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Metamorphoses of Value Consciousness in Modern Society

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Abstract

The aim of this work is a philosophical analysis of the shifts in the functioning of values in contemporary society—in a situation of the collapse of values, the erasure of the boundary between the transcendent and the immanent. The gap between the existential and the social in modern society leads to the destruction of the values functioning and transmittance mechanism. The differences between the target and the value causality were revealed, which contributed to the distinguishing between the praxeological and the axiological aspects of human life. An important consequence of the transformations in the mechanism of value functioning in consumer society is the subtle substitution of value causality—by teleological causality, and subsequently—its reduction to a purely utilitarian one. It is shown that overcoming the problem of value pluralism is often achieved by introducing a common framework—a Supra-value, among which we are inclined to include human dignity, the unconditional intrinsic worth of the human person, the striving for freedom, respect for individual rights to life and health, and to physical and spiritual development. The significance of human preservation became starkly apparent during the coronavirus pandemic, transforming from a pressing social principle into an urgent problem.

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Keywords

Values, Axiology, Man, Society, Existence, Transcendent, Freedom.

Introduction

The research objective was to analyze transformations in the functioning of values in modern society. Values are a means of transmitting culture, ensuring historical continuity in the development of society. They combine the social and the cultural, the social and the existential. However, under the crisis of institutional forms of the social and decentralization of a person, the necessary condition for the value dimension functioning is destroyed, namely, the connection between the social and the existential in the appropriation, transmittance and confirmation of values. This thesis served as the starting point of our research.

A significant cultural backdrop of the modern era is the realities of postmodernism. As J. Lipovetsky correctly replied, “the postmodernist society no longer has idols or prohibitions; it has neither majestic images in which it sees itself nor historical plans that mobilize the masses. From now on, we are ruled by emptiness, but such emptiness is neither tragic nor apocalyptic” [Lipovetsky, 2001, 23-24]. He called the modern era “the era of emptiness”.

However, it is not as simple as that. There is another important point that should be analyzed. The human being's sensitivity to the interval between the normative and the actual is essentially ineliminable from life, for it concerns the fundamental structures of human being — its Existenz. Undoubtedly, the axiological emptiness manifests itself as an existential conviction in the absence of eternal, unshakable values [Skomorokhov, 2020]. However, L. M. Batkin's reflections may be methodologically important in this regard: “A postmodernist... does not in the least abandon values (ideals, personal beliefs, etc.). That is not the point. Could that be conceivable? It's not about a trifle, it's about a person. However, they are less than ever willing to accept them from the outside as ready-made and normative ones. So we have to lay down our lives for elaborating them and changing them – from the very beginning, freely, ‘out of nothing’, as Berdyaev put it – in pace with changing ourselves” [Batkin, 1996, 87]. Thus, nihilism in relation to values at the level of the general cultural mood does not imply an obligatory existential rejection of the value hierarchy at the personal level.

An important part of our work was the development of a case study in the form of a philosophical analysis of value displacements during the coronavirus pandemic. This is, in fact, the genuine novelty of the study. The 20th century had no such precedents, except perhaps the Spanish flu, but that did not become a subject of philosophical reflection at the time. The possibility of future pandemics is entirely real; in this sense, our article is extremely realistic and socially oriented.

Materials and Methods

The starting point in the application of the axiological approach was the author's conviction in the need to overcome its reduction to an understanding method, which limits the richness of its heuristic

possibilities. In our opinion, the philosophical analysis of the transformation of value consciousness mechanisms requires not to oppose but to link the idiographic and nomothetic methods using the complementary principle, since the specificity of existential and cultural-historical values can be determined by generalization – in the perspective of correlation with universal human values and meanings. The critical-reflexive approach allowed identifying the connection between the existential and the value, as well as understanding the narrowness of the traditional perception of the essence of the axiological approach. The formalization method was used in the analysis of “symbolic morality”. The hermeneutic approach and the method of historical reconstruction contributed to the identification of modern transformations in the mechanism of values functioning and the features of the axiological situation under the coronavirus pandemic (a case study). The comparative approach was used in the analysis of the ratio of the axiological and praxiological aspects of human life.

Results and Discussion

The philosophical category of “value” can be called universal, since it affects both the subject-material world and the world of spiritual attitudes and ideas that are integral to the understanding of man and humanity, at the same time embracing such contrasting areas as, for example, psychology and economics.

There are values that are commonly called “basic”, “unconditional”, that is, standing above time and above cultural peculiarities. However, some researchers tend to believe that the existence of such values is either impossible or unattainable since throughout history the conditions of human existence, economic and cognitive activities change significantly, and cultural differences influence the understanding of what is really important, relevant and necessary for a person and the society at a given moment in history.

In Aristotle’s doctrine, the distinguishing feature of spiritual entities, as is known, is the target cause. Goal-setting is the proof of human freedom, the basis (or elementary cell) of projectivity. It should be noted that the target causality was for a long time ignored by scientific cognition; it was believed that the task of science was to establish a system of acting causes, not target ones. Value motivation is included in the category of target causality (the tradition originates from Kant, who defined a set of moral subjects as the “kingdom of goals”); true, values should rather be viewed as the realm of ultimate goals. The value world is, in a certain sense, the realm of goals, since values, being meaningful to people, cannot remain just “mere words”, but are implemented in the form of practical orientations, effective human attitudes, in the form of specific goals.

However, there is a subtle difference between the foundations of target and value causalities: the target logic poses the question: “what for?”, the value logic – “for what sake?”. Axiology cannot be reduced entirely to teleology. The first question actually forms praxeology around itself, the second one forms axiology. However, the assessment of a thing arising in practical activity from the position of significance for the subject in the present and future catalyzes the value dimension. Indeed, the praxeological and axiological sides of human life can be so deeply embedded in each other that it is not always possible to isolate them as separate independent aspects. This proves once again that the crystallization of values occurs in practical activity, but subsequently, values can be hypostatized. However, there are also fundamental differences: for example, praxeology can constitute an axiological problem of the correlation of goals and means, unsolvable only on the basis of praxeology.

Why have we pointed out the difference between praxeology and axiology? The thing is that the vague distinction between them may replace the axiological side with a utilitarian one, a pragma. Actually, in modern society, the dominance of praxeology over axiology is observed in the form of

utilitarianism (a pragmatic way of justifying values). A modern person consumerizes values, primarily spiritual ones. Thus, Z. Bauman criticizes the consumerist attitude to the values of human understanding: “the bonds of partnership are seen as something that should be consumed, not produced; they are subject to the same evaluation criteria as all other consumer goods” [Bauman, 2002, 197]. A legitimate question arises: is there still a place for existential axiological choice under the dominance of the consumerist attitude?

We believe that it is important to pay attention to one more shift – towards mechanical and inertial adherence to values. In other words, in this case, the essence is not in the choice per se, but in the way of implementing this choice: how is it implemented? The value starts living strictly according to the laws of the material world, it loses its function of triggering the target causality, the function of a guideline for activity, and a person turns into a soulless machine. The reason is basically the same: we remove the target reason and what is left is a bare soulless mechanism.

All this leads to transformations in the mechanism of functioning of values, which are akin to what N. A. Berdyaev called symbolic morality. Berdyaev distinguished between the morality of symbolism, which he proposed to overcome, and the morality of realism. He wrote: “I understand symbolic morality as the morality which strives ‘not for the actual transformation of life, but for conditionally symbolic actions’” [Berdyaev, 1998, 213]. And it almost always dominates (in the life of the state, the family, in the secular society). “Instead of the actual implementation of goodness, they produce conditional signs of its implementation. It is considered to be important, significant and worthy to make a known sign, a sign of respect and reverence, a sign of love and sympathy, etc. This could be called ritual ethics... A person is instructed to act as if they respect and love, although in reality they despise and hate; they have to make signs of good behavior and signal about a clear conscience, although they are a low and unscrupulous person” [Berdyaev, 1998, 213]. N. A. Berdyaev considered such morality inhuman, as it contains no true respect and attention to a person; sometimes the height of a person is symbolized by a high rank only (that is, there is a symbolic substitution of human dignity with a social sign). Habits, automatic behavior, moral rhetoric, and hypocrisy are the determining factors in this morality. He identified the morality of symbolism with the ethics of law, which lacks creativity. We believe that the “symbolic” form of behavior results in a formal, external conditionality, in a formal, mechanical involvement in the value layer of life, without a holistic presence – existence; it does not touch upon the depths of the soul, it does not come from the heart, that is, it is not triggered by the value causality, but what is most important – a person is not a “goal” in it. On the contrary, realistic ethics, with its appeal to the human heart, is fundamentally opposed to symbolic morality: it “requires a real transformation and a real implementation of goodness and truth in life, real human qualities, it is human” [Berdyaev, 1998, 213]. Thus, it is implemented in the name of the value of goodness, in the name of the value of a human.

The description of symbolic morality is formally very similar to the requirements of etiquette (it is no accident that N. A. Berdyaev describes politeness as an example). This is especially vivid in the modern consumer society, where etiquette becomes a condition for successful selling of goods and making a profit (thus it is included in the price of the goods). For example, a smile is no longer a sign of kindness and humanness but becomes just a professional requirement, a social function, like a “uniform”, therefore a smile and politeness can be removed together with the uniform after finishing work. It can be continued that the true dignity of a person is replaced by their image.

We got used to thinking that modern society is a consumer society that has more or less solved the pressing problems of survival and is enjoying the benefits of civilization and expecting the upcoming of the universal digitalization era. One should admit, however, that recent years have made significant adjustments to the understanding of what the humanity is in fact doing and where it is moving. The

coronavirus pandemic, which rapidly and quite ruthlessly swept the human race, forced us to look at life – and at values! – from a slightly different angle.

The occurring crisis has given impetus to a change in value attitudes. Man has to revise the priorities, adjust the habitual system of values, to shift the emphasis. For example, one has to give up what was important yesterday in order to preserve and secure the future.

We belong to a generation that has not witnessed the horrors of world wars, that does not know what hunger, fratricide, or mass repression mean. Many of us no longer remember the crisis-ridden 90s. And then, quite suddenly, we faced an epidemic of a disease that has claimed millions of lives. The acute realization of the fact that anyone can die, regardless of any logic, regardless of age and social status, as in a lottery, “just like that”, made us think about other things. As if post factum, as if in a dream, “in hindsight”, we discovered that living in a global and seemingly quite comfortable world people can still become refugees, get into a volcanic eruption zone, or even become participants in religious wars. The sudden and illogical mortality due to the virus has rocked our guidelines and made us think about whether humanity is going in the right direction – that very humanity which, despite technological advances, despite global organizations and the accumulated mass of knowledge, has not been able to help itself. And the question that arose: “Is all this right?” – this is the question of changing or adjusting our ideas about values.

P. S. Gurevich wrote: “The process of changing values is lengthy, as a rule. But sometimes it takes the form of an unexpected restructuring of the entire system of ideas. In addition, the value orientations of a bygone era can be revived, acquire an unexpected significance in another era. From this point of view, we can say: culture possesses a sort of a treasury, a set of value orientations that are grouped depending on the prevailing trend in the society” [Gurevich, 2008, 137].

An American futurologist and publicist E. Toffler wrote: “In 1965, in an article published in *Horizon*, I was the first to use the term ‘shock of the future’ to describe the destructive stress and disorientation that are caused in individuals by too large changes occurring in too short a time” [Toffler, 2002, 15]. However, today we can say that the “shock of the future” is apparently replaced by the fear of the present when everything happens really quickly and it is absolutely impossible to say what will happen in a month. Therefore, we can assume that we are facing the “unexpected reconstruction”, which P. S. Gurevich wrote about. Actually, there is nothing wrong with such a shift. Crises make people think and look for a way out. Now, it is necessary to stop and question not the values themselves, but our interpretation of values. Maybe it is worth substituting consumption for taking care of the future? Substituting wrangle and wars for uniting and mutual assistance? To declare the understanding of some values false (or irrelevant, untimely) and place them aside while retaining the opportunity to return to them later?

Indeed, a comprehensive, holistic understanding of the current global situation is likely to take place much later, after the crisis is resolved. But it is today that we need to reflect and look for a way out, relying on the most unshakable and relevant grounds. To do this, it may be worthwhile, on the contrary, to extract from the experience of mankind what we are starting to forget.

Here we see two aspects.

We will mention the first in passing because the problem is global and urgent. This is the problem of freedom, freedom as a value.

A paradox appears here. On the one hand, there are countries and peoples who constantly use this word and declare freedom the highest value. One can just turn to the modern artistic content, which positions incredible feats for the sake of freedom (up to the destruction of galaxies). In virtual reality, countries are captured, political leaders are liquidated, governments are replaced for its sake... On the other hand, the slogan “Liberty, equality and fraternity” (the legacy of the French Revolution, inscribed

in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR, [www](http://www.ohchr.org)] is perceived as something gone and slightly forgotten. However, nowadays many ordinary people tend to recollect it, especially its first part. The coronavirus, with its lockdowns, bans on country entries and exits, mandatory hygienic restrictions, and (non)mandatory vaccination, has greatly changed our ideas about freedom, and at the same time about a person's place in the society, about relationships within communities, about obligations to people around us, and so on. The issue of everyone's personal choice has become acute, as the general vector of well-being depends on it. For example, each of us poses the question: can I limit my freedom for the sake of society or not?

Starting to ponder about this, we realize that these issues, considered separately, are not in the sphere of ethics or, for example, epidemiology. It is worth recalling the already cited words by P. S. Gurevich, where he says that "the value orientations of a bygone era can be revived". Then it is worth recalling the words of I. Kant from his *Anthropology from a pragmatic viewpoint*, written in 1798: "Egoism can only be opposed by pluralism, i.e. a way of thinking in which a person views oneself and behaves not as embracing the whole world in one's Self, but only as a citizen of the world" [Kant, 1966, 359]. A person should behave as a citizen of the world, as a part of humanity. The obligation is necessary not tomorrow, but now. But is it possible? The urgent medical, economic, and political realities are superimposed on a thorough and long-established program of human values. Figuratively speaking, a person's freedom ends today where their breath reaches, which may contain a virus. These are our modern realities and living conditions.

The second and most important thing which should be mentioned is the value of human life. Years after the emergence of the coronavirus, when the long-term consequences start manifesting themselves, the problem of "human preservation" becomes extremely urgent. It is obvious that we need to save as many people as possible, reduce mortality and, ultimately, fight for the survival of man as a species. But after all, these colossal efforts only confirm the principle of preserving a human life regardless of any conditions. The most striking phenomenon is the professional status of medicine. The shortage of medical staff in hospitals, excessive workload, forced layoffs – this is a new reality that requires our comprehension. However, this is not only a medical problem. We are talking about the transformation of our understanding of service to society because a doctor is not just a profession requiring special qualifications and specific human qualities. This activity and vocation are at the center of the human-preserving situation. It is possible to save a person only if there is a unity of the genuine professional and human vocation. What had been taken for granted in the profession becomes nowadays the first condition for the physical preservation of life. In such a situation, a person needs a person, their warmth, participation, dedication (especially in the "red zone" wards). No achievement of medical technology can compare with the human "reverence for life". Taking care of a human is an exclusively human task. This is implemented in a new (but not from the historical viewpoint) *paideia* format, i.e. a unique combination of the professional and the world outlook.

The new social situation is characterized by a change in attitudes towards educational value, which is now being implemented largely due to the competence approach. Being modern, borrowed from the resources external to the Russian education tradition, this approach affects important professional skills and the general level of knowledge acquisition. However, in many ways, it implies only the technological aspect of obtaining and implementing knowledge. The world outlook aspect is read between the lines of certain competencies, confirming the secondary meaning of the civil and the universal sides in the structure of professional activity. In general, the competence approach seems to be a new, but not indisputable attempt to reflect educational values. In any case, it is not a narrow professional approach that is important, but its unity with the world outlook consistency of a person.

Society urgently needs to develop realistic educational goals; talks about a strong state are always relevant. Any epoch focuses on the priority directions of educational ideals. The ideal of education is undoubtedly connected with the need for internal improvement; it consists in instilling in every person the skills of a citizen capable of making decisions that would be free and meaningful for society. But this requires a turn to oneself, an opportunity to manifest a will impulse over one's soul, mind, and body. The historically formed value is the need for education comparable to the basic life needs of a man. This phenomenon is the legacy of paideia, the idea of all-Greek education, which implied moving from education as such through internal education to the next hypostasis – the outgrowth of the physical and spiritual virtues, the internal and the external into a socially significant activity, a political virtue. The ideal, being a developing phenomenon, cannot exist without a historical edition. The idea of paideia contains many social aspects, but its main significance lies in responding to the first “challenges” of civilization: to educate a certain type of personality demanded by society. The fundamental idea of antiquity: “a strong state means an educated person” – is still relevant.

Conclusion

The process of values functioning and shifting in the public consciousness was analyzed within the framework of the method of unity of the logical and the historical. This is due to the formation of a conceptual structure of values, which undoubtedly implies the inclusion of such aspects as the cognitive and the value, the social and the cultural, the social and the existential. The destruction of the necessary condition for the value dimension functioning – the connection between the social and the existential in the development, transmittance, and assumption of values – was further considered in the historical context of the modern realities of the social development under a pandemic.

The value structures of the society form a certain ideal of man and society. The reduction of the value approach to the target approach is fraught with the revival of utilitarianism. In modern society, the dominance of praxeology over axiology is observed in the form of utilitarianism (a pragmatic way of justifying values).

Implementation of the tasks set in the work has led us to an important conclusion – under the crisis in the society, it is necessary to consider in detail the causes of the values functioning and transmittance mechanism destruction, as well as the alienation of values into the sphere beyond the bounds. It was revealed that without a value dimension if ignored, man is lost in the world. The idea of the detachment of values expresses, on the one hand, the understanding of the transcendence of values, which serves as a means to justify values against accusations of subjectivism. On the other hand, it expresses the fact that values cannot be implemented by force. Values have an intelligible form of compulsion through the modality of duty.

Ultimately, modern society needs to clarify the concept of “preserving a person”, when everyone is important to humanity: “a person should be considered as a vocation, and not at all as nature, which was the case until relatively recently” [Marsel, 2001, 265].

The concept of human preservation, “...despite criticism, the idea of ‘human security’ still has a huge potential. First of all, because still relevant is the question of the values and priorities of modern civilization, raised 27 years ago in the UNO Annual Report on the Development of Mankind 1994. Paraphrasing the document provisions, it can be posed as follows: is not it due time for governments to digress from the endless rivalry, wars and the arms race and direct their efforts and resources to take care of the health and well-being of people, protecting the environment, fighting hunger and lack of water, that is, to try to create a better version of the modern world. And while politicians and researchers are arguing about ways and means to achieve this goal (as well as whether it is feasible at all), the mass

demand for a change of priorities and a new paradigm of world politics is becoming more and more obvious” [Nokhrin, 2021, www].

Under the collapse of values, the social fabric is falling apart. The problem of “preserving a person”, saving the society and preventing a return to medieval realities initiates our appeal to the actualization of values that play the role of a binding “glue” against social disintegration.

Under the pandemic, the value of human life and health, which seemed to be obvious and even “unconditional” before, showed its new facets. We need, so to say, a “pragmatic humanism” that requires urgent protection: it is necessary to protect man for the integrity of the society, which is the greatest value per se. That is because the future will depend on how we answer the “eternal questions” arising today. Moreover, in practice, difficulties have their own “inertia” and manifest themselves not immediately but gradually; therefore, it may take decades, not years, to overcome them. There is a long way to go.

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Метаморфозы ценностного сознания в современном обществе

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Аннотация

Целью данной работы является философский анализ смещений в функционировании ценностей в современном обществе – в ситуации крушения ценностей, стирания грани трансцендентного и имманентного. Разрыв экзистенциального и социального в современном обществе приводит к разрушению механизма функционирования и трансляции ценностей. Выявлены различия целевой и ценностной причинности, что способствовало разведению прагматической и аксиологической сторон жизнедеятельности человека. Важным следствием трансформаций механизма ценностного функционирования в обществе потребления является тонкая подмена ценностной причинности – целевой, а далее – редукция ее сугубо к утилитарной. Показано, что снятие проблемы плюрализма ценностей достигается нередко за счет введения общей рамки – Сверхценности, к числу которых мы склонны относить достоинство человека, безусловную самооценку человека. Значимость человекобережения явно обнажилась в эпоху пандемии, превратившись из актуального социального принципа в чрезвычайную проблему.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Ценности, аксиология, человек, общество, экзистенция, трансцендентное, свобода.

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