

Ethical Considerations about Thinking in the Past and Present

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Thinking about the ethical and moral issues which humanity has faced in different periods of society cannot be constantly taken for granted. It is subject to constant development. This applies to all areas of life, including social, political, cultural, and scientific, for example in relation to issues of transhumanism, enhancement, ecology, the environment, artificial intelligence and so on. This was also evidenced by the 23rd international online conference *Ethical Thinking of the Past and Present*, which took place on May 27-28, 2021, entitled *Ethics in the 19th and 20th Centuries*.¹ The event was organized by the *Civic Association Ethica* and was attended by philosophers and ethicists not only from Slovakia but also from the Czech Republic, Poland, Italy and Ukraine. This online meeting dealt with, within several monothematic blocks, the broader context of philosophy and ethics in the 19th and 20th centuries, and also included the period up to the present day. In addition, it focused on the period of development of ethical thinking in Slovakia, Central Europe, as well as other parts of the European continent and the world, especially in relation to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (until 1918).

The academic guarantor of the conference, Vasil Gluchman (University of Prešov, Slovakia), stated that the standpoint on many ethical and moral issues within society and humanity is changing and evolving in connection with the scientific and technological progress of the time. Other reflections on the future also testify to this. Questions about the nation, which were fundamental in the 19th century and, to some extent, in the first half of the 20th century, have been replaced by current challenges for the future, for example in the areas of transhumanism, enhancement and artificial intelligence.²

The period of the 19th and 20th century in Slovakia is connected with the

¹ The paper is a result of KEGA project No. 013/PU-4/2019: History of Ethical Thinking in Slovakia.

² Hähnel, M.: Is it 'more normal' to enhance than to restore our nature? *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 7 (3-4), 2017, pp. 105–113.

gradual onset of philosophical and ethical thinking within the next phase of the Slovak national movement. The nation was not only the topic of nationalists from the ranks of politicians, historians, writers, priests or teachers, but also became the topic of the philosophical and ethical reflections of the time.³ Vasil Gluchman in his paper, *Ján Kollár in Masaryk's Reflections at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, stressed that T. G. Masaryk paid great attention to Ján Kollár as well as František Palacký, Josef Dobrovský, Josef Jungmann, and Karel Havlíček. Masaryk perceived Kollár's work in the context of formulating his conception of Czech-Slovak reciprocity, which was part of Kollár's lifelong efforts, albeit in the broader context of Slavic reciprocity. In his critique of Kollár, Masaryk also pointed out, for example, the different understandings of humanity in Kollár and Kant. According to Jan Svoboda (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Republic), we can consider Masaryk's philosophical approach to reality to be generally consistent. August Comte's inclination to positivism was characteristic of him. His phenomenalism was originally corrected by Masaryk in the psychology of J.S. Mill. According to the author, a positive starting point for Masaryk's ethics is a combination of these positivist approaches. In *The position and role of ethics in Masaryk's system of sciences*, Svoboda stated that Masaryk's German translation of Hume's book carrying the name *Eine Untersuchung über die Prinzipien der Moral von David Hume* (1883) revealed that essential stimuli – which shaped Masaryk's own ideas about ethics – was drawn from David Hume, who was considered the “father of positivism” and in critical confrontation with Kant. Lukáš Švaňa's (University of Prešov, Slovakia) article, *Masaryk, war and humanity*, dealt primarily with an analysis of ethical aspects. The author was also interested in T. G. Masaryk's views on war, revolution and violence in general. Zuzana Danišková (Trnava University, Slovakia) in her presentation, *General education for the teacher: Masaryk's view*, recalled and emphasized the current recommendations of T. G. Masaryk, despite the fact that pedeutology is currently not oriented in the same direction.

What was the state of ethics in Europe and in the world at that time? The subject of critical analysis in Ondrej Marchevský's (University of Prešov, Slovakia) paper, *Kant before the court of Jakov E. Golosovker*, was the appropriateness of the starting points for Kant's evaluation. The subject of the analysis is Golosovker's short but contradictory treatise on Dostoevsky and

³ Krištof, P.: Ethical aspects of the non-romantic thinking of Jonáš Záborský and Štefan Launer. *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)*, 10(3-4), 2020, pp. 146–154.

Kant from 1963. It is the contradiction of Golosovker's evaluations that becomes his central theme. The inconsistency of Kant's special grasp of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, which has far-reaching implications for Golosovker. Among other things, morality and values. The rage of the devil in Dostoevsky's novel is plotted by Kant's first critique. The subject of the critical analysis of the paper was the appropriateness of the starting points for Kant's designations, which Golosovker formulates using a narrative close to the war crime drama. On the basis of the selected samples of beliefs and activities of the representative of one branch of the family, namely Leonid Zaklyns'kyi (1850–1890), Oresta Losyk (University of Lviv, Ukraine) presented *Ethical aspects of the philosophical culture of Halychyna in the last third of the 19th century: The activities of Leonid Zaklyns'kyi*. She analyzed how the evolution of value (in particular ethical) beliefs as to the direction of the Ukrainian national revival happened in the last third of the 19th century in Halychyna including dealing with Immanuel Kant's views. Marián Palenčár (University of Prešov, Slovakia) in *Boredom as a necessary condition of the ethical stage in S. Kierkegaard*, pointed out the understanding of the phenomenon of boredom, which is presented on the aesthetic stage. At the same time, he emphasized the role that boredom played in human life in the transition from the aesthetic to the ethical stage. The contribution of Wendy Droženová (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Republic), *R. Tagore's Criticism of Nationalism, Its Contexts, and Humanistic Legacy*, focused on the legacy of Tagore's humanism. Its aim was to overcome religious, national and social differences, in particular through moral and spiritual progress.

Several authors have dealt with reflections on contemporary morality in literature. Peter Káša (University of Prešov, Slovakia) in his paper, *Ethics and forms of involvement in the early poetry of Svetozár Hurban Vajanský*, dealt with the description of the poetic structure and aesthetic parameters of poetic text. In selected poems from the collection of poems *Tatry a more*, he stressed cultural aspects and contextual determination. The author tried to find intersections between artistic presentation and involvement in society. This manifested itself in a rhetorical style, publicity, as well as moral appeal. Ján Kalajtšidis (University of Prešov, Slovakia) in his paper, *Exploring the social issues in J. G. Tajovský's writings*, tried to approach the literary work of J. G. Tajovský through the depicted moral questions. Tajovský is one of the most prominent prose writers and playwrights in Slovakia within a defined period. He presented his views on well-known social issues in the cultural region at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The most sig-

nificant of these themes were alcoholism, war, the morality of the people, as well as materialism. Andrea Klimková (Matej Bel University, Slovakia) stated that the goal of her presented paper, *On freedom, emancipation, and 'women's questions' in the pre-war period in Slovakia*, was to address ethical and philosophical considerations that dealt with the issue of women. These questions were raised by Hana Gregorová. Júlia Polomská (University of Prešov, Slovakia) in her article, *Philosophical-ethical reflections in the work of Dušan Makovický*, provided some details that dealt with the philosophy of L.N. Tolstoy. Similarly, some efforts to identify Dušan Makovický's philosophical and ethical considerations can be observed here.

Some transhumanist authors today, such as J. Savulescu and B.D. Earp, suggest applying chemicals as one of the forms of therapy for people who have problems, for example, in their relationships and, therefore, their lives are not filled with happiness. Zlatica Plašienková and Martin Farbák (Comenius University, Slovakia) presented *The Chemical Future of Relationships: A New Paradigmatic Approach to Human Enhancement?* Their attitude to this was critical. They pointed out that this, at first sight, can deprive people of their natural ability to cope with critical situations in their lives. On the other hand, they could be impoverished by autonomous feelings of happiness and the search for meaning in their lives. The contribution by Jana Bartal (Constantine The Philosopher University, Slovakia) *Artificial intelligence as a challenge for the future?* dealt with artificial intelligence and ethics. She stated that discussions on this topic had already begun in Slovakia. The author tried to point out the positive as well as negative aspects of artificial intelligence. She perceived the issue through an ethical prism. In this context, she recalled the opinion of Isaac Asimov, who established three laws of robotics, which were also adopted in this field. They are based on Kant's categorical imperative, but also on the principle of utility, always in favour of man. In the end, she emphasized the need to define specific ethical relationships to different types of artificial intelligence, where Kant's categorical imperative should generally be applied. However, the specification should be the regulation of the ethical relationship to general intelligence and superintelligence, where Kant's imperative should apply to a limited or full extent. Eva Smolková (Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia) considered whether it was the right decision to incorporate environmental philosophy into the system of bioethics, which meant the realization of environmental ideas. She pursued a perspective of promoting the ideas of environmental responsibility as well as environmental ethics. Her presentation *Where is current environmental thinking headed?* focused on the possibilities for dis-

cussion, which would try to address environmental issues in the context of bioethics, as well as to assess whether these steps would have any benefit for environmental ethics. Inocent-Mária Vladimír Szaniszló (Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Italy) tried to approach and emphasize the demanding work of several experts within the CRISIS 2020/21 project at his university. In his paper, *How invisible emigrants became systems-relevant workers during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: Current state of ethical solution of social and health rights of “mobile” workers of the member states of the European Union*, he also pointed out several solutions for how a common Europe should work in the future.

What was the ethical and moral dimension of upbringing and education, or the teaching of the history of ethics at universities in the past as well as in the present, as well as the most current and pressing ethical and moral issues of the present day? Marta Gluchmanová (Technical university of Košice, Slovakia) believed that the humanities should also play a very important role through a better understanding of human behaviour. Her paper *Ethical challenges for contemporary education* stressed better cooperation between the humanities, as it is also part of the shared responsibility for successfully addressing the challenges of human development as part of the plurality of contemporary education.

Slavomír Lesňák (Masaryk University, Czech Republic) arranged elements of ethical thinking in Bondy's dramatic, fictional, and theoretical work. At the same time, he tried to compare them with his reflections in the Czech-Slovak philosophical environment in his presentation *Ethical aspects in the work of Egon Bondy*. Stefan Konstańczak (Institute of Philosophy, Poland) tried to present a hypothesis that dehumanization of people in concentration camps and this evil is the reason why traditional ethics, including Kantian or neo-Kantian ethics, cannot, to this day, formulate any theory explaining the consequences of the tragic legacy of the past in his presentation *On the Permanency of Evil and the Powerlessness of Ethics in Polish Camp Literature*. The importance of community for living a good life as is perceived by Józef Tischner was presented by Joanna Mysona Byrska (The Pontifical University of John Paul II, Poland) in *Community as the basis of a good human life*. The paper *Selected aspects of ethical thinking of the late Wittgenstein* by Marián Ambrozy (International School of Management, Slovakia) designed to map ethics in the work of the late Wittgenstein.

The papers presented at the conference, as well as the rich discussions that followed, are evidence of a huge shift in relation to ethical and moral issues and issues that have been, and are being, addressed in the Central

European region from the 19th century to the present. While in the past, those themes concerning the existence and future of the nation dominated, at present, philosophers and ethicists in Central Europe are reflecting on ethical and moral issues concerning the existence and future of humanity in general. It is proof that the efforts of previous generations are being reaped in the present.

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