

UDC 001

DOI: 10.34670/AR.2026.94.37.001

The existential nature of the functioning of values

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Abstract

The objective of this work is a philosophical analysis of the universal mechanism of functioning of the value layer in the society and substantiation of its existential nature. It is shown that the matter of social sciences and humanities cannot be objectively investigated outside the axiological aspect. The transformation of value consciousness in modern society requires reflection on the part of the social sciences and the humanities. The theoretical reasons are revealed which explain why values can be elevated to the rank of the transcendental. The authors insist not on the transcendent, but on the existential nature of values. By means of an axiological approach, the prevalence of the existential aspect in the values functioning mechanism is proved, since values should not so much be as they should have a meaning for someone. The novelty of the work is provided by the conclusion that the existential choice should be considered a means of existence and a necessary condition for the values functioning.

For citation

Ibragimova Z.Z., Saikina G.K., Khaziev A.Kh. (2026) The existential nature of the functioning of values. *Kontekst i refleksiya: filosofiya o mire i cheloveke* [Context and Reflection: Philosophy of the World and Human Being], 15 (2A), pp. 221-228. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2026.94.37.001

Keywords

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

Introduction

The “human” is actualized in the gap between the proper and the existent, the value-meaningful and the meaningless, the existential and the empirical existence, the existence and the facticity, the essence and the nature. The unspecified essence of a person permanently forces them to correlate their actual reality with the modality of duty (that is, with what the person is according to their supreme ontological and axiological destination). The true existence of a person is unthinkable outside the value-semantic layer. In addition, the value structures of the society form a certain ideal of a person and the society (which means that they throw the person into the future, without which existence is impossible). That is why they invisibly constitute the projectivity of a person as a way of their being; they push a person towards existence.

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the direct connection of values with the very act of human existence may be overlooked by thinkers: the existential potential of values has not been fully explored in terms of the direct formation of human projectivity and the launching of existence. Perhaps this was influenced by the conceptualization of the existence notion within the framework of the existentialism ideas about the absurdity of human existence. Actually, existence per se is understood as self-creation, freedom, but without any external determination, especially on the part of social structures, within which values seem to be given to a person initially, since birth. In this case, the valuable can be defined in existentialism as a factor of pressure on a person and even as an obstacle on the way to existence. In addition, existence as the uniqueness and self-worth of human being contravenes the universal nature of values, primarily moral ones. At the same time, it is unclear how transcendence is possible without value self-exaltation?! Therefore, the importance of the existential factor as a catalyst for the vitality of values during the values transmittance remains a relevant issue in axiology ([Badavi, 2017], [Baeva, 2003]).

The research relevance is also due to the fact that modern man actually lives in an axiological vacuum, the original cause of which is the “death of God” and the subsequent devastation of the transcendent. Postmodernism, alongside neutralizing binary oppositions, has eliminated the gap between what is due and what is; the polarization of the transcendent and the immanent no longer makes sense. The traditional transcendence seems to be exhausting itself. In the prevailing consumer society, a person-consumer, according to J. Baudrillard, is able to use only a “decentered, extensive strategy”, while existence requires active transcendence, intensive living of life. All this objectively leads to dehumanization of a person.

It should be noted that values are always tested through an existential choice or, as B. Huebner wrote, through the so-called “metaphysical legitimization” [Hübner, 2000, 28]. Therefore, value self-awareness is to a great extent represented as free value creativity. One of the key issues of the work is the substantiation of the thesis that value is alive only in existential axiological practice, in living existence. The novelty of the work consists in proving the provision that axiological practice is an existential practice of transcendence. But is there an existing personality that saved the values, preserved and kept them? We believe that the solution to this problem is of theoretical and practical significance.

The research objective was achieved by employing the heuristic potential of the axiological

approach proper. In this work, the method and the object of study effectively intersect, which constitutes a distinctive feature of the author's approach.

Results and Discussion

Social sciences and humanities are aimed at the study of a specific subject area – the actual human and social being in the plentitude of its manifestations and levels. Problematization in these sciences, regardless of how much they are aimed at grasping empiricism, always explicitly or implicitly suggests asking about the correspondence of the phenomenon being studied to what it should be in its essence, *eidos*, and indepth cultural sense. In other words, the axiological aspect is intrinsic to socio-humanitarian research; it is always actualized by the specifics of the research subject.

In this regard, it is worth noting that we agree with the opinion of a number of philosophers opposing the dichotomic understanding of “facts – values”. According to L. A. Mikeskina [Mikeskina, 2007], in modern science studies, this understanding was initiated by an American philosopher H. Putnam in his work *Reason, Truth and History* [Putnam, 1998]. This thesis is usually proved within the logic of refuting the well-known provision which links the objectivity with value neutrality of science (a bright example of that are, for example, the works by L. Laudan [Laudan, 1984], H. Lacey [Lacey, 1999], L. A. Mikeskina [Mikeskina, 2007] and M. Szapuová [Szapuová, 2018]); in our opinion, it implies bearing in mind that the ideal of value-neutral science per se was the product of certain value attitudes and served the needs of a certain stratum of the newly-born bourgeois society.

In her research, L. A. Mikeskina repeatedly emphasizes the importance of epistemological values in understanding a scientific fact. In addition, she makes an interesting conclusion: “Like the terms ‘good’, ‘beauty’, ‘mercy’, the words ‘coherent’ and ‘simplicity’ are also used for praise and approval” [Mikeskina, 2007, 9-10], that is, these concepts are viewed as values. Fortunately, the idea of the unity of the cognitive and the value (unity of facts and values) is not ardently rejected in the modern scientific community but, on the contrary, is widely developed; this is also due to the reflection of the features of post-non-classical rationality and science, in which extra-rational components, primarily value ones, play an important role. However, in our opinion, the axiological approach per se still requires a full-fledged rehabilitation and purposeful development due to the fact that historically it unfairly received the status of “non-scientific” or was reduced to the method of understanding. The illegality of the opposition of the value and the cognitive is especially clear in the social sciences and humanities, but in them one sees the “functioning” of not only epistemological values but also universal ones. Therefore, the issue of the correlation of the value and the cognitive acquires a different setup and requires further research, especially under the modern conditions of devaluation of values.

At the same time, in the public consciousness, values, as a rule, appear as the sphere of Absolutes, universal and unshakable guidelines of human life, following which gives it an unconditional meaning. Without this sphere of absolutes, a human being feels unsupported. In order to consolidate the universal character and unconditional significance of values, the idea of the divine establishment of values was often asserted. The social nature and the supra-individual mode of existence of values (and each of us finds them readymade in one way or another) could also contribute to the values being conceptualized in terms of a transcendent nature. In this case, the world of values most often acts as a normative reality, with a prescriptive function. In addition, at times of crisis in the society, values are alienated into an exorbitant sphere (for which, it should be noted, there is no place in the modern picture of the world and in the consciousness that knows nothing else). It is worth noting that the transcendence of values served as a means to justify values against accusations of subjectivism. In addition, the idea of the

“otherworldliness” of values expresses the understanding that values do not have repressive power: they cannot be introduced or imposed by force. Via the modality of duty, values have a form of compulsion, but rather intelligible.

We are convinced that what is due in itself does not need to be evaluated; it is we who evaluate ourselves (what exists in general) under the influence of what is due; rather, it is it that evaluates us. As a result, “communication” with the world of values can be equated with transcendence, since any transcendence is not just self-overcoming, but also self-exaltation, in a value perspective. One understands beauty better, one is more receptive to it, one has become kinder and purer, one is open to love and forgiveness, and all this is due to transcendence. Naturally, someone lives only in the horizontal plane of the world, without the modality of what is due – in *transgression*, at the same time sincerely believing that transgression is the same as transcendence. At the same time, the presence of a transcendent plan is not a guarantee of the vitality of values.

It should be borne in mind that the pluralism of means of justifying values (for example, ethics distinguishes hedonistic, eudemonistic, utilitarian, and religious means of justifying moral values), in our opinion, clearly demonstrates that values cannot always be universal, that is, assert and broadcast the universal Good (O. G. Drobnitskii wrote a lot about universality and relativism [Drobnitsky, 2002, 272-299]. That is why the Idea of the Greater Good can be introduced (Plato faced difficulties to logically reconcile it with the class codes of virtues). Consequently, the valuable does not always coincide with the good in general, with the universal Good, and may even come into conflict with it. However, the valuable for some reason implicitly requires a common framework (Super-value): The idea of the Greater Good, the Absolute, God, or Being. As a rule, the common denominator is built up in the form of an ontological transcendental structure.

However, it is worth noting that no matter how strong the desire is to present values as transcendent, the value dimension is related to a human being, first of all. Thus, L. A. Mikeskina wrote: “If we assume that values and assessments belong to the field of knowledge, then this is knowledge of a different type: it is not about an object with its parameters, but about a subject; it is ‘on the other side’, on the side of the subject” [Mikeskina, 2007, 9]. It is a person that identifies the significant advantages of objects or spiritual representations and coins a value attitude to reality, including while forming a prescriptive level.

The significance of values is established in the space of interactivity, genuine communication; that is, values cannot exist outside the system of social relations, outside the cultural ancestral body and practice. At the same time, the value itself should become an **actual** social attitude. It is more difficult to assert and preserve one’s values just in the face of Another – in communication with people, in practice, in actions. In this regard, we can speak, in our opinion, about a new general framework for “removing” the problem of diversity of values, which we have defined as a cultural-ethical one and which interpret as a framework for asserting human dignity, elevating it to a super-value (the contradictions between the due and the existing as a contradiction between human dignity and human rights were researched, in particular, by T. Sedová [Sedová, 2021]).

Strictly speaking, values are an anthropological phenomenon; they determine not only what for, but also for whom they are valuable, and not at all abstractly. Definitely, values do not so much exist as, by H. Rickert [Rickert, 1998, 55], they mean, but we would add: they mean for someone. Therefore, a necessary condition for the functioning of values is their existential assumption and justification. In other words, values are not so much set from the outside as they are internally chosen, and therefore they certainly actualize the level of freedom and guarantee the autonomy of will. The choice and affirmation of value is an existential creative act in which a person’s ability to autonomously build a

causal series is constituted. Values cannot just be reproduced automatically without an existential form, without the live participation of people, without an act of freedom (for example, a deed or creativity).

As M. S. Kagan wrote, "...value is the internal, emotionally appropriated by the subject, guideline for their activity..." [Kagan, 1997, 163]. It is believed that goal-setting is impossible without relying on values, which means that any action is impossible, as well as an assessment of the actions already performed. A person always asks himself: "Do I need this? Does this lead me to happiness and well-being? Is it right?"

Notably, according to N. A. Berdyaev, ethics is always based on a personality: "Moral radiations emanate from a human personality, spreading throughout the world. But a human personality always remains the fiery center of the world. Moral life, the subject of which is the society, is already a chilled life, a life of morals, customs, and public opinion. Personality alone is a truly creative and prophetic basis of moral life, it forges new values" [Berdyaev, 1998, 123].

Today, in the era of decentralization and dehumanization of man, the personal backbone of ethics has also been lost. The "fiery center of the world" is no longer left; an apathetic person appeared instead, to whom J. Lipovetsky gives the epithet "cool" – a tepid, indifferent person. "A cool person," he wrote, "is neither a pessimistic decadent of Nietzsche nor an oppressed worker of Marx; he rather resembles a TV viewer trying to 'drift through' evening programs one after another; a consumer filling his bag; a vacationer vacillating between staying on Spanish beaches and camping in Corsica. Alienation, analyzed by Marx as a result of the labor mechanization, gave way to apathy caused by a dizzying choice of opportunities and general free service; it is then that mere indifference arises, freed from poverty and 'disassociation from reality' of the initial era of industrialization" [Lipovetsky, 2001, 68]. The reason for this is the decentralization of a person and the lack of a value structure since values are always practice-orienting entities. Essentially, the axiological deficit generates unproductive boredom.

Thus, the authors come to the following conclusion. The existential aspect prevails over the ontological (or, as a variation, the transcendental) one: it is insufficient that values just exist as something given (like things), it is necessary that they really mean, are chosen and evaluated; most importantly, it is necessary that they are followed. Essentially, values are not a rational but a volitional phenomenon: values are inert unless they are chosen by individuals and manifested in action.

The form of the existence of values is actually the existential choice (like the fundamental choice "Either-or" described by S. Kierkegaard), outside of which they are dead and are no longer values (in an abstract or extremely transcendent form), that is, they do not correspond to their purpose. Ultimately, freedom is implemented through values (since a free choice is a value choice). Value consciousness requires a developed volitional personality with self-awareness, not a detached person.

The existential assumption of values in the act of existence is the point of bonding of the transcendent, the social, and the human levels of the existence of values.

Conclusion

The philosophical analysis of the universal mechanism of functioning of the value layer of the society has revealed the need to actualize the axiological approach, through which a certain ideal of man and society is formed. This research shows the heuristic significance of asserting the self-worth of the axiological approach, in particular, the need to go beyond the apprehensive method in the interpretation of the axiological approach.

The study argues that the comprehension of values as entirely abstract, transcendent entities is fraught with their ceasing to fulfill their original function of "being people's life guidelines". In this

regard, the collapse of the transcendent can be interpreted as the beginning of the existential axiology formation. Only the acts of existence transmit abstract values that form the sphere of the due, the sphere of ideals, into existence, they actually bring them to life and make them really meaningful. Beyond the existential choice, assumption, justification, and servicing to values, they cannot mean, that is, cannot fulfill their original function of being authentic to themselves. Today there is a gap between the existential and the social – due to the crisis of trust in the society and the division of man per se.

The practical significance of the research lies in a new understanding of the existential aspect in the mechanism of the values functioning in the modern society, in recognizing the need for a living existential practice, in creating the necessary social conditions for the reality and feasibility of values under any challenges of history.

Under the modern conditions of value depreciation, the research prospects are associated with a more detailed study of the problem of the correlation between the value and the cognitive, the existential and the social in the mechanism of values functioning.

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Экзистенциальная природа функционирования ценностей

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Аннотация

Цель данной работы — философский анализ универсального механизма функционирования ценностного слоя в обществе и обоснование его экзистенциальной природы. Показывается, что проблематика социальных и гуманитарных наук не может быть объективно исследована вне аксиологического аспекта. Трансформация ценностного сознания в современном обществе требует рефлексии со стороны социальных и гуманитарных наук. Раскрываются теоретические причины, объясняющие, почему ценности могут быть возведены в ранг трансцендентного. Авторы настаивают не на трансцендентной, а на экзистенциальной природе ценностей. Посредством аксиологического подхода доказывается преобладание экзистенциального аспекта в механизме функционирования ценностей, поскольку ценности должны не столько быть, сколько иметь значение для кого-то. Новизна работы обеспечивается выводом о том, что экзистенциальный выбор следует рассматривать как способ существования и необходимое условие функционирования ценностей.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Ибрагимова З.З., Сайкина Г.К., Хазиев А.Х. Экзистенциальная природа функционирования ценностей // Контекст и рефлексия: философия о мире и человеке. 2026. Том 15. № 2А. С. 221-228. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2026.94.37.001

Ключевые слова

Ценности, Аксиология, Человек, Общество, Существование, Трансцендентное, Свобода, Наука.

Библиография

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