Morality of the Past from the Present Perspective
Morality of the Past from the Present Perspective
Picture of Morality in Slovakia in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Edited by

Vasil Gluchman

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Life of the Slovak people of the 19th and 20th centuries was closely connected with the misery of the Slovak nation itself in the second half of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. During that period, the Slovak nation became a target of national oppression, especially during the 19th century when the Hungarian ruling classes attempted to liquidate the Slovak nation by means of magyarization.

Although Slovakia was a part of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, Slovak people preserved their language in spite of immense difficulties imposed by both churches and the state power. The Slovaks preserved their language as a language of Liturgy, and in a similar way, they managed to preserve their national language in primary (especially church) schools. This was in spite of the endeavors of the Hungarian authorities to liquidate the Slovaks’ national identity, for instance also by means of liaising Slovak Lutherans with Hungarian Calvinists within one church union. No church union was created, though, due mainly to the principal resistance from the Slovak Lutherans. The relations between the state and the church in the period before World War I had been determined by laws where aim was the implementation of the government policy of magyarization against non-Hungarian national communities (including Slovaks). As an example, article XLIII of law from 1895, which bore the title of the free professing of any religion, directed its interpretations against the religious, church, political, and national interests of the Slovaks.

During the period from 1875 to 1918 the Slovaks had no secondary school of their own. Slovak intelligentsia (priests, teachers, writers, and politicians) were making attempts to attract the attention of the world on the genocide of the Slovak nation. In spite of the protests from renowned personalities of world culture (e.g., R. W. Seton-Watson, B. Björnson, and many more), the pressure of magyarization towards Slovaks lasted till as late as the end of World War I. The Slovak nation lived in such complicated national, cultural, religious, political and social circumstances in Hungary at the turn of the 20th century that Slovak culture and morality has been developed under such circumstances.

Within Slovak culture and morality, issues of saving national identity also
became highly important in the first half of the 20th century. Of course, the roots of the Slovaks’ fights for their national identity began in the 19th century and earlier. We will focus, above all, on the situation of Slovak morality, culture, literature as well as the professional ethics at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. A national issue has been a common basis for Slovak culture and morality since the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century.

During the course of World War I, the resistance against the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the movement for the independent Czechoslovak Republic was being formed. Side by side with the Czech politicians Tomas Garigue Masaryk and Eduard Beneš, as well as Slovak politicians Milan Rastislav Štefánik and Štefan Osuský, who also played an important role abroad, they fought for independence. Independent from foreign activities, the representatives of the domestic Slovak policy convened at a meeting in Turčiansky Svätý Martin on 30 October 1918 and passed the Declaration of the Slovak Nation, in which they manifested their will to create a common state of Czechs and Slovaks. Despite the fact that Slovak Lutherans represented only about 13% of the Slovak nation, their representation in Turčiansky Svätý Martin was major, and many Lutheran pastors were among them. The activity of the Slovak Lutheran intelligentsia in defense of the Slovak nation and their endeavor to form the Czechoslovak Republic was the main precondition of their significant position in Czechoslovakia, after its rise in 1918.

An issue of national identity had stopped as a common basis of the Slovak culture and morality after the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the rising of Czechoslovak Republic. A main reason underlying the destruction of the common basis was pluralism in the political, economic and social interests of Slovak people. It was also reflected in pluralism towards the attitudes of the Slovaks about resolving the position of the Slovak nation in Czechoslovakia. That issue also included important political aspects. After the rising of Czechoslovakia, two lines in the Slovak national and cultural life were created concerning the position of Slovaks in the Czechoslovak Republic: centralistic and nationalistic. The nationalistic position was the political orientation of minor Slovak people and political parties, but it did not essentially differ from the centralistic position before the end of the 1930s. The nationalistic position emphasized, above all, the shortcomings of the present position of Slovaks in Czechoslovakia. While the centralistic position emphasized the last merits of Slovaks fighting for a Slovak national identity and perspectives of cooperation with Czechs in the future, the nationalistic position also had ideological aspects, because nationalism would be in strong opposition to communism. The greatest contribution of the nationalistic activity in Slovak culture and morality of that time has been the attainment of a national, cultural,
political, economic, and social identity for the Slovak nation. A negative aspect has been its part in the destruction of Czechoslovakia at the end of the 1930s.

The position of Slovak intellectuals in the period immediately following the rise of the Czechoslovak Republic reflected their merits in the fight for the rights of the Slovak nation and the creation of a common state for both Czechs and Slovaks. In relation to their political and national activities before 1918, and after the rise of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Slovak intellectuals and their political representatives (especially of Slovak Lutherans) gained a majority representation in the state institutions in Slovakia and in the Slovak Club of the Czechoslovak Parliament. During the whole existence of the Czechoslovak Republic, but also after World War II, the majority of Slovak intellectuals supported a united Czechoslovak Republic. Through their members, they exerted a meaningful influence on the democratic political system. They recognized the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic as a guarantee of the satisfaction of the national and cultural needs of the Slovak nation. However, many Slovak intellectuals (centralists) tended to underestimate the really existing social problems within society. Also, they underestimated a certain amount of tension in the relations between Czechs and Slovaks. The underestimation of the complexities of national relations between Czechs and Slovaks was manifested in the decline of the influence of Slovak intellectuals (centralists) on Slovak politics and development in the 1930s. However, a small group among the centralists stressed the national and social aspects of the position of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Republic. The group, however, did not manage to gain a meaningful political, social, cultural and intellectual influence by the end of the 1930s. The decline of the political influence of the Slovak centralist intellectuals was manifested most obviously towards the end of the 1930s and in the beginning of the 1940s, when the nationalistic and fascist Slovak Republic was founded, in which the centralistic intellectuals gained no significant posts. The rise of the Slovak Republic was a consequence of the Munich negotiations among the Western European powers with Hitler in 1938 and the whole development finally resulted in the outbreak of World War II.

There is the specific period of World War II and in the existence of the Slovak Republic (1939-1945) in the history of the Slovak culture and morality when Slovak intellectual attention, at that time, was focused, above all, on the practical issues of life during that difficult time. An example is the relationship of the Slovak intellectuals with political power, which has been especially influenced by the Roman Catholic Church (e.g., the President of Slovak Republic, Jozef Tiso, had been a Catholic priest). That political power has been closely connected to German fascism. Many representatives of the nationalistic Slovak Republic saw an opportunity to oppress the thinking that was the enemy of nationalism in the Slovak Republic. The most important influence and
consequences of the Slovak intellectual opposition was reflected in the attitudes and actions of democrats against the fascist political power. The armed fight peaked in the Slovak National Uprising at the end of August 1944. Many intellectuals were active fighters in that uprising. The leaders of the Slovak National Uprising were democrats and communists. However, it is necessary to state that a small group of Slovak intellectuals supported the political power in Slovakia in the time of World War II. Its goal was to obtain a more important position within the power framework of Slovakia since March 14, 1939, when the Slovak Republic was created under the guarantee of a fascist Germany. However, a majority of Slovak intellectuals developed their attitudes toward an active fight against political powers supporting fascist Germany, which was not only an enemy to Slovak culture, morality but also to the whole Slovak nation. They supported centralists and democracy. This follows from their conviction about the necessity of cooperation with the Czechs, because Slovak national existence is only possible in cooperation with the Czechs.

Social and ethical concepts in Slovak philosophy were not central and decisive in the period from 1918 to 1945. It was missing a statement, a formulation in a more precise way which shows the standpoints on principal social and moral problems of the times, and among other things, elaborating the issues of the relation to the state with a certain perspective of the religious, social, cultural, and political program. It has been in presented more or less individual opinions or public statements given by individual intellectual representatives who felt the need to give their views on such important issues. However, philosophy and ethics as a whole kept almost silent. In relation to the existing state, the position of intellectuals was outwardly pragmatic, in which national aspect clearly prevailed. A different situation has been in culture and especially in literature, because many writers were strong critics of Slovak morality and politics during that period. One should stress, at this point, that the problem of Slovak national interests in the Slovak cultural and intellectual life (including philosophical and ethical) was a decisive criterion for passing judgments on social, ethical and moral issues existing in society. The circumstances being above the then existing Czechoslovak Republic, was considered by the majority of Slovak intellectuals to be the best possible solution for the existence of the Slovak nation. It tended, however, to obscure some other important issues of the social life of the existing Czechoslovak Republic.

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The book is divided into four parts. The first part deals with philosophical and ethical issues arising from the examination of morality at the end of the 19th
century and the beginning of the 20th century. This part creates the methodological starting point for the examinations presented in the next three parts of the monograph. The second part focuses on the development of the philosophical and ethical reflection of morality in Slovakia in the given period. The third part examines socio-political and professional-ethical aspects of the development and function of morality in Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century. Reflections of morality in Slovakia in Slovak literature of the first half of the 20th century are the object of interest in the fourth part of the monograph.

The first part, Philosophical and Ethical Issues of the Examination of Morality, presents two essays. In the first essay, Vasil Gluchman, on the basis of his analysis of the history of morality, points out the fact that moral problems have been an integral part of human history, including the period of the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. According to him, the examination of the history of morality should be an impulse towards a better understanding of the present situation, along with its moral problems and shortcomings. Viera Bilasová in her work claims that it is our relation to the past through which we form our attitude to the present, and which is also a means of the search for the logic and meaning of history. She believes that modern thinking, through critical reflection of the past, discovers and analyses the contradictions of the development of history, thus eventually becoming a part of the preservation of a cultural and moral equilibrium.

The second part of the monograph is titled The Development of the Philosophical and Ethical Reflection of Morality in Slovakia (at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries). The point of departure for this part’s exploration of morality is represented by Rudolf Dupkala and Igor Kišš’s contributions. Rudolf Dupkala in his paper presents opinions on ethics and morality existing in the philosophical thinking in Slovakia in the given era. He analyses two lines of thought within the context of his exploration: the line of theological reflection and of the philosophical reflection of morality in Slovakia. Igor Kišš, on the basis of Luther’s ethical principles, examines the differences and similarities between Slovak and German Lutheran ethics in the first half of the 20th century. He concludes that Slovak Lutheran ethics remained faithful to Luther’s principles and did not follow the deviations from these principles that appeared in German ethics. This part of the monograph also includes a contribution by Jana Pospíšilová devoted to the analysis of the moral world of man in the works of Andrej Vandrák, who put special emphasis on the imperative of fulfilling the moral duty of an individual. Vasil Gluchman’s essay presents a reflection of the period’s moral and political problems in Martin Rázus’ work Argumenty [Arguments], which belongs to the most important ethical works in Slovakia of that age. Petr Jemelka examines the synthetical utopism of Ján Maliarík, reflected in his projects of synthesis of all religions and knowledge, which was
to result in asceticism in the life of an individual, as well as the life of society. Dalimír Hajko analyses the ethical and cultural views of Vavro Šrobář, who was one of the most significant representatives of the intellectual group in the Slovak intellectual and cultural journal “Hlas” [Voice].

The third part of the monograph introduces a Socio-Political and Professional-Ethical Reflection of Morality in Slovakia and includes contributions that present an analysis of the social and moral problem of alcoholism in Slovakia, especially in relation to a rural population (Vasil Gluchman), moral problems of a Slovak family in comparison with a Western European family (Luba Kráľová), as well as moral determinants in the work of Slovak doctors and nurses in the context of the serious social transformations in the given period (Mária Nemčeková and Lucia Balážová). The monograph also includes the contributions that examine moral troubles related to solidarity with socially handicapped people (Beáta Balogová) or the moral dimension of social issues, which were strong determinants of the functioning of morality of the period in Slovakia (Gabriela Olejárová).

Literary and Aesthetic Reflection of Morality is the title of the fourth part of the monograph, which includes the contributions that analyse Slovak literature of the first half of the 20th century from the perspective of the picture of morality created by this literature. Jana Sošková reflects on the possibilities and the limits of the use of literature as a source of information of morality and ethics of society at that given age. She pays special attention to the work of an important representative of the Slovak literature of the given era, Janko Jesenský. Gabriel Kohl’s paper examines the given ages’ moral aspects presented in the novel Jozef Mak, written by another important Slovak writer of this period, Jozef Cíger Hronský. Silvia Malankievčová focuses on the analysis of the literary works of Gejza Vámoš, who puts morality in the centre of the individual experience of his characters. In Vámoš’s works morality is still reflected on the level of individual consciousness. The work of this author is also discussed in Viera Bilasová and Viera Žemberová’s contribution, which focuses especially on the moral contexts of his novel Atómy boha [Atoms of God]. The work of Jozef Cíger Hronský is again discussed by them in the essay, in which they pay attention to his reflections on the morality of “ordinary” life in a fast changing social environment.

The book is a result of the research project VEGA 1/2229/05 Reflexie morálky na Slovensku [Reflection of Morality in Slovakia].
PART I:

PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES
OF THE EXAMINATION OF MORALITY
Meditations and discussions on the moral state of society or humanity as such, or on the morality of individuals are an integral part of the whole of human history from the time when our ancestors reached self-awareness. We are permanently, more or less intensively, asking the questions concerning morality of the past, present and future. In that case a man as well as the whole humanity suffers from the disunity of spirit and mind. They have an inclination to idealize the past and to expect or hope for a better future. However, the present times are frequently perceived as a nightmare, by not fulfilling their concepts of the moral state of society and the moral level of an individual. Discrepancy between what is and what should be is often so frustrating that they make conclusions about the moral crisis of society, about the decay of morality, moral values and about the decay of the whole of humanity.

When we look back to the not too distant past we may ascertain that the discrepancy between reality and expectations, i.e. between what is and what should be, is permanently present in all times and societies. There is neither a period in human history nor culture and society where people would be satisfied with the existing morality or moral level of individuals living at that time. In a short review, we may mention e.g. Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus as Roman Stoics, Peter Abelard from medieval times, La Bruyer and La Rocheffoucauld from modern times; in literature and drama there were William Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, William M. Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot or Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky as well as Arthur Schopenhauer, Soren Kierkegaard and Frederick Engels in 19th century, and I could continue listing authors from different periods of human history who noted the serious moral problems of their times and individuals.

The picture of the morality of individual periods as well as the whole of human history would not be very cheerful. We could find out that even
humanity in ancient Greece was unjust when they sacrificed the life of an innocent man, who was politically troublesome for certain reasons; e.g. Socrates, for the sake of preserving political power. Seneca in his work *De Beneficiis* uses an example of Roman morality from the times of the emperor Tiberius. There was a common and almost universal frenzy for informing, which was more ruinous to the citizens of Rome than the whole civil war; the talk of drunkards, the frankness of jesters, was alike reported to the government; nothing was safe; every opportunity of ferocious punishment was seized, and men no longer waited to hear the fate of accused persons, since it was always the same.¹ Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus served for Seneca as an example of arrogance and cruelty of ruler.²

That is enough of Roman debauchery and cruelty! Let us quickly look at how Peter Abelard, who is the leading representative of medieval ethics, describes the morality of his period. First, it is necessary to acknowledge that Peter Abelard did not try to make himself a better man than he actually was. In his autobiography, with its Latin name *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard writes that he fathered a child to his female student Heloise against the will of her relatives and they had vengeance him

“[W]ith a most cruel and most shameful punishment, such as astounded the whole world, for they cut off those parts of my body with which I had done that which was the cause of their sorrow. This done, straightway they fled, but two of them were captured, and suffered the loss of their eyes and their genital organs.”³

Similarly in his *Ethics*, Abelard describes the period of sexual morality which, despite the clear dominance of the Christian church and the requirements of Christian morality, was not as puritan or ascetic as it appeared to seem. He uses an example of a monk forced to make love to women. The monk suffers, although pleasantly.⁴ His *Historia calamitatum* contains also other considerably interesting examples of the morality of the period such as hiring murderers to attempt to kill him by stoning him to death during a journey.⁵ That was often the reality of the Christian Middle Ages, filled with brutality and sexual immorality despite the leading rules commanding sexual purity, continence or even asceticism. Besides those facts we should mention the Crusades which were

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³ Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, 16.
⁴ Abelard, *Ethics*, 1-58. Based on the life of Peter Abelard, Kevin Guilfoy claims that Abelard has understanding for immoral deeds (Guilfoy, *Etická teória Petra Abelarda*, 269).
⁵ Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, 38.
very well-known for brutality and cruelty, often affecting innocent people. I think that these depictions of certain aspects of the period of morality above are sufficient.

In connection with Modern times I will not mention religious wars or inquisition periods when millions of people died in the wars “defending faith” and when the whole of Europe became considerably depopulated. Neither of the fighting sides were less cruel to unarmed people. I will focus on the times of peace and the period of morality, which remained unaffected by the hectic struggle to survive. Proof can be found in Daniel Defoe’s novels *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*. In both works Defoe critically depicts morality in the 18th century social life of England as being a constant pursuit of money and wealth and are causative factors of behaviour and activity for people living at that time. Desiring a luxurious life Roxana is willing to get rid of her five children, which are her burden. Moll Flanders becomes a prostitute and a thief on her way to money. Similar depressive examples of the 19th morality can be discovered in works of Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, William M. Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky etc., including Slovak authors, such as Martin Kukučín, Jozef Gregor Tajovský and so on.

We could state that each period in human history has its own moral problems that are, however, in many cases identical during the whole history of mankind. Sometimes they differ in urgency or intensity of perception by people living in a certain period. The Nobel Prize winner, Konrad Lorenz, like all others, claims that a human soul or human psyche is actually the same since the beginning of human culture; in other words the ways of human experience have not changed during the centuries. It illuminates the reasons why we are always facing the same moral problems. The whole of human history is full of serious moral problems. There was no period in our history without moral problems, perceived as serious and often causing offence or leading to the conclusion of a decaying morality, the decay of moral values or even decay of the entire human society. I suppose that it is quite natural since the discrepancy between what is and what should be is always present in the life of a man and the whole mankind. Humanity would discontinue with its development, even moral development without this discrepancy and tension. Simply we would morally stagnate and become stunted. The necessity to struggle with our everyday moral problems leads us to continue in this search, in ourselves and people around us, for a better “self” that could sometimes be pushed to defend or even passively resist under such external circumstances. We frequently formulate what should

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be a moral duty to ensure higher bindingness or an even probability of its implementation.

When thinking about morality and its historical development, we should perceive it within the whole development of human society, including its scientific, technical and cultural aspects. Conflicts and discrepancies in morality can be then understood as something natural. Any change brings tension and conflict, since people only modify their long-lasting ways of thinking and acting, slowly and with difficulty. However, one should examine to what extend the tension, quarrel and conflict are natural results of change and to what extend there is something new that can not be explained or excused by this change. There is a real risk to consider something bad, immoral or wrong as natural result of change. It would be a serious mistake. It could create space for acceptance or even an explanation of immoral actions based on the idea that it is a process of transformation and change of values or value paradigmas.

Morality is on one side the reflection of specific social and economic relations in a certain period, however on the other side, it regulates them since it reflects historical knowledge and experience. The process of its transformation is slower than changes on an economic and political level. It can be stated that on one side, morality is the same as the period; however on the other side it contains the basic genetic set and historical moral experience of humanity. Besides this, morality also reflects certain moral aims and models which mankind aspire for and which are formulated by ethics as something what should be, i.e. something desired. Morality for sure has its biological basis connected predominantly with respect and the protection of human life. On other side the respect for life is not something exclusively human. The existence of this fact in the animal kingdom implies the biological base of the given form of behaviour among people and all animals. To constitute our morality on ability to respect, i.e. not to kill each other, is not sufficient proof that we are somehow special compared with the rest of nature and does not mean that we have made a step up in the natural or biological chain of evolution.

According to Teodor Münz, the existence of morality is proof of the moral weakness of a man, since we need moral guidelines to protect us from ourselves.7 In connection with the above mentioned statements I want to say that virtuousness and morality are factors helping us to develop the positive and to limit or to restrain the negative in ourselves. They encourage our humanity and suppress bestiality. I do not consider the existence of morality as a bad sign about us or signal of our negative intentions. In contrary, they document our attempts to be better, they prove that we know about our weaknesses and that by morality we are trying to limit or control them. The truth is that we are not

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7 Münz, Listy filozofom, 60, 129.
always successful, however we are trying. Nobody is perfect; we make mistakes, sometimes even tragic ones as in the first half of the 20th century. Virtuousness and morality serve us in our “eternal fight” with ourselves. It is really the endless fight between good and bad, “angels” and “devils”, “saints” and “beasts” in each of us. Nobody escapes from having to solve this dilemma and one can not avoid it. One day we are successful, the next less successful and sometimes we fail in this fight. It depends mainly on our moral maturity. The first half of the 20th century is littered with examples of tragic mistakes which can be made by humanity such as how mankind used knowledge to their advantage and how it was misused for its own end: e.g. mass killing such as the holocaust. Our moral maturity is reflected by the fact of how often we are able to win over ourselves. Konrad Lorenz writes that

“There is only one being in possession of weapons which do not grow on his body and of whose working plan, therefore, the instincts of his species know nothing and in the usage of which he has no correspondingly adequate inhibition. That being is man. With unarrested growth his weapons increase in monstrousness, multiplying horribly within a few decades. But innate impulses and inhibitions, like bodily structures, need time for their development, time on a scale in which geologists and astronomers are accustomed to calculate, and not historians. We did not receive our weapons from nature. We made them ourselves, of our own free will.”

“Thanks” to our tragic experiences in the first half of the 20th century we are more aware of the paradox of bestiality and humanity as we are more sensitive to expressions of our bestiality. What is growing is not only our moral sensitivity, but also our awareness of responsibility for bestiality. I am convinced that there is not a single mentally healthy person who could say without hesitation that they have won every moral fight. They would have to be an extraordinary example. Even Münz suggests that a saint often reaches their moral maturity by winning over an opposite way of life, with the fight lasting their whole life. Our human nature is not of one colour, it is a mixture of egoism, altruism and other factors. In this context I understand virtuousness and morality as something positive that helps a man to live and to live better. In my opinion it is our morality that is and should be the social restraint against ourselves, since we understand our weakness and imperfection and our need for having the scourge of commands and bans. Accordingly, Mark de Bretton Platts stated a life without morality would be lonely, miserable, disagreeable and

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8 Lorenz, *King Solomon’s Ring*, 186.
short.\textsuperscript{10} On the contrary, the existence of morality does not guarantee an easy life without problems. Morality itself does not remove moral problems from our lives and it does not make our lives easier. Its task is to facilitate our life through rules and commands, therefore protecting and supporting basic moral values as life. For some people, moral rules and commands are limiting their ideas of freedom; however the rules are important since they provide freedom and life. Peter F. Strawson claims that morality is a sphere of regulations and their existence is a condition for the existence of society.\textsuperscript{11}

According to Alfred Adler, one of the reasons for the frustration that we feel in the existing state of morality is the fact that the endeavour to seek perfection is an inborn part of life of man. However, man permanently experiences the complexity of inferiority since he constantly compares himself with an unattainable and idealised fullness.\textsuperscript{12} Prioritising what should be instead of what is, was typical for different ethical theories in the past as well as for images of morality. Ethicists in the past were trying to formulate some moral or ethical ideals that were often separated from real life society and seemed to be counter-productive. Ethics in the past (not only in its theoretical form starting from ancient Greece, but even earlier, in a pre-theoretical form in India and China) permanently formulated a morally perfect ideal, however in reality this ideal deprived man of his faith and ability to be moral. Ethicists of the past constantly flogged humanity with ideals of perfection. One should not wonder that an individual felt guilty for his moral imperfection and that he considered the world to be a sinful being full of evil, imperfection and corruptness. It is interesting that perfection was often associated with knowledge (Socrates, Spinoza) and not connected to the actual reality of the life of society and individuals. The pursuit of perfection was connected mainly with religion, which was dominated by a perfect God and His antipole, an imperfect man (with a sinful, evil and corrupted human nature) trying to get closer to his ideal. The model of moral perfection was created and man could not compare himself with God in any aspect.

Ladislav Kováč is right when claiming that for centuries the variations on common Aristotle – Plato topics can be identified in cultural sciences and humanities.\textsuperscript{13} However, is not it caused by the fact that morality or the human soul is always the same, in Aristotle times, as well as at the turn of 19th and 20th century and even now? We know a lot more about those things than Aristotle, but the essence of the issue is almost identical. What has changed is only the level of knowledge. When analysing the work of Balzac I made

\textsuperscript{10} Platts, \textit{Moral Realities}, 150.
\textsuperscript{11} Strawson, \textit{Social Morality and Individual Ideal}, 102-3.
\textsuperscript{12} Adler, \textit{What Life Could Mean to You}.
\textsuperscript{13} Kováč, \textit{Ludstvo v ohrození}, 112.
a conclusion that man of today loves or hates in the same way as a hundred, two hundred, a thousand or two thousand years ago. Names, names of towns, the course of individual actions have changed, however the core of our deeds, behaviour or experience is more or less identical. We are able to do good and bad things, to love and hate, to be altruists and egoists, in the same way as the heroes of Balzac’s works. I suppose that we know more than Balzac and people of his times, however we act and experience always in the same way. Everything has already been here somehow and Balzac has proved this.\textsuperscript{14} I think that William Makepeace Thackeray expresses the essence of the life cycle and human history, including the moral life accurately when stating in \textit{The Newcomes} that

“All types of all characters march through all fables: tremblers and boasters; victims and bullies; dupes and knaves; long-eared Neddies, giving themselves leonine airs; Tartufes wearing virtuous clothing; lovers and their trials, their blindness, their folly and constancy. With the very first page of the human story do not love and lies too begin? So the tales were told ages before Aesop; and asses under lions' manes roared in Hebrew; and sly foxes flattered in Etruscan; and wolves in sheep's clothing gnashed their teeth in Sanskrit, no doubt. The sun shines to-day as he did when he first began shining; and the birds in the tree overhead, while I am writing, sing very much the same note they have sung ever since there were finches. Nay, since last he besought good-natured friends to listen once a month to his talking, a friend of the writer has seen the New World, and found the (featherless) birds there exceedingly like their brethren of Europe. There may be nothing new under and including the sun; but it looks fresh every morning, and we rise with it to toil, hope, scheme, laugh, struggle, love, suffer, until the night comes and quiet. And then will wake Morrow and the eyes that look on it; and \textit{so da capo}.\textsuperscript{15}

These can be deemed adequate returns to our distant and recent history and have their raison d’être. From this point of view, the first half of the 20th century is close and that is the reason to return and analyse it.

The ethics and morality of a distant or recent past reveal the manner of thinking about eternal questions of morality and virtues of that period. However, on the other hand they also reveal the way people wanted to solve problems in the past based on their level of knowledge and experience. Knowledge of the past could be (and is) challenging also for present times, especially concerning the questions being solved about the whole of human history. It does not mean that we should hold on to ethical or moral opinions from the past or use that period’s solutions to solve current moral problems. We may search for

\textsuperscript{14} Gluchman, \textit{Honoré de Balzac}, 422-3.

\textsuperscript{15} Thackeray, \textit{The Newcomes}, 11.
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inspiration, starting points for our contemplation when studying the history of ethical thinking and morality; however we can not use it for solving our period determined problems or even as a scheme valid not only in the past but also nowadays. Validity of any ethical theory (and a period of morality) is limited and also relative. The authors formulated them as ideals that we should attempt our whole life for, rather than in a form reflecting that given period. From the time frame point of view, the ethical theories usually exceed the period of their origin and also later as they do not necessarily become reality just because they are the basis for new theories trying to formulate a certain moral vision in a form of new moral ideals or even the moral perfection of individuals and mankind.

Kováč concludes that there should be some proof to show future generations that the authors of the past (Aristotle and all others) were wrong in their ideas about man and society and to refuse to deal with them any longer since they are unproductive. I am convinced that Aristotle and the whole history of ethical thinking (including moral history of mankind) can contribute to the contemporary problems of ethics, morality, virtuousness and the human soul despite their mistakes, faults and imperfections. The history, including the history of ethical thinking and the history of morality should not be worshipped as an idol. In contrary, one should learn from history (including the history of philosophy, ethics and morality). This is the main aim of this work which does not attempt to be the complete compilation of the state of morality at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. It seeks to study its individual expressions that could lead to a better understanding of contemporary ethics, morality and virtues. The ethical theories of present, including our morality, are built on the arms of the past and it would be a great mistake to ignore the past.

Translated by Zuzana Terrayová

References


Kováč, Ľudstvo v ohrození, 109.
CHAPTER TWO

MORALITY OF THE PAST OR THE PAST OF MORALITY

VIERA BILASOVÁ

“The fight of man against power is the fight of memory against forgetfulness.”
—Milan Kundera

It appears that the sources of integrity inherent in society and the individual relate to their ability and courage to adjust their vision of reality and to act on philosophical reflection, which through its dimension of criticism helps uncover not only the truth of the world but also the values and standards that are a part of life and relate immediately to the issue of its being. No historical period of time has ever offered any key, which would be instrumental in finding orientation in the social development to such a degree so as to create a correct image not only of “what is” but also of “what should be”. Under the label of morality, that is the sum of moral values and conscience, what is hidden is a pressure of will and desire, which becomes a catalyst of commensurability of the forms of freedom and power and is reflected in the network of relations in each culture and each historical period of time. Making decisions and what requirement should be preferred is then related to the processes of differentiation, which are part of the modes of (self)perceiving as they transcend the sphere of culture and become part of the political sphere, which binds one by responsibility on how to decide and act. Logos and ethos in the dimension of sociability intersect. This is why in this respect, one cannot a priori represent or weaken the value system of the past. One cannot abstract after discriminating the acts as correct or mistaken, the behaviour as human or inhuman, this should then mean that we have to “attempt

17 For the sake to secure the agreement of controlled people, those who are in power activate social images, which are based on generally acceptable ethic value. So legitimacy of power is in direct attitude to socially acceptable confessions, norm and values in certain cultural system (more on power and necessity of its legalization from the side of those who are in a power, but also from the side of controlled people, Kráľová, Moc vo všetkom, 43–64).
at a kind of a dialogue between ourselves and the past, a dialogue from man to man.”

Culture offers this environment through its paradoxical nature of bonds between the known and the alien, between ideality, intimacy, and internal life creativity which opens it and makes its further development dynamic: “The unique character of each culture is manifested and only has philosophical significance if and when such a culture exists simultaneously with another culture and when the cultures mutually complement their respective cultural systems and ideas.”

Being different is not in any of its manifestations a hindrance to dialogue and tolerance, this is why it is culture, which offers space (geographical, ethnic, local or national) for the continuity and accumulates life experience related to human values and lifestyles, and these constitute the culture itself as “a whole”. One should agree with Umberto Eco who claims that the ethical dimension is being born at the moment when the other enters the scene. Every single law, whether moral or legal, always regulates interpersonal relations, including the relations with the Other, who issues this law.

Complexity and antagonism of the social development includes moral looking for the sense of the movement and objective, since both of these are simultaneously and jointly an expression of moral consciousness or awareness of the (in)ability of society and the individual to find an optimal route.

The accompanying signs of the dynamism of lifestyle include also relation to the past and its feedback which is a critical re-evaluation by both society and the individual. What is present in this attitude is tension, which not even contemporary man can get rid of, since it is bound to the autonomy and authenticity of individual cultural worlds and simultaneously to the universal character of human rights, and these have been conceived and gradually made more precise in the historical cultural process through the European tradition. The tension between the need for return and looking for continuity uncovers space for reflection-albeit permanently changing-values and lifestyles which are modified by a different cultural shape, are then unique and, simultaneously, standard-giving in their respective environments. Social problems become a theme of historical contemplation which uncover the confrontation of selection and choice in specific conditions in relation to consequences, which are not only perceived as overlapping the conflicts but also as an accumulation of hope for their solution:

“Coping with the past has always several dimensions. We have to recognize existential, moral, psychological, socio-psychological moments (...). The past is

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18 Loewenstein, My a ti druzi, 156.
19 Kolosok, Dialóg etnikultur, 670.
20 Eco, Five Moral Pieces, 72.
not only “lived” it also must be judged. There are things that cannot be "lapsed" and one should talk about them in terms of moral, political, and legal guilt (and punishment)."²¹

Historical memory forms part of the image that man creates about himself and the world, this is why these processes of interpretation are also accompanied by the decisions, which are bound to various value systems—there is either their acceptance or refusal—we find them in life, in society as principles and standards of ethos. Every single historical period of time, every single event, past or present, appears only comprehensible if we understand the sense, which is encoded in the value bonds, since these formed the cultural tradition. To understand the objectives of life means to clarify the relation to tradition and realize the values, which are an inevitable condition for a man to be able to find orientation, not only in reality but predominantly in opportunities and possibilities offered by that reality.

Reflection of social relations and their arrangement disturbs the status of the image of truism and opens a space for problems related to looking for the ways and their solution in the context of culture and their possibility to uncover its crises. The idealistic trips to the past enable us to understand not only the historical background of the development but in its topical form to redefine social values, which specifically include the place of values related to national identity. The need for (national) identification, predominantly a political one, which is related to the idea of the nation’s self-determination and its state form, called for a need to protect its independence by means of cultural values, since these had its social significance. The significance which builds and codifies certain values and patterns of behaviour to a certain level of certainty—we know we belong somewhere—is understood as a source of integrity so very much required for the development of the present and the future.

Forming the identity of a community and an individual may have different forms and this process is accompanied by a struggle and tension in the world of values and in certain phases of its development, the very belonging to a nation (national identity) becomes a determining value in itself.²² In social movements,

²¹ Novosád, Alchýmia dejín, 193.
²² One can only agree with the opinion of František Novosád according to whom national awareness in a certain phase is understood as a precondition of functioning of all the structures and activities, predominantly those which are related to culture, education, and cultivating one’s lifestyle. The change of the mode of being for national awareness does not mean that national awareness receives a status of being natural—it must be systematically maintained, cultivated, and developed. National awareness had never a status of facticity and Novosád considers normative dimensions its substantial constituents. He includes also discussions on what we are like and what we should be like. Ethnicity is a fact but belonging to a nation is also a value (Ibid., 210).
moral values acquire their own cultural milieu and a possibility of choice connected to freedom and responsibility accompanying human actions becomes a significant factor in the life of both society and the individual. The historical experience of mankind shows that the values and standards belong into the “trousseau” of every culture and along with institutions and modes of thinking they co-create a milieu in which society lives and actively transforms and shifts the development forward. Discriminating values in human life is an important factor, which multiplies itself predominantly through the ability to create, explore, and produce the values, which despite all things have their own regularity, despite the resistance of the existing social order and its institutions, even though they enable the transformation of the old and formation of the new value. This space of the dynamism of principles and standards of co-habitation and interpersonal relations as manifestations of the autonomy of human spirit is created in the process of (self)evaluation of both society and individual, and is related to the ideals (political, ethical, social, economic, cultural), and the fulfilling of which is related to the historical context and its values because these co-created the former. The returns to the values of the past, to tradition, to “the routes” are a manifestation of our endeavour to understand the milieu in which we live, but specifically its changes in time. This is not worshiping the past or culture whose sane spirit is not afraid of the load values of the past. Just the contrary, it looks for the lessons of the old sages, rather it is the understanding of the continuity that creates a space for a free choice and critical reflection of the components, which constituted this tradition.

Internal tension of the bond of knowledge and being was understood by philosophy in the very earliest periods of time. Satisfying the human endeavour to understand things means that we are to understand their reasons and was accompanied by an endeavour to regulate the value of knowledge of knowing and in this way co-determine the quality of life practice (acting). Evaluation is part of each and every process of knowledge and then the reflection of these values requires the development of a moral awareness of the same level. Moral judgment may not be replaced or excluded from the life attitude of both man and society, since this would not only lead to ethical chaos but also to a crisis of culture. This moral milieu is part of culture, which must continue in its creation and this requires a certain balance of both material and spiritual values: “If there exists a harmony of cultural functions then it must be manifested by an order, strong classification, style, and rhythmical life of the respective society.”23 The need for order and an endeavour at one’s safety are an expression of a feeling of obligation that is present and even dominant in certain historical periods of time in the development of society, along with the will and agreement to look for

23 Huizinga, Kultúra a kríza, 29.
general rules for co-existence. The problem of identity then is predominantly a problem of ethics, only then it is a political problem, however, its solution means to understand it on the level of ethics (through the analysis of plurality of anchoring the identity) and then a political reflection (through the analysis of possible relations of identities).24

The phenomena of modern times and the currently existing modernization processes and the modernization processes in Europe of the 18th and 19th centuries include also the processes of forming the national awareness related to the rise of states and nations.25 The ethos of the time brings along the ideas of Enlightenment in philosophy and literature which were leaned against of the criticism of oppression, dogmatism, inequality and developed the values following from the universal and natural platform of reason and humanity: “The ethics of Enlightenment itself was individualistic, universalistic, and equalitarian.”26 A philosopher of Enlightenment knows what a man should be like, he knows his moral status and moral rules enable him to appeal to the reason which liberates an individual from the bonds of hierarchy and the pressure of moral authority which had its routes in the past and tradition. Contemplation of Enlightenment were related to the ethos of man as conceived and moving within the social milieu which was heading towards a rational arrangement and harmony and at the same time it offered sufficient possibilities for autonomy and self-awareness of the individual, which was based on the individual’s freedom. The reason for European Enlightenment wanting to become a practical implementation of freedom and looking for justice and this type of rationality came from a foundation for a new political culture, which focused on the freedom of an entity and the dignity of every single man. This is a message that through its universalism became domestic in the European spirit27 and laid the foundations of social emancipation that partially opened the gates to the processes of the formation of nations.

The period of political turbulences in the first half of the 19th century raised

24 Hlaváč, Identita ako sociálna konštrukcia, 18.
25 Ernest Gellner considers nations and nationalism phenomena of modern time of the 19th and 20th century, which are part of the phase of the development of the European society, i.e. part of the modern industrial society. He defines nation as a large group of people with common culture whose substantial trait is common language and a group of people who understand their common culture as a reason for the existence of social political unity. He holds the opinion that culture became interconnected with the state even before onset of nationalism which as a political doctrine emerges in the society in which the state had previously existed and acquires in certain phases of its development a key position as a politically legitimate principle (Gellner, Nacionalismus, 58-60, 99).
26 Ibid., 82.
27 Metz, Křesťanství a evropský duch, 3.
new questions for the philosophy of an entity which drew attention not only to the possibilities and boundaries of the knowledge of man as a thinking existence with his/her own reason but exposed the entity also to the pressure of the consequences following from his own freedom. This not only brought him/her a feeling of power in relation to the nature and of specific position in the world but also a feeling of helplessness, since there was no higher instance in this world than in the entity him/herself. Against the cold rationalism of the man of Enlightenment who celebrated reason and human universality, there appears a romantic vision of the relation between the world and the man: “What is romantic is what lives in nature and exerts its life-giving effect on the given moment of time.” Nature is becoming a mirror of the inner existence of man and romanticism not only interferes with literature but also science and philosophy. The philosophy of romanticism as a part of culture, penetrated almost into all spheres of life and spiritual activities, but predominantly into literature by which it created a platform for the return to the unifying principles of the explanation of the world and human history. The entity from the romantic point of view is perceived as a creative, free, spontaneous being, I, which opens its internal space for the influx and expression of emotions, irrationality, mysticism, and visions that find their most immediate expression in literary symbolism. “Hominum romanticum” is the embodiment of man, in which joy and sorrow, will and hatred, courage and fear are present and these penetrate to the remaining spheres of life.

Romanticism intervened with the political sphere of society and regulated the contemplations on the substance of humankind, looking for peculiarities, differences, and cultural specific traits too, which were ideally suited to offer the ideational space for nationalism. Romanticism indeed offered both language and style for the political vision of citizenship through a return to the roots, through

28 Schulz, Romantika, 24.
29 Elena Várossová is another author who pinpoints getting together the creative principles of philosophy and art, especially a strong, significant, internal tie between literature and philosophy. She considers the Romantic movement an ideational expression of dramatic life of nations in the European society in the 19th century. The romantic philosophy, having opened in an unparalleled measure to the influence of life dynamism and simultaneously to the influences of those creative spheres, which formed the above dynamism to the greatest depth, i.e. the literature and art, threw itself into the arena of romantic battles and stood at the forefront of that movement through its own philosophical weapons. The components of Romantic movement thus acquired its world view, epistemological and methodological unity. Várossová emphasized this relationship predominantly in relation to the Slovak romanticism in which she considers philosophical inspirations not only an inseparable part of literary and social practice of that period of time, she considers the ideational and philosophical background of those processes “as if primary” (Várossová, Filozofia vo svete, 119-20).