The word (definition) of *new* in ethics, as in other areas of life, is applied to changes of various scale, including epo-

life, is applied to changes of various scale, including epochal shifts in the way of human existence. New was the ethics of Jesus Christ, of the New Testament which united people of different tribes in the face of one God. New was the democratic ethics of the New Age, which equated diffe-

<sup>3</sup> The report is based on the paper: *Гусейнов А. А.* Что нового в новой этике // Ведомости прикладной этики. 2021. Вып. 58. С. 91–106.

# A. A. Guseynov<sup>2</sup> WHAT'S NEW IN THE "NEW ETHICS"?<sup>3</sup>

rent social strata as citizens of the same republic. New was the communist ethics, which was supposed to unite all people into one brotherhood. Is there anything like that in the phenomenon that is termed "new ethics" today?

## Ι

The "new ethics" as a term in its current meaning is a very recent development. To the best of my knowledge, its history has not yet been thoroughly traced. In the United States, the "new ethic" refers to the moralistic turn of the public consciousness that seeks to expel colonialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of imperialism from humanitarian knowledge and generally accepted values<sup>4</sup>. Certain domes-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> According to the Russian-American researcher V. I. Rossman, "Instead of classical problems, the humanities have focused on 'micro-narratives', problems of minorities, and the 'new ethics.' There was a certain 'moralistic' turn in the humanities that was closely linked to a critique of imperialism, colonialism, sexism, racism, and other social ills. Largely legitimate, this critique has nevertheless been unbalanced and has led to the degeneration of the humanities of history. At any rate, the victimhood agenda has become the most prominent in the public debate" [9].

tic authors believe that the term was coined in Russia, is limited to the Russian-speaking space, and expresses a Russian view of the radical moral processes taking place in the West [7]. This term received an additional impetus and became a meme after film and theatre director K. Bogomolov's paper "The Abduction of Europe 2.0" [2].<sup>1</sup> In any case, the "new ethics" does not refer to the changes in our domestic moral ideas and social habits, although they have been quite significant in recent decades (e.g. with regard to labor, consumerism, sexual relations, etc.), but to the bold processes in the moral (ethical) practices of Western countries, unusual from the traditional point of view.

The term "new ethics" is used with different value connotations: for some it denotes a certain vector of social processes in the Western world; for some it is a step forward on the uplifting journey of liberalism; for some it is a dangerous boundary, a red line of sorts, which denotes the collapse, the crash of thousands of years of moral foundations of the modern civilization and, above all, is a mortal threat to us, our people, country, and way of life. The latter point of view, specifically that of radical critique, is the most interesting and insightful for understanding whether the discussion concerns the new ethics in the aforementioned epochal sense, i.e. a different understanding of the ethical foundations of our social existence.

In fact, we are talking about a change in the morals that is expressly manifested in broad social movements for postcolonial clearing of the humanities, against discrimination of women (Me Too), against racism (Black Lives Matter, BLM), and for an open gender identity. These processes have been going on in the Western countries, especially in the United States and Great Britain, for a relatively long time (two or three decades). They have affected a wide range of problems of public consciousness, and have become a significant and, most importantly, morally prevailing social and political force. In Russia they have become widespread in the last two or three years and affect certain aspects of human relations (harassment, political correctness, gender identity); they are largely perceived as someone else's problems and the public response is mostly negative. Let me emphasize: those who call this a new ethic and reject it precisely as such, as being completely unacceptable (personally, historically, in terms of religious and national aspects), are outraged not by the movements themselves, but by their claims for exclusivity. The problem with the "new ethics" is that it claims to be the new moral truth.

A woman who, 20 years post-factum, recalls her boss wanting to have lunch with her or lustfully touching her knees under the table, is not just reminiscing and sorting out her soul; she is seeking sympathy, support, compassion and justice; her opinion in this case should not be questioned, just as the possibly sincere opinion of the alleged abuser that he had no bad intentions or even has no memories of the episode, should not be taken into account: she and he in this context do not appear as personalities, but as mouthpieces of unequal (masculine) relations between the sexes. A homosexual couple is not content with being left alone; they demand social recognition, and not only legal rights, but also moral validation to be treated in the same way as a different-sex union. People who experiment with their gender identity expect the same morally compassionate attitude from the society.

The BLM movement's proponent is not content with condemnation of racism in the United States; he or she wants every white person to feel and publicly admit to being a racist; so that oppressors (even if they were "good" masters) were not honored as morally worthy heroes; so that statues and other memorials are not dedicated to the so-called prominent slave-owning men. The logic behind the movement itself is that racism as a morally unacceptable (or rather: totally unacceptable) phenomenon cannot have any historical, psychological, economic, or other justifying reasons, and that only the members of discriminated races ("people of color") have the right to judge it and voice out their right.

The Russian (Russian-speaking) public space and media have just started a focused discussion of the "new ethics." Still, the generally accepted (or at least prevailing) expressly negative attitude toward it is quite established. The society has already formulated the most important objections to it, reflective of the qualitative features of this social phenomenon and at the same time designed to become a mental boundary separating it from the system of the so-called traditional Russian values. In my opinion, they boil down to the following questions: "Why can't I tell a person who is behaving badly that he is behaving badly?"; "Why, if I think a person is behaving badly, it is not enough for him that I do not judge him, but he wants me to think he is behaving well?"; "Why should I feel guilty about something I personally have no part in and that was not my intention at all?"

These three *whys* are by no means far-fetched; they are actually structuring the public consciousness of the majority of Russians and occur in their everyday communicative experience. These questions do not simply dwell on the external changes in morals brought about by the aforementioned Western movements, but uncover their underlying value base, the very ethical construct of relations between people in the society. We are actually witnessing a new turn in ethics.

#### Π

"Why can't I tell a person who is behaving badly that he is behaving badly?" This question, which I borrowed from the public texts of a famous journalist, writer, and public figure, is remarkable for its fundamental obviousness. It seems to be imprinted in the image of morality that dominates everyday consciousness as the knowledge of what one ought to do. In fact, why can't I say about something that exists that it actually exists, that two times two equals four, etc.? The answer is quite simple: you can if you really know.

But do you know what is good and bad in terms of behavior, especially moral behavior? When you say of someone that he has done wrong, the question arises what it is that you are condemning: the act itself, its content, or the fact of an act, the act of a particular person. When it comes to the content of an act (word, action, look, life, etc.), whatever it is, it is amenable for objective (scientific) evaluation (description, measurement, weighing, etc.). But when

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> "The modern West appears as a criminal that has been chemically castrated and lobotomized. Hence the stiff fake smile of benevolence and unconditional acceptance on the face of the Western man. This is not the smile of Culture. This is the smile of degeneration... The modern Western world is shaping up into a New Ethical Reich with its own ideology, the 'new ethics'." [1].

it comes to the fact of the act, or the individual who committed the act, then how can you or anyone else evaluate it, because it was he who committed it, it was his act, and he, by committing it, by the very fact assumed all responsibility for it, all its consequences, including, by the way, your (our) moralizing evaluation?

The act can be bad, it is not a rare occurrence. But can a man be bad? If yes, than who can tell? And why exactly am I, someone else, third, tenth, and so on, or even all together, entitled to do it – to competently judge it? Is there any knowledge that makes it possible to separate the good people from the bad people, and if so, who has it and what school teaches it?

Mikhail Bakhtin teaches that in the philosophy of an act as an attitude of a living individual to the world (culture), we should distinguish between the subject-based content of an act (or action itself in the narrow sense), which is an element of the world, and the fact of act, reflective of the living individual who stands behind it [3]. But this distinction is not intended for maintaining the academic accuracy and separating one aspect from another without lumping them together. In fact, it is impossible to separate these sides (aspects) of the act. An act cannot be separated from the one who commits it: an act, good or bad, whatever it may be, is committed under a name, is someone's act; an act in itself, without the individual who performed it, does not exist and cannot be described in its factuality. At the same time, the individual also cannot be separated from the act: the individual without the act, without doing something, whatever it may be, is not a living individual, he simply does not exist, is an empty space, zero; to be is to act. As M. M. Bakhtin summarized this fundamental property of human existence, an individual has no alibi in being. Distinguishing between these two sides (two aspects) of the act, namely its subjective origin and its empirical (objective) manifestation, the fact of the act and its subject-based content, is necessary in order to understand the act as a whole, to make its ends meet and understand its internal structure.

It is possible to connect these diverse sides of an act (which, precisely because of this diversity, create the balance in its structure), only if one moves from the fact of the act to its content, and not vice versa. The fact of the act is given to us in its uniqueness, as this one act (a look, a thought, a deed, a joke, a journey, a book, a suffering, a life – whatever it is), whose uniqueness we cannot express except that it is produced by a concrete living individual, who is all merged, included, embodied, remained in the act, and of which we can say nothing beyond the act itself, without naming it, by naming the one who it belonged to, just as we exhibit a shirt in a museum with a caption that it was worn by this famous person, or keep a night cap of a distant ancestor in the house as an extraordinary treasure.

In aesthetic terms, we cannot say anything about the author of an act or acts, except for what is given (fixed, embodied, imprinted) in the acts themselves, which we can describe, prove, analyze, etc. It follows that we can evaluate the acts every time on the basis of their concrete content and the criteria that correspond to them, each time well-defined and verifiable, and determine more or less accurately whether this or that act is bad or good. For this we have our own, more or less accurate but always specific criteria, which are determined by the nature (matter, substance) of the act itself. But about the living, concrete individual who the act belongs to, we cannot say anything beyond (apart from) the act, because there is no gap between him and the fact of the act. The only way to stay grounded on the facts and be objective is to judge (evaluate) the acts, but not the person who has committed them, recognizing that the latter has a profoundly mysterious, primordial and inescapable capacity to act (the imperative), a capacity which philosophy struggles to determine, giving it various names (freedom, freedom of will, arbitrariness, autonomy of the spirit, moral autonomy, etc.). It is important for us to emphasize that it is understood, both in everyday speech and in theoretical experience, as moral force: notwithstanding the debate between various philosophical doctrines, they all agree on the point that morality (moral force) is the initial beginning of man, a human semantic nerve or sorts, responsible for his active existence.

This idea, according to which good and bad can apply to acts but not the people committing them, will become clearer and more familiar if, instead of "good" and "bad," we use the concepts of "virtue" and "vice" that are adequate for evaluating human behavior. The alpha and omega of moral judgment is to judge vicious deeds but not vicious people; villainy but not villains. Ethics has been based on this postulate ever since the theory discovered ethics itself as a space of human freedom, and social consciousness, in the form of the Sermon on the Mount, solidified it as a normative practice.

When we characterize an act as vicious, we proceed from the fact that it was a free act of an individual (person) who might have as well not committed it. Otherwise, we could not consider it (the act) vicious. This is why, although we associate the individual with this vicious act because it is his act, we do not identify the person with it, thereby preserving for the individual the very possibility of acting freely.

Therefore, the elementary requirements of logic prohibit extending moral evaluation beyond the actual limits of human acts to the very individuals who commit (perform) them, for then the latter would be deprived of the very possibility of committing them. After all, moral evaluation is a view of the reality through the prism of vice and virtue, the very possibility of choosing between them. This choice, of course, is not ethically neutral; vice and virtue are not equal in the face of the moral subject; it represents only the first step that the individual takes as a moral subject, the first ramification in his or her life journey.

Basically, the choice between vice and virtue is the first choice on the path of virtue, in the pursuit of virtue. Either a man possesses the freedom to choose between vice and virtue, and then he himself cannot initially (substantially, by nature, by design) be either virtuous or vicious, he can only want (desire, strive, have the opportunity) to be virtuous, not vicious. Or he himself (initially) is vicious or virtuous, and then he has no choice between vice and virtue.

The first and most general definition of virtue and vice as moral concepts is that the first is what we aspire to and the second is what we avoid. Therefore, if virtuous acts can still be viewed with some (most likely negligible) probability as an expression of the virtuous essence of those who commit them, then in the case of vicious acts, there are no grounds for such a transfer of the quality of the act to the qualities of its author. Apart from the logical considerations, there is a sociological reason that prevents the transfer of moral evaluations from acts to their authors. In morality, individuals follow only those requirements which they themselves consider moral, that is, they act on their own behalf. This means the autonomy of morality in its sociological expression. Or, to express the same thought in another form, there are no special persons in the society who have a justified and universally recognized right to speak on behalf of morality, to determine what is virtue and what is vice, and to rank people according to the moral criteria.

Socrates said that there are teachers of mathematics, music, and gymnastics, but no teachers of virtue. They do not exist because virtue cannot be internalized from the outside. Each (without exception!) activity has generally recognized experts, professionals, teachers of sorts, who are in some way authorized by the society in this capacity. Morality has no such persons. It appears to be the only domain that lacks them. Ethical (moral) standards exist, but there is no authority behind them; no authorized representative.

Every person is believed to be their authority and representative. Moral accountability is a way of being of the acting individuals themselves: whatever they do, they do what they must, as no one else can act instead of them; and no one, acting on their own behalf, can do anything else but what they must. Just like the living individual cannot transfer to another the ability and capacity to be alive, he cannot delegate another the moral accountability for everything he does. And it is indeed the accountability for everything, as there are no acts that are specifically moral; but all acts, their very being as acts, constitute a subject of moral accountability; here it is not even necessary to specify that we mean acts committed in sound mind, since the very fact of moral accountability is the first and indisputable criteria of the same.

Concerning BLM movement that was born in the United States out of anger over the death of a 46-year-old African-American George Floyd from the hand of a police officer in Minneapolis, our mass media commented that there was a contrast between the grandeur of the honors (gold casket, the abundance of officials, the elaborately solemn funeral ceremony) accorded to the deceased as if he were a national hero, and the dubiousness of the cases that marked his biography (five prison terms, the last one five years to 2019 for armed robbery; on the day of his fateful death he was stopped because he was suspected of having paid in a store with a counterfeit bill of money).

The commentators have compared and measured the value of George Floyd's life and personal dignity, which were trampled upon by the grossly disproportionate actions of the police, as subsequently proven in court, against the value of the acts he committed, as if the former depended on the latter. Meanwhile, the excessive, even caricatured, celebration of this very man in the bleakness and even insignificance of his biography emphasizes with particular force the unconditional value of the life and dignity of each individual, and the BLM movement that reinforces this truth raises it to the level of a paramount political force.

The question is more complicated when it comes to the so-called eminent persons whose deeds are considered progressive by historical standards, but who were ethically toxic as individuals, both in fact and in conviction, e.g. were slave owners, such as one of the forefathers of the United States Constitution and the first popularly elected president, George Washington. It is logical to assume that human morality, since it has no sources other than freedom, is not influenced by the epoch, or at least cannot be seen otherwise, cannot but be conceived of as the absolute law of reasonable life.

If on the basis of vicious acts one cannot infer a negative assessment of the moral dignity of the one who committed them, and George Floyd's criminal acts did not prevent his honoring as a person, then likewise, public merits cannot be the basis for the moral elevation of the one to whom they belong, and George Washington's public achievements cannot cancel out his personal disgrace as a slaveholder. By asserting this truth in the framework of an openly stated political position, BLM supporters are undoubtedly raising public morality to a new level. They proceed from the belief that moral offenses have no statute of limitations. This also applies to the history of a society whose foundations were based on moral crimes, for it bears their inevitable and profound traces: in particular, the tradition of erecting monuments to statesmen in spite of such crimes.

The same is true for the history of individuals, as evidenced by sensational and highly publicized cases of harassment that occurred long ago (sometimes 20–30 years earlier) and in such random forms (such as flirting without consequences) that the accused have forgotten about them. Moral trauma leaves an indelible mark on the victim's soul, just as a person's body bears the mark left by a knife or bullet. And one shouldn't be under the illusion that this only applies to certain sensitive or courageous people who dare speak about it. The point is that it is not a mental trauma, but a moral one: it touches the very nerve of life.

#### III

"Why, if I think a person is behaving badly, it is not enough for him that I do not judge him, but he wants me to think he is behaving well?" The answer to this seemingly natural perplexity has to do with what we understand by tolerance and how we see its role in the human society. Tolerance literally means patience – it is one word, but from an ethical perspective it has at least two significantly different meanings.

In the first approximation, in the most common and everyday use of this term, patience is understood as a special, i.e. a softer, condescending, less aggressive form of moral judgment toward a person who has committed an unworthy act. As such, it is a moral psychological quality of the individual, a property of temperament or character. It expresses an attitude toward the individual but not toward the bad act he committed; is open to forgiveness, aims to distinguish the individual from this act to a certain extent, believing that the individual is better than this act (that the latter was untypical of him, will not happen again, etc.). In this sense, patience is a form of a relationship between individuals within the same culture, the same system of values; it is not considered a positive moral quality in itself, but only insofar as it supports, strengthens the latter. There are contexts in life in which patience is perceived as a disadvantage. In such cases, the moral language contrasts it with exactingness, righteous anger, and uncompromising attitude.

In the second sense, patience is a fundamental moral virtue that was formed and historically consolidated in the

modern times as a result of the devastating religious wars of the 16th century that accompanied the formation of modern European nations and nation-states. In literature and media it is most often referred to by the borrowed Latin word "tolerance." Tolerance arises as a recognition of the futility of military resolution of religious disputes and the human passions and interests behind them. Its first form was religious tolerance: it became the ethical and legal basis for uniting people in a single political and legal national space regardless of their religious affiliations. The *Edict of Nantes* of 1598 is considered the first legal document that sanctioned multi-faith practices, recognizing equality between Catholics and members of the Reformed religion in the rights to education, medical treatment, and public services.

Tolerance refers to such patient (non-aggressive, restrained, peaceful) relations between individuals that are practiced by them in full awareness of the fact that they hold different mutually unacceptable value positions: religious beliefs, life beliefs, and political positions. It is no longer a question of a respectful attitude toward the individual in spite of the fact that the latter commits an act that is unacceptable from the point of view of the other, but rather of a special respectful attitude, which is directed toward the individual precisely because he does something that is wrong in the opinion of the other. In the first case, we are dealing with patience as a natural inclination, and in the second – with tolerance as a quality of social relations, which is solidified as an artificial habit.

Tolerance is characterized by the fact that it excludes corrective action (criticism, discrimination, harassment) in relation to views and actions that are perceived and evaluated purely negatively by the acting subject. In short, it represents a moral form of a relationship between individuals who hold different worldviews.

Tolerance is an appropriate way of public behavior in a situation of religious, ethnic, racial, or cultural diversity of the social organism. Its historical fate has not been easy, but nevertheless the general trend has been toward an increasing expansion and deepening of the field of tolerance, extending it to gender, race, ethnic cultural and other aspects of social relations. This process continues, becoming relevant and particularly acute in connection with the intensification of intercultural contacts, expansion of migration flows, legitimization of non-traditional practices and other contemporary challenges.

Tolerance is an intrinsically contradictory practice that requires a special construction of different aspects of human consciousness, in particular the volitional (ethical-normative) and epistemological aspects. The pathos of truth in a man reaches its climax when it is related to one's worldview choices, beliefs, and convictions. At the same time, the very idea of the absoluteness of truth obliges one to consider any of its concrete incarnations as relative. Thus, tolerance becomes an expression of the diversity of individual human paths to absolute truth and, at the same time, an ethical sanction for them. We must be tolerant because we are imperfect and capable of making mistakes. Tolerance is active recognition of each person's right to exist responsibly and to pursue his or her own path to truth.

Tolerance is associated with yet another inner tension. It concerns the differences within its ethical normative aspect between its functioning as a political legal reality and as a moral principle. In the political legal sphere, tolerance is aimed at ensuring the equality of civil and human rights of individuals regardless of their origin, social status, religion, political beliefs and other actual (objectified) personal characteristics, whose observance is guaranteed by the subjective basis for the unity of the political legal social organism. It is always historically specific and limited by its own legal framework, which, acting as protective barriers against intolerant behavior, constitutes its own limitations. Although modern law classifies the protection of personal liberty and dignity as an absolute right, it nevertheless authorizes derogations when it comes to social emergencies and particularly dangerous criminals. Tolerance in law retains the rank of social expediency.

Another thing is its place in morality, where it acts as an unconditional duty. Tolerance as a moral principle ultimately rests solely on the moral autonomy of the individual, because the surrounding world, society, and people may have many arguments in favor of tolerance, but such arguments can never be the sole or even the primary motivating force behind the behavior of individuals. As any moral principle, it assumes this quality to the extent that it acts as a requirement that one makes of oneself; and not just a requirement, but a prohibition against imposing one's beliefs on others. Tolerance as a common norm that ensures the unity of a culturally diverse community can function only in the limited form of legal coercion that cuts off actions violating this norm and blocks the individuals who do not recognize it. In this sense, it suggests and incorporates an intolerant attitude toward those who are intolerant themselves. And only as a moral principle, according to which my tolerance is expressed by not imposing my life beliefs on others, it is able to unfold into a universal form. As a moral, individually binding principle, tolerance is a form of nonviolence.

To answer the question why it is not enough for supporters of various "ideological" minorities to be "endured" (not judged, not discriminated against), why they also want to be valued, to be considered valid, we can say that they do this in defense of their human dignity. For example, why supporters of LGBT communities are not content with not being prevented from cultivating their sexual gender identity as private individuals, but want to make it known publicly (demonstrate it), walk the streets with their flags, organize festivals, and so on? This is their way to extend their legal status to moral recognition: they assert, firstly, themselves as individuals who have the right to determine their own beliefs and principles of life, and secondly, their beliefs and principles as full-fledged forms of social life, valid on self-evident basis.

#### IV

"Why should I feel guilty about something I personally have no part in and that was not my intention at all?" In the most general philosophical sense, the answer to this question is very simple: there are no things in the world in which you have no part. The very way of human existence in the world is a way of participating in it. This idea can be developed in various ways: I cannot help but understand and feel my involvement in what others are doing, including people completely unknown to me, even those who lived centuries before me, whoever they are and whatever atrocities they have committed; in short, whoever and whatever it is about, I cannot help feeling guilty just by the mere consideration that I belong to the same human race. As a generic being, I am involved with all individuals who belong to my - human - kin.

But even from the perspective of one's singularity and oneness, the individual cannot build a relationship with the world without taking a personal responsibility for it. After all, a man always acts toward a purpose; he cannot do anything without first stating his desire, without deciding what he must do; we are rational beings because we cannot live and act in the world without judging it, without expressing our attitude to the world; even if we are doing this in various forms and with different energies. In fact, each person creates and cannot help but create his or her own holistic image of the world, and cannot but be responsible for it. As a living individual, I am, by virtue of my conscious existence, bound to the species, inevitably centering it on myself and thus being accountable to it.

Within this philosophically sound understanding of responsibility, the claims that black America makes against white America for the slavery of the past on which the United States was nurtured, and for the racial prejudices of today, do not seem far-fetched or nonsensical. And one can understand those white people who have actively joined BLM, publicly kneeling in recognition of their historical guilt, even if they have nothing to do personally with slavery or racism. It should be emphasized, however, that only black America has the right to judge whether or not the white majority of the country (all of it, every single person) is responsible for the racism that still pervades the fabric of the society. By virtue of the same logic, only women (and not men) can bear witness to the debasement of their dignity in historical relations between the sexes.

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