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**CONTEMPORARY AXIOLOGICAL GRADATIONS:
ATROPHY OF VALUES OR AN ETHICAL RENAISSANCE?**

Abstract

The article explores contemporary axiological gradations through the prism of Ukrainian wartime discourse, addressing the tension between the apparent erosion of values and the possibility of an ethical renaissance. The authors focus on the transformation of identity and authenticity under conditions of full-scale war, interpreting them not merely as sociocultural constructs but as ethically and ontologically grounded phenomena rooted in national dignity. It is argued that the contemporary crisis of grand narratives, intensified by digital communication, postmodern relativism, and the fragmentation of meanings, has led to the diffusion of stable value reference points and to the weakening of coherent identity frameworks.

At the same time, the article substantiates the thesis that wartime realities provoke a re-actualization of value-based metanarratives rather than their окончательну disappearance. Within this context, Ukrainian identity is conceptualized through the essential triad “national dignity / identity / authenticity”, which functions as an ethical-axiological prism for personal and collective self-identification. The study demonstrates that this triad is formed at the intersection of axiological reflection and lived ethical experience, rather than as the result of *abstract* universalist imperatives.

Drawing on postmodern philosophy, communicative practical philosophy, responsive phenomenology, and the philosophy of dialogue, the authors analyze competing ethical paradigms – universalist macro-ethics and the ethics of authenticity – and argue that, in contemporary Ukrainian realities, priority is increasingly given to authenticity understood as personal moral responsibility toward oneself, the Other, society, and history. Particular attention is paid to the role of alterity, dialogue, and the ethical response to aggression in shaping value orientations during wartime.

The article concludes that contemporary Ukrainian axiological discourse should be understood as an open and dynamic project. The formation of authentic values is shown to be inseparable from personal experience, civic belonging, and ethical choice, thereby framing the current moment not as an atrophy of values, but as a complex and unfinished ethical renaissance.

Keywords: axiology; identity; authenticity; national dignity; ethics of authenticity; Ukrainian wartime discourse.

Introduction

In contemporary Ukrainian society, philosophical questions concerning the transformation of the categories of identity and authenticity have acquired particular urgency. These categories are being rearticulated within the realities of war through the prism of national dignity at a profound, ontological level. Which factors shaping personal and collective identities stand in tension with ideological narratives, both classical and contemporary? To what extent does such an identity correspond to the demands of universalism.

It may be stated that “one of the markers of contemporary networked communication is epistemological, axiological, and ethical relativism, which at the level of mass consciousness and mass culture often erodes the criteria of identity. As a result, so-called ‘mass’ social communication unfolds under the slogan ad hoc, serving as a kind of flagship for trends, mainstreams, hype, and triggers of the modern world. These factors sometimes give rise to cognitive, value-based, and moral indeterminacy, and even to an existential disorientation of the individual, who in almost all spheres of life is overloaded by information flows and becomes lost in an endless hypertextual space” [1, c. 41].

Such an “erosion of truth” and “diffusion of identity” undoubtedly calls for new stable reference points – both individual (communitarian, in the sense of Ferdinand Tönnies’ celebrated dyad) at the axiological level of customary ethos and topos, and social, at the level of logos permeated by the legitimized normativity of highly developed societies of “high complexity” (to use Niklas Luhmann’s apt formulation). Moreover, “the contemporary individual, in attempting to find social support and markers of personal identity, sometimes feels like a prisoner of Plato’s cave – confused and lost in a world of simulacra,

immersed in and absorbed by a ‘matrix of ideologies’ of which they are often scarcely aware” [1, с. 42].

Julia Kristeva was probably right in claiming that the mirror in which a monolithic (and monological) logos once perceived its own reflection no longer exists — there is nowhere left for logos to observe itself; “everything takes place on the surface of an amalgam” [2, p. 78]. This postmodern interpretation of blurred and “erased” dimensions of identity leads us into an atemporal and atypical palimpsest of digital culture, offering a plurality of foundations for identity that, in fact, resembles Borges’ “garden of forking paths”.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the theoretical and applied aspects of value transformation within the optics of the Ukrainian wartime discourse. The objectives of the study are determined by the need to examine effective criteria for constituting a coherent discourse of identity (within which the applied dimension of value transformation is realized), both at the level of consciousness — in the reflexive processes of self-awareness as the foundation of essential selfhood — and at the level of society — in the dimensions of permanent social communication. The core task of the section is to elucidate the trajectory and specificity of the formation, within the Ukrainian wartime discourse, of the essential triad “national dignity / identity / authenticity” as an ethical-axiological prism for the realization of personal values rather than universalist imperatives.

Methods

In the process of preparing this study, a range of interdisciplinary methods was employed, including structuralist — phenomenological, logical-analytical, ethical — axiological, cultural-philosophical, hermeneutic — ontological, prognostic, and comparative approaches. The research also actively draws on such methodological strategies as the “history of concepts,” pre-understanding, explication, commentary, and interpretation. The source base fully reflects the stated methodology. In particular, in order to realize the aims and objectives of the study, we engaged in a polylogue among the following discourses and paradigms: axiology [3; 4], ethics [5; 6], macro-ethics [7], political philosophy [8; 9; 10], social philosophy [11; 12], postmodernism [2; 13], responsive phenomenology [14], and the philosophy of dialogue [15].

Presentation of the main material

In order to pursue a logical search for answers to the questions posed above, we propose to turn to several emblematic paradigms of the late twentieth century. Let us therefore begin with postmodernism and its notion of the “crisis of grand narratives.” In particular, in his well-known work *La condition postmoderne* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard argues that the organization of all events without exception takes place according to a “new principle.” As the author notes, «this study aims to examine the condition of knowledge in the

most highly developed societies. We have decided to call them ‘postmodern.’ The words ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodern condition’ are frequently used on the American continent; they appear most often in the writings of sociologists and critics. They designate the state of culture following the transformations that have affected the rules of the game in science, literature, and the arts since the end of the nineteenth century. Here we shall consider these transformations in relation to the crisis of narratives» [13, p. 8].

Nor should we overlook Lyotard’s provocative thesis that «from its very beginnings, science has been in conflict with narratives. Judged by its own criteria, most of the latter are fables» [13, p. 9]. In this respect, we find particularly noteworthy the author’s observation that «the rule of consensus between the sender and the receiver of a linguistic statement will be accepted if it fits into the perspective of a possible unanimity of rational minds: such was the narrative of the Enlightenment, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end, toward universal peace and concord» [13, p. 10]. This invites reflection: do we not, as Ukrainians, encounter in the realities of war a rehabilitation of the Enlightenment “metanarrative” identified by Lyotard, albeit refracted through, for example, a thoroughly rational belief in victory? In our view, this question remains — and will likely continue to remain — open.

Let us return once more to retrospection, since the issue at hand concerns a hypothetical turn toward the “rediscovery” of metanarratives in the digital twenty-first century. As Lyotard observes, «the society of the future will be far less dependent on a Newtonian anthropology (as is the case with structuralism or systems theory) and far more on the pragmatics of language particles. Nevertheless, decision-makers attempt to manage these clouds of sociality through input/output schemata according to a logic that presupposes the commensurability of elements and the determinacy of the whole. Our lives, according to their plans, are meant to serve a single goal: the increase of power. Its legitimation in terms of social justice, understood as scientific truth, serves to optimize the functioning of the system, its efficiency. The application of this criterion to all forms of our behavior cannot do without a certain degree of terror, whether softer or harsher: either be such that you can be easily governed — that is, commensurable — or disappear» [13, p. 10]. As becomes evident, «the postmodern condition is alien to disenchantment, just as it is alien to the blind positivity of delegitimation. Where, then, can legitimacy be sought outside metanarratives? The criterion of operability is a purely technological one; it is not suitable for judging either truth or justice» [13, p. 48].

Let us extrapolate certain of Lyotard’s ideas to the discursive fields of contemporary social philosophy, ethics, and axiology. Present-day realities demonstrate that metanarratives — or, as we prefer to call them, grand narratives — have proven not to be “dead,” as Lyotard suggested, but rather fully

operative, or, in more precise scholarly terms, re-actualized in the contemporary world. For instance, the question becomes pressing: what is the current concept of “European values” — a contemporary grand narrative or a localized European “micronarrative”? The same question may be posed with regard to Ukrainian identity markers rediscovered through war, such as national dignity and belief in victory. In any case, in the course of the “resurrection” of metanarratives and their fusion with micronarratives, a new Ukrainian authenticity is constituted, or, as we have previously termed it, “the essential triad of the Ukrainian axiological discourse: ‘national dignity / identity / authenticity’» [3, p. 160].

Let us turn to yet another discourse of the constitution of identity/authenticity, namely to the paradigm of communicative practical philosophy (universalist macro-ethics), already mentioned at the outset of this study. Karl-Otto Apel, one of its founders, formulated at the end of the twentieth century arguments pro and contra ethno-ethics as a version of Aristotelian ethics of the “good life”, on the one hand, and universalist macro-ethics, on the other, as a (until recently urgent) condition for equality and cooperation among different cultures. Apel notes: «If, following Aristotle, ethics is interpreted as a general teleological perspective of evaluations (Wertungen) in the sense of a (for me or for us) good (guten) life, that is, eudaimonia, then today there seem to be only two alternatives: either an ethics of authentic autonomous choice, as this radically individualistic ethics appears in existentialism, for example in Jean-Paul Sartre, or an ethics grounded in belonging to an established system of cultural values (Werttradition) or to a particular sociocultural form of life (Lebensform). In fact, only today — when for the individual the self-evidence of traditional (conventional) values has become problematic — does a quasi-existential ethics of autonomous authentic choice become the ultimate consciously chosen point of orientation» [7, c. 355].

However, in general, these acts of autonomous authentic choice are connected with belonging to a particular sociocultural form of life. It is precisely this belonging that renders forms of human behavior and their (mutual moral) evaluations ethically expected and consistent with the demands of everyday life. Apel emphasizes that orientations toward what “ought to be done” do not necessarily have to be defined as “non-identical” (or “inauthentic”), since for the self-affirmation and identity of a contemporary individual with a post-Enlightenment mentality it is entirely possible (and necessary) to belong to a particular sociocultural form of life, even if the existential condition of free (authentic) choice nevertheless remains the final instance. «Such an unavoidable belonging to a certain cultural form of life and form of ethos, however it manifests itself — more religiously or more ethnically — is today demonstrated not only by hermeneutically oriented philosophers (namely the post-Heideggerian and

post-Wittgensteinian schools), but also by empirical social research and the cultural sciences» [7, c. 359].

In our view, the normative primacy of late twentieth-century macroethics in fact gives way, in Ukrainian wartime realities, to an ethics of authenticity (in the sense of Charles Taylor's conception), thereby posing the question: what does it mean, in the present moment, to be authentic to oneself and to one's nation — that is, to be oneself? After all, it is precisely «the relationship between the individual and the community that constitutes the space within which the dialogical process of forming personal identity takes place» [6, c. 11]. According to the Ukrainian philosopher Serhii Krymskyi, the core of personal self-identification is spirituality, which is connected with authenticity/identity as factors of the “self-construction of the personality”. «Today we no longer suffer from a deficit of ideas — the twentieth century seems to have invented all possible ideas of humanity's own salvation — but an ever more palpable deficit of human qualities has emerged. And these are more reliable; one can rely on them more than on *abstract* ideas. In my view, the problem of human qualities is precisely the problem of the monadic nature of the personality, the problem of the personal representation of one's time» [5, c. 144].

This raises a logical question: are there foundational criteria capable of adequately correlating the triad “national dignity / identity / authenticity”? Let us turn to several definitions of the concept of identity. Thus, in the glossary to the collection Cultural Values of Europe, identity is defined as «a subjective sense of (social) belonging, inner coherence, and biographical continuity» [14, p. 549]. By contrast, Francis Fukuyama emphasizes that “identity” as a concept has multiple meanings; in some cases it denotes a social role, while in others it refers to basic information about a person (personal data): «I will use the word ‘identity’ in a specific sense; above all, identity grows out of the distinction between the inner self and the external world of social rules and norms, which fails to properly recognize the value and dignity of the inner self. Only in our time, however, has the idea taken hold that the true inner self is valuable in itself and that external society systematically underestimates it. It is not the inner self that must be forced to conform to social rules; rather, society itself must change» [8, p. 19].

In contemporary Ukrainian social-philosophical discourse, it is precisely identity grounded in civic belonging that plays a decisive role in the choice between two systems: the totalitarian and the civilizational. «Most societies prefer the civilizational democratic system, since it is a system of opportunities, whereas the totalitarian one is a world of a ruler governed by Shakespearean rules» [11, c. 28]. Accordingly, “identity serves as a passport for legitimizing the narrative of a particular nation, community, or group.

In contemporary social philosophy, there is a view that European civilization is constructed around architectonic metaphors: thus, «civilization must rest on something, and its rules must be observed; its entire life and self-understanding revolve around an architectonic imagination» [9, с. 17]. For this reason, ideological discourses over the past two centuries have always existed in a paradoxical process of becoming, incessantly changing garments, masks, or arguments, inventing new adversaries for themselves, as well as their own past, origins, and genealogies. «Ideological systems — conservative, liberal, socialist, communist, fascist, Nazi, and others — sought to be architectonic discursive unities, closed in upon themselves, yet they never truly were; instead, they clandestinely exchanged ideas and arguments in order to reinvent and recreate themselves anew» [9, с. 18].

Attempts to answer the questions posed above may also be found, in our view, within the discourses of responsive phenomenology and the philosophy of dialogue. Let us begin with the paradigm of responsive phenomenology. According to Bernhard Waldenfels, the “shared world” emerges through universalization; it is a world that expands its possibilities while at the same time preserving the play-space of those possibilities. A different situation arises with “inter-worlds”, which are and remain foreign to one another [14, p. 154]. Thus, culture owes its specificity to its response to alterity, which may originate either within its own tradition or from foreign traditions. As can be seen, foreignness is a priori inscribed within one’s ownness, because a “pure” native culture would be one that no longer produces any responses but merely reproduces and varies existing ones. Hence, «the foreign is the elixir of life — but only when it is not mistaken for such. In this way, we can say that the phenomenon of interculturality allows for other interests, takes its own impact into account, and remains connected to the claim of foreign experience» [14, p. 150]. Therefore, when speaking of the horizons of identity in responsive phenomenology, one should point to a specific play of “appropriation — alienation” that unfolds at all levels of cognizing the experience of the Other.

As a result, attitudes toward the Other acquire a natural ethical and political dimension, which a given epoch and particular cultures, in our view, will inevitably “adjust” to their own “ideological matrices”: ranging from passive universalist hypertolerance to extreme manifestations of atolerance toward the aggressive Other. The latter, in contemporary Ukrainian wartime realities, are, in our opinion, fully justified, since they concern the unjust and unwarranted violation of Ukrainian essentiality at both the national and personal levels. In particular, as D. Zolotukhin observes, «the meta-war continues in the space of meanings — where part of the world considers Russia and China to be evil, while another part of the world hates the United States of America. This means that any changes in reality in the physical dimension can only be the consequences of

shifts in the dimension of meanings – in the understanding and perception of what is good and what is evil» [10].

Let us cite one more topical example. In one of his speeches in 2023, President Zelenskyy stated: “The war has not erased our values.” It is difficult not to support this thesis, especially when nearly all Ukrainians sense the emergence of new value-based meanings (at the societal level) and a new “axiological grid” (at the level of personal ethos), while literally standing face to face with death. Unfortunately, the experience of the “face of death” has become acutely real. As an illustration, we may refer to our own lived triggers of war – the “death from the sky,” those moments when a building shook from a shell landing nearby or from an enemy missile strike hitting a neighboring structure. We describe this as “an experience one would never wish to have,” just as one would never wish to sweep up shattered glass from balcony windows blown out by a shockwave. The problem is that this “unwanted experience” exists – it is real, painful, and personally lived – and it compels an entirely new appreciation of one’s sense of identity in terms of belonging to the Ukrainian nation. This is stated with complete sincerity, without any excess of pathos.

For the further representation of the pathways through which identity/authenticity is formed, let us also turn to the origins of the philosophy of dialogue, taking as an example the classical intellectual legacy of Martin Buber. As is well known, the thinker proceeds from the maxim that the world is dual for every human being, just as the human being has, in essence, a dual relation to the world. This reciprocity is realized, in Buber’s reflections, through the existential encounter of I and Thou, and the author emphasizes: “The moment of encounter is not an ‘experience’; rather, something happens to the person. Sometimes it is like a breath, sometimes like a collision – yet in any case something happens. Within the human being there is something More, the origin of which they cannot explain” [12, c. 33].

It is precisely for this reason that the world is dual for the human being, drawing attention to the deep-seated need of every person for the Other. Buber demonstrates how the Other, from being an external “non-I,” is transformed into an existential Thou: “The Thou appears as acting and as that which receives action” [12, c. 78]. Thus, the doctrine of dialogue represents the dual attitude of the human being toward the world: alongside utilitarian, impersonal relations (which Buber terms I – It relations), there also exist personal relations – that is, an address to nature, to other people, and to God as Thou (as an essential and profound interlocutor). It should be noted that it is precisely within such relations that an object is transformed into a subject, becoming an equal partner in dialogue.

In our view, this perspective naturally invites a correlation between Buber’s dialogism and Erich Fromm’s well-known dyad Being / Having. Demonstrating

the fundamental difference between being and having, Fromm notes: «The dilemma ‘to have or to be’ is not perceived as one that accords with common sense. It seems that having something is a normal function of our lives: in order to live, we must have something. <...> In a culture where having (possessing ever more of everything) is the dominant mode <...>, it may appear that having is the essence of being: if you have nothing, you are nothing» [12, c. 28]. The thinker emphasizes that this distinction between having and being represents «two basic modes of experience, the respective strengths of which determine the differences between characters of individuals and various types of social character» [12, c. 29]. We maintain that the dyad being – having constitutes a key aspect in the construction of utilitarian markers of identity characteristic of the post-industrial “consumer society.” At this point, it is worth appealing once again to a slightly modified thesis of Buber: a human being cannot live without the world of It, but if one lives only in the world of It, one is no longer truly human [12].

Conclusions

To summarize, from the perspective of the Ukrainian philosopher Serhii Krymskyi, identity with oneself is the possibility of becoming a “monadic” personality – that is, a personality capable of representing one’s epoch, one’s time, and one’s nation – and this possibility has now genuinely emerged for the majority of people. To what extent this possibility is realized is another matter altogether. In our view, such realization is precisely a question of national dignity for every contemporary Ukrainian; moreover, it is the duty of every conscious Ukrainian to possess such dignity and to be capable of realizing it at the level of self-identification of one’s own authenticity. Thus, the triad national dignity / identity / authenticity is primarily examined by axiology, while it is realized at the level of ethical “customariness” (Sittlichkeit) – in the sense of the personal moral responsibility of the contemporary individual (toward oneself, others, society, and history). Such personal responsibility inevitably involves ambivalent and often subjective criteria for the formation of authentic values as worths (rather than universalist imperatives) in the mirror of identifying the self – that is, the emergence of that spiritual personality which was so aptly described as a “person” by the founder of philosophical anthropology Max Scheler as early as 1928.

Consequently, the identification of the leading criteria for the formation of personal self-identity and its influence on the shaping of contemporary dimensions of social identities is carried out within the optics of axiological, cultural, and social backgrounds. Without undue pathos, we may state that the issue remains open, for the essential triad national dignity / identity / authenticity outlined in this study represents an open project, reflecting and transforming itself within the realities of the Ukrainian wartime discourse. Therefore, let us realize personal values, rather than universalist imperatives.

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**СУЧАСНІ АКСІОЛОГІЧНІ ГРАДАЦІЇ: АТРОФІЯ ЦІННОСТЕЙ
ЧИ ЕТИЧНИЙ РЕНЕСАНС?**

Резюме

У статті досліджуються сучасні аксіологічні градації крізь призму українського воєнного дискурсу з акцентом на напруження між уявною ерозією цінностей і можливістю етичного ренесансу. Основну увагу зосереджено на трансформації ідентичності та автентичності в умовах повномасштабної війни, які інтерпретуються не лише як соціокультурні конструкти, а як етично й онтологічно вкорінені феномени, пов'язані з національною гідністю. Обґрунтовується, що сучасна криза «великих наративів», посилена цифровою комунікацією, постмодерністським релятивізмом і фрагментацією смислів, спричиняє розмивання стабільних ціннісних орієнтирів і послаблення цілісних ідентифікаційних рамок.

Водночас у статті доводиться теза про те, що воєнні реалії не стільки зумовлюють зникнення ціннісних метанаративів, скільки сприяють їх повторній актуалізації. У цьому контексті українська ідентичність концептуалізується через сутнісну тріаду «національна гідність / ідентичність / автентичність», яка функціонує як етико-аксіологічна призма особистісного й колективного самовизначення. Показано, що ця тріада формується

на перетині аксіологічної рефлексії та прожитого етичного досвіду, а не як результат абстрактних універсалістських імперативів.

Спираючись на ідеї постмодерної філософії, комунікативної практичної філософії, респонсивної феноменології та філософії діалогу, автори аналізують конкуруючі етичні парадигми — універсалістську макроетику та етику автентичності — й доводять, що в сучасних українських реаліях пріоритет дедалі більше надається автентичності, осмисленій як особиста моральна відповідальність перед собою, Іншим, суспільством і історією. Окрему увагу приділено ролі інакшості, діалогу та етичної відповіді на агресію у формуванні ціннісних орієнтацій у воєнний час.

Зроблено висновок, що сучасний український аксіологічний дискурс слід розуміти як відкритий і динамічний проєкт. Формування автентичних цінностей постає як процес, нерозривно пов'язаний з особистісним досвідом, громадянською належністю та етичним вибором, що дозволяє інтерпретувати сучасний момент не як атрофію цінностей, а як складний і незавершений етичний ренесанс.

Ключові слова: аксіологія; ідентичність; автентичність, національна гідність; етика автентичності; український воєнний дискурс.

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