On the Linguo-Philosophical Nature of Socio-Ethical Vocabulary

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Abstract

The article discusses current issues related to the linguistic and philosophical nature of socio-ethical vocabulary in terms of the diachronic. Based on an analysis of a large amount of historical and philosophical material, the author presents his interpretation of the stages of the formation of the vocabulary of ethics as an integral part of general philosophical vocabulary, since the problems of ethics as a science and as a form of social life have undoubtedly been a focus of consideration at all stages of human civilization. Nonetheless, the interpretation of ethical concepts and norms and therefore of the terminology employed within each individual timeframe and in each individual country has taken on a specific historical and purely national character.

Keywords: philosophy, ethics, social being, vocabulary, civilization.

In describing the objectives of this article, we might consider it necessary to offer a brief overview of the ethics of antiquity and the Middle Ages in order to understand and analyse the specific role of ethics in the science and practices of later historical periods and of the Renaissance and early modern periods of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular. Ethics, like any other social and humanistic philosophical phenomenon, has a historical character and was one of the earliest theoretical disciplines to arise as part of philosophy during the formation of a slave society. While the problems of ethics as a science and as a form of social life have, of course, been considered at all stages of human civilization, in each individual time period and in each individual country, the interpretation of ethical concepts and norms, and hence the terminology employed, have born a specifically historical and purely national character.

The study of ethics can be understood as a science that studies morality and the expression of social consciousness and forms of social behaviour. Ethics and morality are the most important and fundamental features of the existence of human society. Ethics first emerged as an independent element of philosophy in the work of Socrates, with Aristotle singling out ethics as a distinct and unique field of inquiry (Parry 2014). However, prior to the Renaissance, ethics as an independent science did not exist; more specifically there was no systematized, ordered scientific vocabulary or conceptual and terminological apparatus. The emphasis on ethics, as well as the development of philosophy in general, emerged only gradually. Ethics, together with physics and logic, was first identified as such by the Stoics, and this division, coexisting with others, did not disappear, but instead gradually developed over time. It was also characteristic of medieval thinkers, continuing into the Renaissance and the early modern periods in the works of Abelard, Chaucer, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Spinoza, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Helvetius, Edmund Spencer and others (Annas 2007).

Only from the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries did ethics acquire the status of an independent science, but nonetheless it remained bound within the framework of philosophical studies; at the same time, its basic concepts began to be defined and its most important categories were determined. Ethics were meant to provide people with advice on how to live correctly and this included a reliance on religious institutions, a key feature of pre-Renaissance ethical thinking. In the Middle Ages, a tradition prevailed in which everything was subordinated to theology, with philosophy relegated to providing justifications

for theological concepts. God, holy scripture and the Church had predetermined the solutions to all conceivable problems, including the place and role of man in life (Gurevich 1984).

The issues of morality and human values were resolved along the same paths. The development of ethical thought among Eastern and European philosophers in the Middle Ages gradually led to a revolution in the understanding of ethics in subsequent periods – primarily in the Renaissance and early modern periods. In the history of English philosophy this is connected with the names of Duns Scott, Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, Baruch Spinoza and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, but also with the works of William Shakespeare, John Donne, Ben Johnson, George Puttenham (Barg 1979). It must be emphasized that this period was not only an era of revolution in ethics; it was a revolution in all sciences and social practices. It became clear that science could no longer remain hidebound by the narrow grip of religious thinking, an approach which contradicted the very nature of science as a specific sphere of thought and as an objective form of reflection of life. The coup began with the discoveries of Copernicus which overturned the geocentric picture of the world and replaced it with the heliocentric model. The Copernican revolution had a tremendous impact on the entire historical process of the formation of a secular, bourgeois worldview in those historical conditions, a process which contributed to the secularization of the social views of the newly developing society and the formation of a naturalistic, historically progressive understanding of social life and morality within these social conditions.

For the first time, the Copernican revolution allowed science to challenge the monopoly of theology in determining the formation of a worldview. This was the first act in the process of penetration of scientific knowledge and scientific thinking into the structure of active life, man and society. These trends had the most direct access to human independence but emerged in the light of new ethical standards. The problem of humanity, its essence and existence in a material, spiritual and moral respect, its development, destiny and future is, perhaps, the most central of all that humanity has addressed over the thousands of years of its evolution. Take, for example, Thomas More. The main idea of his work *Utopia* (1516) is primarily one of ethics. Accordingly, the definition of happiness as the goal of human existence is the central philosophical problem of Utopia. Moore does not know and does not recognize any other philosophy than an ethical one. Man lives in order to be happy – such is his credo. Pestilence understands nature as a workshop and God as an architect in it. Therefore, he believes that a person can and should understand this workshop and the creations which exist within it, the most beautiful of which is man himself. This approach was fundamentally contrary to medieval ethical approaches which could not conceive of man as being equal to nature, and even less so to God.

Determining the nature of happiness and recognizing the goals of an individual are vital tasks in any form of ethical teaching. Depending on how the problems of the origin and content of morality are solved, how it relates to everyday human activities, two areas can be distinguished in ethics – the hedonistic-demonic and the rigorous approaches. The principles of hedonism in ethics were first practiced in ancient Greece by Democritus and Aristippus and also by Epicurus and Lucretius (Parry 2014). Rigorism is a kind of formalism in morality; moral principles which characterize the way to fulfil the requirements of morality which consists of a strict and steady observance of certain moral standards regardless of specific circumstances, in unconditional obedience to duty. In the former approach, it is generally accepted that morality stems from the nature of man and his needs. This is opposed by the latter understanding of ethics, characteristic of the works of the ancient Stoics, Eastern religions and

of medieval systems of thought. Rigorists deny the very possibility of proceeding in ethics from the starting point of the natural needs of man and consider morality as something beyond that which is granted to man, perceiving this as being predetermined by God. Of course, in the late Renaissance and the early modern period, the first point of view prevailed, although not in its purest form. Thomas More considered it absurd to seek out a harsh and inaccessible level of virtue, to exclude oneself from the pleasures of life and to voluntarily endure suffering which serves no purpose. For thinkers of the Renaissance, and then of the early modern era, ethics had become the doctrine of leading an intelligent, happy and full-blooded life. Such a theory was advanced in opposition to asceticism - the most important manifestation of medieval ethics which preached the voluntary renunciation of earthly joys and blessings and the tight control of sensory drives and desires all in the name of the afterlife. In essence, its main goal was to restrict individual pleasures.

Although the concepts and terms of ethics are quite common in philosophical, socio-political and fictional English literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this does not mean that English thinkers clearly recognized the place of ethics in the general system of sciences and treated it as an independent field of study. In the centuries under consideration, an active process of determining the basic definitions and categories of ethics took effect. Primarily, ethics as an independent scientific system was formed only at the end of the seventeenth century. Thomas Hobbes, for example, considered ethics not as an independent scientific subject, but rather as a field of study which connected philosophy with social theory. Ethics, according to Hobbes, are based in natural laws and their manifestation in man. In marked contrast to his medieval predecessors, Hobbes saw nothing wrong with a morality derived, first of all, from individuals' natural inclinations such as self-preservation or the gratification of natural needs. Hobbes believed that men strove for good and that which they desired, while shunning all which they do not love and which could be termed evil. From the point of view of the general theory of ethics, Hobbes considers the main ethical categories - good, evil, moral, etc. – to be relative concepts. Human virtue (or vice), he believed, depends on how rational the members of society are, and upon the degree to which they contribute or interfere with the realization of the good. According to Hobbes, the obligations of members of society coincided with the morality that is laid down in the basis of the social contract and which is provided for by this contract. Any failure to comply with moral and ethical requirements, that is, the violation of ethical rules, should be chastised by varying degrees of punishment as a failure to comply with the provisions of the social contract (Lloyd and Sreedhar 2019).

Somewhat similar to Hobbes was the thought of John Locke (Locke 2018). As an empiricist in his worldview, Locke believed that good is that which brings pleasure, and that evil is that which causes suffering. On this basis, happiness consists in producing a greater sum of pleasure and a lesser sum of suffering and thus the pursuit of happiness is, according to Locke, a natural and understandable process. All human activities should be free, and the goal of individual freedom should be the pursuit of both individual and common good. Locke considered the true basis of morality to be divine will which finds its direct embodiment in the laws governing social life. Therefore, morality for Locke was nothing more than awareness of and reasonable obedience to these laws. Locke considered the combination and harmony of the needs of individuals with the interests of society as a whole to be a necessary condition for the existence and prosperity of society. Mutual understanding can only be achieved if it is possessed by the members of the society themselves.

The study of ethics in English philosophy had a strong influence on the philosophical and socio-political thought of other countries. Bacon, Hobbes and Locke were widely read by progressive thinkers, scientists and public figures both in Britain and in other countries, for example by Toland, Priestley, Berkeley, Hume, Voltaire, Condillac, Lametri, Helvetius, Diderot and others. John Locke, for example, was considered the most influential philosopher of his era. Thus, the conception of a divine understanding of the world, a world built according to God's understanding, had been destroyed, but this revolution was very different to those which had come before; if in the Middle Ages such destruction was carried out only theoretically and a priori, and was brutally persecuted as heretical, now, in the Enlightenment, this destruction was carried out empirically, in actuality, on the basis of experiments and practical evidence (Bogomolov and Oyzerman 1984).

Supporters of the older vision of the world – religious figures and thinkers – could not deny the discoveries of natural science, because these discoveries were based in reality and were perceived by the masses as correct, as true. Religious leaders then adopted ethics-based approaches and reframed the question as follows: the natural science image of the world may be correct and the significance and forms of influence of God may have been exaggerated, but is it in fact ethical to reduce the existence of God to nothing? Is it ethical to deny the existence of God or for a human to pretend to omnipotence? Empiricists and natural scientists answered these questions in their own way: truth is the goal of a scientist's dreams and he must stop at nothing to achieve it. This also shows one of the manifestations of the ethics of the Renaissance, i.e. the new ethics.

The formation of scientific and philosophical vocabulary took place in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; on the one hand, it emerged from the influence of the national specifics of socio-economic and cultural development and, on the other, it reflected the main trends of general language evolution despite the presence of two contradictory and opposite directions - purism, on the one hand, and the widespread use of Latinisms in creating novel terminology on the other (Petelina 2004). Both the first and second directions are indicated by the conscious nature of the struggle for a specific language policy. The impact of these two factors was constant, but not uniform. It should be noted, however, that the growing influence of England as an advanced country lagged behind the corresponding influence of English bourgeois political ideas, English philosophy and literature and English morals; as early as the 16th century the real possibility of using the English language in all types of literature, both fictional and scientific texts, was the focus of sharp discussion (Tucker 1961).

The new interest in language issues was relevant not only for England; it was a sign of the times in which the struggle for native languages had become one of the most effective ways of manifesting national identity. Many researchers note that the main factor of scientific thinking in this era is the ideological criteria of the interpreter, depending on the research methodology on which it is built. This fully explains the scientific orientation of the formation of scientific terminology. Therefore, in the terminology of philosophical content there may be lexical units which, at first glance, refer to the terminology of the natural and didactic-psychological sciences. Nonetheless, the phenomena associated with them remain inseparable from the sphere of the philosophical worldview of the author; therefore, the meanings of these units also have a philosophical character.

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