it would suffice to say that ethics in his system of knowledge is not first philosophy; it belongs to the second tier and is built as an objective analysis of the moral aspect of human activity proceeding from the knowledge of man's specific nature distinguishing him from other living creatures. Plato and Aristotle had already separated knowledge and virtue and charted the path of the movement of philosophical thought from the knowledge of what exists in the world and what man is like to the meaning of virtuous existence and what man should do to be virtuous.

It has to be stressed however that in their case, along with ethics in the narrow sense of the word as the teaching of human virtues and vices, we may talk about ethics in the broad sense, a supra-ethic considering that philosophical systems in general, and their teaching of being, are predetermined as moral ones. This is obvious in the case of Plato, whose world of ideas is not only the first world, but also the best and model world in which the idea of good occupies the central place like the sun in the sky. In Aristotle, we find the idea of two eudemonies, the first (highest) eudemony representing superhuman, almost divine activity of reason aimed at contemplation of pure entities, the first principles. In my opinion, the supra-ethical perspective of ethics in philosophy which can be compared to the otherworldly prospect of earthly life in theology, attests on the one hand, to the philosophical status of ethics, and on the other, to the ethical charge of philosophy. What I call supra-ethical perspective is one manifestation of the moral pathos of ideal aspiration of philosophy characteristic of all its greatest versions. For philosophy is not merely interested in what being is in itself (in that case it would be science or would not exist at all because it is impossible to speak within a scientific frame of reference about being in itself as something elusive and limitless, and at best something we know); it seeks to tease out of being an explanation of how it is possible and what is the meaning of the existence of man with his reason, thirst for knowledge, unlimited quest of self-perfection even to the point of

cracking the mystery of being and becoming part of it. The very existence of the ethical perspective as a necessary (working) element of the ethical system as its final framing and logical conclusion is an indirect recognition of the fact that ethics displaced to the periphery of philosophy and made dependent on the teaching of being and epistemology cannot adequately express the moral foundation of human existence.

In later antique philosophy, ethics is a special part that is secondary to physics (ontology). It formulates normative programs of virtuous living established in philosophy and, more broadly, in European culture. They are correlated and justified by corresponding general philosophical views of the world. Stoic staunchness and ataraxy in the face of any vicissitudes of fate that enable the virtuous man to remain inwardly calm, even faced with the need to eat human flesh or in a situation of a world conflagration, is explained and justified by the fact that he, a stoical virtuous individual, has adequately fathomed the nature of Cosmos, which is always reasonable and inexorable in its actions; a stoic is endowed not with human reason, but with cosmic reason. The ethical ideal of nonchalance of the Pyrrho school of skepticism is a direct and automatic consequence of their method of suspending judgment. The possibility of Epicurus' ethics is given in his ontology where, along with necessity and accident, there are also niches of freedom, while blissful life seen as ataraxy is achieved through the knowledge of what depends on us, namely, thanks to a correct understanding of the negative nature of pleasure and an enlightened reason which proves the imaginary nature of our fears, including the fear of death. In accordance with the subjective logic of late Antiquity thinkers ethics is derived from teachings of nature, but there is nothing to prevent us from asserting that in reality they interpret nature in such a way as to be able to derive from it the ideal of an inwardly free and self-sufficient individual. The ethical teachings of that era are also informed by a supra-ethical goal (Epicurean ataraxy, Stoical and skeptical apathy, divine ecstasy of Neo-Platonists) which is complete virtue.

All these ethical programs had at least two features that present special interest in the context of the relationship between philosophical ethics and morality. The first feature is that the subject of virtuous behavior in them is the philosopher, he alone can draw the line between virtue and vice and follow the virtuous path. Thus morality turns out to be an intellectual luxury because only a wise man, whose image looms large in ethical teachings of the period, can become a virtuous man and achieve a blissful and autotelic state. Wise men were rare: for example Chrysippus named just two (Socrates and Zeno), and Seneca said they were born once every five hundred years, like the Phoenix. No longer is the sphere of virtue explained or grounded by philosophy, rather it is mediated by philosophy and therefore is greatly contracted. In such interpretation ethics is not a spin-off of philosophy into practice, but the practice of philosophy itself. The withdrawal of philosophical ethics into itself was highlighted in the system of Plotinus, which crowns antique thought and represents ethical practice, the path of virtuous purification and reunion with Good.

The second feature is linked with the first and consists in the fact that in viewing ethics as the continuation of physics and finding in nature grounds for the individual's self-sufficient virtuous existence, philosophers ignored the social dimension of man which played the key role in the teachings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They interpreted virtue as man's individual concern, as a kind of epiphenomenon of his intellectual and spiritual development. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus said: "As Antonius my city and fatherland is Rome, as a human being it is the universe" [7, p. 48]; in reality, philosophers seeking a virtuous way of life looked to the world ignoring the city. Of course, compared with the world, meaning Cosmos, Rome is infinitesimally small, but the path to it, to the world, goes through Rome and it is not so easy to pass through it. In a (probably apocryphal) text Anaximenes says: "How then can Anaximenes any longer think of studying the heavens when threatened with destruction or slavery?" [4, p. 235]. Destruction and slavery were even more of a danger in Rome than in Miletus. How to ensure that there is no destruction and slavery in Rome is a question that philosophers sidestepped at the tail end of Antiquity. They did not have a credible argument why there should be no killings, not to mention other moral norms. They could not find an answer to such questions either in physics or in logic.

The answer came from a totally different direction: from Christian religion and theology, which offered their own understanding of the world, man and life goals rooted in God's creative and providential activity. Morality was declared to be an absolute value in its own right and was expressed in unconditional terms bequeathed and communicated through a revelation by God Himself. The task of the people is to believe what God said, adopt his law and follow it. Morality is not simply from God. This sentence does not say much about morality because in the framework of religious logic everything is from God; it is from God as something that has inherent value in itself, a primary and most important value for man. This meant that morality, being a law of faith, is not the consequence and result of human reason and knowledge, but their beginning and foundation. An equally decisive answer was given to another problematic question as to who could direct man toward the road of virtue: spiritual pastors who are descended from the Lord Jesus Christ and stand guard on His commandments. Thus were cut all the knots in which ethical teachings had become entangled: God in place of Being, Faith in place of Reason, priests in place of philosophers.

Post-Antique philosophy developed in tandem (alliance) with theology (was thought to be its maidservant); their roles were distributed as follows: metaphysics and ethics became part of theology, leaving to philosophy technical servicing of theology, logical and methodological problems, and mobilization of human Reason to interpret and prove the truths revealed by God. However hamstrung was philosophy by the ideological framework of religion, old problems resurfaced on a new soil; reason of its very nature is a seducer and apparently it cannot deal with any object without putting it into question. Because the unconditional moral law had divine status, philosophers were faced with the question: has it been given by God because it is moral, or is it moral because it has been given by God?

In other words, is God himself constrained by moral law? The medieval alternative between faith and reason (“I believe to understand” and “I understand to believe”) had to do with the driving forces of morality because it was thought that God gave Man the moral law to take or leave. If it is a matter of free choice, reasonable choice, decision and the effort of the individual’s will, how to tell a situation when he acts in a way that pleases God from a situation when he considers that what he does pleases God? In other words, superficial positing of morality presented as an unassailable law, even if it has to do with God, generates insoluble problems because it contradicts the concept of morality as a self-sufficient and free individual act. Not surprisingly, Medieval philosophy in many ways drew on Antique schemes on matters of the structure of philosophy and the place of ethics in its structure. Thus, according to Thomas Aquinas, the basis of philosophical knowledge is the category of order: nature philosophy deals with the order of things, rational philosophy with the order of reason’s own concepts, moral philosophy with the order of volitional actions, mechanics with the order of objects created by man’s intelligent activity.

Modern philosophy is post-Medieval, confirming the view that in philosophy “post-” always also means “anti-.” Now it develops in tandem with science and in confrontation with theology, while philosophers are often themselves scientists, just as in former times they were monks. Philosophy abandons the idea of transcendental moral entities and seeks a rational explanation of morality as the business of man, taking it out of the natural and social reality. For all that, it does not give up the Socratic tradition that considers morality to be an unconditional value and ethics “the highest and most perfect” science [3, p. 186]. That already was fraught with a contradiction between method and teaching. On the one hand, ethics was seen as a science derived from other areas of knowledge and explained through them: according to Francis Bacon, it is part of the science of man that studies will; according to Thomas Hobbes, it should follow geometry and physics and be based on them; René Descartes deferred the formulation of ethical rules until other sciences had provided complete knowledge. At the same time it was considered to be first in importance, while morality and its subject matter were invested with unconditional meaning. This was reminiscent of the logic of the madman in Jaroslav Hašek’s *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War*, who argued that the earth was a sphere inside which was a still bigger sphere.

Philosophers were unable to make two ends of morality meet and explain how, being a freely expressed individual act, it is at the same time an objective universally binding law. If it is a consequence, a continuation of natural and social processes, then why does it exist only in the form of free expression of individual will? If it is a product of free expression of individual will, where does its categorically binding normative content come from? Kant claimed to be the first to determine that on matters of morality “the human being... was subject *only to his own* and yet *universal legislation*” [6, p. 50]. Kant pinpointed the problem with which ethics was wrestling. As for his own solution, in order to make ends

meet Kant had to divide man and, along with the phenomenal, empirical, external man, to posit an inner man anchored in the noumenal world of freedom in which morality is rooted. As he (probably rightly) saw it, morality is causality out of freedom. By identifying freedom and the practical (moral) law which mutually refer to and justify one another, he nevertheless admitted that man cannot comprehend how pure reason becomes practical reason or, to put it another way, how morality is possible.

Another problem at the focus of Modern ethical reflections, which is linked with its basically naturalistic methodology (naturalistic in the broad sense, including its sociological version) was the problem of the functioning of morality in a classless civil society. An answer had to be given to the question of what can guarantee the moral cohesion of society in the absence of direct (especially religious and church) tutelage. In other words, how is society's moral unity achieved considering that morality addresses the individual's reason and consciousness and is each time a form of individual responsibility, how to get individuals, while acting freely on the basis of their personal resolve, nevertheless follow common moral norms. Seeking an answer to this question, philosophers, on the one hand, invoke utility, individuals' awareness of the link between their own good and the good of other people, and on the other hand, directly fall back on education, laws, jurisprudence and the state. In both cases the argument runs in the same way: individual virtuous behavior relies on an external source, is guaranteed by a morally sound social system oriented toward the common good by the communal environment. This landed thinkers in a trap because the social environment geared to the common good has to be created by someone: if good laws lead to good mores, how can good laws be made if there are no good mores; if a legal system is possible that would guarantee legal behavior that meets moral canons. Even if people are devilish, where is the good angel who can guarantee such a morally sound legal system? This is a train of thought that is oblivious of the fact that, as Marx put it, "it is essential to educate the educator himself" [8], and inevitably ends up dividing society into the knowing and the unknowing, the good and the bad.

In line with my general reasoning, I would thus formulate the Modern philosophy lesson: ethics sitting on one branch of the philosophical tree cannot hold on to the tree. This is highlighted by the intellectual experience of Hegel whose grandiose system crowns the Modern era. Hegel, treating morality not only as a subjective principle of "ought," but also as an objective state, not only as an individual characteristic, but also as a characteristic of society, assumes that the individual becomes a personality and asserts himself as a subject only in society, in a state. The state, to use Hegel's own manner of expression, is the individual truth, embodying universal will, what is reasonable in itself and for itself in will, in it morality becomes real, turning into the ethical way of life. Taking advantage of the presence, in German, as indeed in Russian, of two terms, "morality" and "ethical order" (*Moralität*, *Sittlichkeit*) Hegel invests them with different meanings, fixing two aspects of reality with which ethics deals: morality refers to the subjective aspect, individual imperatives, while *Sittlichkeit* is the universal way

of life of individuals; moral categories include premeditation, guilt, good, conscience while *Sittlichkeit* categories are family, the civil society and the state. In Hegel's system the concept of *Sittlichkeit* denotes, I believe, the supra-ethical perspective of ethics. Considering that according to Hegel, morality becomes real through "ethical order" which is the idea of the state, it would be no exaggeration to say that ethics as a distinct discipline is put into question. Was it a result or a verdict? In any case it marked a watershed beyond which the very subject of ethics changed substantially.

The change consisted in the following. From a science of morality which accepts it as a given and sees its task in understanding, explaining and justifying it, ethics turned into a critique of morality seeking to expose and discredit it. The pivot from apologia to criticism, from love to hatred was dramatically indicated by the founders of Marxism and by Friedrich Nietzsche (not only by them, but they did it in the most definite and sharp form). It can be described as an anti-normativistic turn. What was criticized and negated was precisely what previous ethics struggled to solve, namely the idea of morality as an inherently valuable and unquestioned norm given to Man as a canon of conscious life activity. The very idea was declared to be false.

Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* declare that "the communists do not preach *morality* at all" [9], do not oppose altruism with egoism or egoism with altruism, believing that both, under certain circumstances, are necessary forms of self-assertion of individuals. Looked at from this angle morality is a false form of social consciousness intended to elevate the will of the ruling class to the level of universal will and to keep the working masses in spiritual bondage. It was assumed that revolutionary action aimed at communist transformation of society, as communism itself interpreted as practical humanism, rendered morality redundant and harmful as a supra-individual form of consciousness. The nihilistic position with regard to morality was subsequently adjusted, elaborated and moderated in the works of the founders of Marxism and their followers to morph into a tradition of Marxist ethics (see Section VII, 2 in [5]), but that is another question.

Nietzsche rejects morality as the greatest falsehood and as a disgrace. He considers morality to be a form of slavish consciousness, hypocritical through and through, an apology of weakness, self-poisoning of the soul; the very concepts of good and evil are plebeian, reeking of the deadening spirit of slavish envy and impotence, to indicate all of which he coins the unique word *ressentiment*. He criticizes morality in the shape in which it was practiced in European culture in its most massive forms—Christianity and Socialism—and sanctioned by philosophy from Socrates to Kant and Hegel. Nietzsche takes the critique of morality and the related ethics to the point of exposing the falsehood of its methodological foundations consisting in the objectified approach to man, absolutization of epistemology, knowledge whereas the task of philosophy is to create values, and failure to understand that "will to truth is—*will to power*" [11, p. 106]. There exists a paradox of moral nihilism whereby negation of morality is only possible from the moral point of view and is therefore inevitably a form of asserting morality.

Nietzsche also denies morality for the sake of enhancing man, i.e., for the sake of higher morality. The superman utopia can well be interpreted as a supra-ethical perspective of his teaching.

The negation of morality and ethics by Marxism and Nietzsche, although not carried through in the proposed radical form, nevertheless lent a new social-critical direction to ethical studies by highlighting the problem of the philosophical status and place of ethics in the framework of philosophy. The main achievements in this field are to be credited to the philosophy of existentialism and to the analysis of the language of morality. In the case of existentialism, it has to be noted that although (perhaps “because” would be a more appropriate word) it carries an inherent ethical charge, ethics is not singled out as a separate discipline; and its founders and outstanding representatives had not produced ethical works although (here “although” is certainly appropriate) they seemed to have an intention to do so. The conclusions of analytical ethics that it is impossible to give a scientific (genus-species) definition of morality and to pass on from sentences with the linking verb “is” to sentences with the verb “must” are significant and have yet to be studied in all their theoretical ramifications. Does it not mean that virtue is not knowledge and ethics cannot be secondary with regard to epistemology?

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Summing up this historical-ethical foray into the past, which might be described as discourse on a set topic, I would like to say that ethics needs a new theoretical perspective, a rethinking of its philosophical status. Mikhail Bakhtin has identified what may be a promising direction of inquiry. Speaking about a new look at ethics and linking it with Bakhtin’s name I have something very definite in mind. Let us go back to the question, “What must I do?” Ethics, as will be seen even from this brief flashback, sought an answer to a different question, not the question *what must I do?* but a different and very abstract question, *what should man do?* (what is the moral duty). Ethics has ignored the *I*, the personal pronoun, translating it into an impersonal form. It wanted to be a science, to objectify morality, reveal its patterns, formulate and explain its norms, and bring human motives and actions to a common denominator. Accordingly, it used scientific methods. Ethics reasoned in the third person. But the question was not about what is duty and how good men should act, but about how I should act. I as a unique and concrete individual with my own name, place in the world, my own history and my absolute irreplaceability. This articulates the demand for first-person ethics. Science does not have methods for such ethics, which can only be philosophical. Bakhtin’s approach is ground-breaking because he speaks about morality in the first person in form and substance.

Bakhtin set forth his philosophy in his treatise *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* [2], and the companion work *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* [1]. The act is the main category in his system of views. The point that needs to be stressed in the context of the ground-breaking view of moral philosophy proposed by Bakhtin is as follows. Bakhtin looks at the act not from outside, not as an impartial

observer who can describe the act as something given. He looks at it from within, not as an objectified substantive outcome, but as the initial subjective genesis. Not only does he not forget that the act is created by the acting individual, but this is the only thing that interests him in his analysis.

The act (and this is his basic premise) faces in two opposite directions: on the one hand, the world of culture which determines the content of the act, its meaning; and, on the other hand, the acting individual who is responsible for the act coming into being. Thus any act, whatever it may be, whatever it is about, turns out to be part of the external world and at the same time is generated by a living individual. According to Bakhtin, an act is not what is usually considered to be an act as distinct from the motive, and intention and what can be placed in a synonymous string of such words as action, business. Everything is an act: feelings, thoughts, deeds. A word. A look. Life itself. In other words, an act is an expression, an elementary basis, a basic unit of human activity in all its conscious forms. Morality is responsible for the act, for the very fact of its being. Moral responsibility is responsibility for the fact of the act, for its being; not for its content, meaning, but for its being. It is responsibility for the act being committed or not committed. This depends exclusively on the person committing an act, on the concrete flesh-and-blood individual. The content of the act does not depend on him, it is determined by the world. Because every act, whatever it may be, whatever it is about, faces in two directions, and because one end of it is turned, or more specifically, is rooted in the subject, because every act is generated by a living individual, the world of moral acts is coextensive with the world of culture in general. Morality is not a special part or stage in the world of human activity; it is present in this whole world from the outset and is inseparable from it. All the acts committed by man (a living individual) and the acts for which he is morally responsible constitute the same set. Thereby morality is, to use Spinoza's term, not a modus of the substance of human being, but its attribute. In this interpretation man's being becomes moral. And that provides a very different theoretical basis and a totally different theoretical perspective for ethics to be able to perform its mission as the philosophy of morality and answer the question *what must I do?*

To be sure (and this is also essential for understanding Bakhtin's teaching) moral responsibility never exists by itself. Because it is always only the first (one of the two), but not the only side of the act, i.e., not the whole act; it is inseparable from the special responsibility which is the responsibility for the other aspect of the act, for its content, its meaning. Moreover, special responsibility is a specialized case of moral responsibility. It is important to stress that the act, facing in opposite directions—the individual (subject) committing the act and responsible for its being, and the external objectified world in which the act is committed and which determines its content, its subject-matter cannot form itself into a whole and get a single plan if one moves from its content, from the objective possibility or necessity of the act. What I should do in my unique position does not follow from the law, from the norm, from the obligation that set the generally valid parameters of the act. The being of a thing does not stem from the concept

of the thing; an act does not follow from the norm, something that was conceded even by such an adept of moral law as Kant, who said that perhaps no one anywhere in the world ever committed an act out of duty. An act acquires a single plan if one moves from *I*, from the subject that commits an act, gives life and cannot but commit it because he has no alibi in being and, to use Bakhtin's expression, "I must have my ought." The question is what I will do, but whatever I do, it will be my business, my link with the world, my responsibility for my act, for the fact and for its content. But that brings us to a more specific conversation about Bakhtin's theoretical construct. I would merely like to stress that his philosophy offers a different theoretical basis for ethics which can be called philosophical ethics, first-person ethics and which differs dramatically from the classical ethical teachings in its understanding of morality as the basis of human existence.

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