

# Challenges of Philosophy and Challenges to Philosophy

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During an interview on human rights in a TV programme, the interviewer all of a sudden said that, so far as he could understand, I was establishing a connection between philosophy and torture, and asked me what this connection was. I was shocked.

In a couple of seconds I tried to guess how he could have come to such a conclusion. My response was: there is no connection between philosophy and torture, still when you look at the fact of torture with philosophical-ethical knowledge, you can realize that torture does not damage, nor 'degrade', the human dignity of the victim of torture, as is usually accepted – e.g. in the formulation of the title of the 'Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment'. It causes damage to the human dignity of the person who tortures. We protect or damage human dignity, but our own human dignity, by what we do and *not* by what we suffer, since we are responsible for what we do and *not* for what others do to us. What we do, or refrain from doing, depends on each of us, i.e. acting in accordance with human dignity in our relations with other human beings is a problem in our ethical relation with ourselves, in spite of the fact that our actions are directed to somebody else.

This is in fact a general claim which I have been making for many years. In connection with torture, awareness of this truth bears results for the education of security forces, as well as for the rehabilitation of the victims of torture. It is a challenge of philosophical knowledge to the lives of individuals and an example of one of the roles that philosophy can play in everyday life.

Awareness of this role of philosophy is not something new. We find its best examples in the Platonic dialogues, in which Socrates tries to make his interlocutors aware of their ignorance about something they assume they know, and thus help them realize the use of philosophical knowledge. We find a typical example of this in Meno's confession in the *Meno*, who avows that 'he feels benumbed – both in thought and speech – and knows not how to answer. And yet many a time and at great length has he publicly discussed upon virtue, and right well too, as he thought; but now he can't even tell what it is.'<sup>1</sup>

This is a challenge of philosophy to all of us and is directly related to philosophical education, as certain other insights which contribute to the humanization of individuals.

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But there is a challenge in the opposite direction too, stemming from the impact of what is going on around us in our philosophizing. The source wherefrom we derive philosophical knowledge is the world we live in, provided that we have sufficiently sharpened the

eye, so as to become able to see the philosophical problem(s) underlying what is going on around us.

I have personally met with many such challenges since my early youth, and the first important one has been the well-known fact of *quite divergent*, even opposing, evaluations of the *same* actions, the *same* works, the *same* persons, the *same* events, and so on. This was surely one of the main causes of so many value-wasting disputes.

My revolt against this value-waste, which we encounter at every step we take, due to this divergent evaluation of the same objects of evaluation, led me to question 'evaluation' in different fields. Both relativistic and absolutistic value theories proved, to my eyes, inadequate in explaining the above-mentioned fact.

Evaluation, as a human phenomenon, appeared in this questioning to be carried out in three different modes, i.e. it proved to be not one but at least three different activities, all claiming to put forth the value of the object they evaluated.

Put very generally: one mode of evaluating we observe, is to *impute value* to an individual 'object' in accordance with a general value judgement valid for the evaluator; another mode is to *ascribe value* to the evaluated object with regard to a special connection which the evaluator sees between himself and the object in question, or a contingent consequence it bears for him. Both of these modes of evaluation fail to lead the evaluator to grasp the value of the object he evaluates.

The analysis of the third mode of evaluation – with respect to different kinds of objects in various fields – allowed me to put forth the main components or steps of the activity of *right evaluation* which appeared to be a complex *cognitive activity*, presupposing in the evaluator different kinds of knowledge.

These analyses made it necessary to distinguish not only between value judgements and value(s), something that had already been done, but also between 'value' (i.e. the value of something) and values.

The question of the right evaluation of an action made me realize that such an evaluation was impossible, unless we considered it within the framework of the 'ethical relation' within which it had been carried out. Abstracted from this framework, an action may be only the object of value imputations and/or value ascriptions, and of most divergent ones indeed.

This led me to the analysis of action within the framework of 'ethical relation'; for every action is the outcome of a personal-individual relation: it is always a singular-unique man, with all his personal characteristics, who acts in a singular-unique situation; and what he does or refrains from doing, is related, directly or indirectly, to another unique man, or to other men, whose situation is singular; or it is related to himself, to his own situation.

The analysis of action within this framework has shown that the first, and indeed decisive, component of an action is an evaluation – that of another's situation, action, etc. – the second being a value experience following immediately the evaluation made. Intention and aim, together with the way in which they are fulfilled, constitute only its third component.<sup>2</sup> Ethical theories up to now have considered this – also complex – component as the whole of the action.

Another challenge which I was met with in the last decades, and which led me to inquiring into the epistemological specificities of norms, was the widespread promotion of equal respect to all cultures. And what if a culture has norms contradictory to human rights?

This promotion of equal respect to all cultures, though well meant, appears to be an attempt to correct an error by committing another error. There was, and there still is, a problem in the relations between individuals from different cultures – in fact, in the way how people belonging to the so-called western culture look at the people of other cultures, related to issues of evaluation: usually they impute value to individuals of other cultures, to their actions and achievements. One of the best examples of this value imputation we find in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, in the episode of the Turkish astronomer, which is also a sharp criticism Saint-Exupéry directs to the people of his own culture. Those among you who have read it will probably remember the story about the discovery of the planet where the Little Prince came from, asteroid 612, discovered in 1909 by a Turkish astronomer. This astronomer had reported in detail his discovery at the International Congress of Astronomy, but nobody gave an ear to him, because he was dressed in a strange fashion. 'So do grown up people usually', comments the narrator. Fortunately a good statesman got power in Turkey, and made his people wear European clothes. Thus the fame of asteroid 612 was saved. When in 1930 the same astronomer, this time in modern dress, made the same communication everybody in the congress affirmed the truth of his discovery.

Thus, instead of demanding equal respect to all individuals as human beings, i.e. independently from what culture they belong, and of trying to make right evaluations of their actions and achievements, the demand for equal respect to all cultures was introduced. It escaped attention that this demand implies, among other things, also equal respect to norms contradictory to clearly conceived human rights and not rarely leads to value-wasting acts in life – something that its introducers surely did not intend.

This fact, considered from a theoretical viewpoint, betrayed to my eyes lack of clear philosophical knowledge at least about what cultures are, as well as lack of clear philosophical knowledge of the epistemological specificities of norms. This led me to inquire into the latter specificities. Here is a part of the outcome of this inquiry, i.e. the epistemological and consequently axiological differences between cultural norms and human rights.<sup>3</sup>

The existence of norms, of different and changing norms, is a fact, related to a specificity of the human being: the establishing of social relations, i.e. the creation of social roles, assumed by concrete individuals.

Norms are *deduced*, undeliberately or deliberately, in order to create an order in a given group, i.e. in order to provide measures for the right and wrong, consequently in order to determine the conduct of individuals in public life, as well as the way in which social relations will be established among individual members of a given group. Whoever assumes, or finds himself in, a given role, has to behave in accordance with the norms constituting that role.

Norms are usually worded as ought–should–must or may propositions. This means that propositions of norms are not propositions of knowledge, i.e. they have no object independent of those who put them forth. Consequently norms are neither true nor false.<sup>4</sup>

This is the main epistemological specificity of norms and also the origin of the difficulties faced in evaluating a given norm: norms cannot be verified or falsified; their evaluation presupposes a different epistemological treatment.

Compared with propositions of knowledge, norms are propositions expressing thoughts deduced from epistemologically very different premises and by different kinds of reasoning.

The axiological specificity of a norm depends on the epistemological specificity of its premises. Its justification or 'foundation' is related to the possibility of *going back* to its origin – to the premises from which it is deduced – and of seeing their epistemic specificities, i.e. whether the premises from which a given norm is deduced are knowledge or other norms and what kind of knowledge or norms.

This first step in the epistemological evaluation of a norm, to which every norm has to be subjected, is something quite different from the *ways of validating* or enforcing a norm. The latter are social procedures – different social or political procedures – aimed at establishing a broad *consensus* on a given norm. To find out how a moral norm was *made valid* presupposes sociological research, while to find out how a legal norm was enforced, one has to read the minutes of the sessions of the bodies which the enforcement of such a norm depends on.

What we see in the present world is a search for *consensus* on given norms, *without taking into consideration the epistemological-axiological specificities of the given norms*. This is also one of the main dangers of 'democratic' decisions in our present world. It makes possible the enforcement, by consensus or by the majority of votes, of norms which are contradictory to human rights.

What I said concerning the epistemological-axiological specificity of norms is true for both moral and legal norms.

What we call 'morals' are systems of norms which individuals in a given group (or in a given culture) are expected to follow in their relations with others, in action – norms of behaviour or conduct, as well as of norms of evaluation. They are the 'goods' and the 'bads' prevailing in a given group – a given 'society' or 'culture'.

Now, if we look at these moral norms from a distance, we easily observe that a part of such norms prevailing in given groups or 'cultures' is different, and that it is also changing with time within the same groups, that even a way of behaviour, once prohibited, becomes promoted and *vice versa*; we also see that the same single action – of yours or mine – is qualified by prevailing different norms on the same issue, simultaneously, as good and bad. This fact, which postmodernism, by losing sight of the specificity of other kinds of norms, attempted to justify theoretically, has led especially young people and mainly in so-called 'Western society', to the (theoretical) rejection of all and all kinds of norms.<sup>5</sup>

Still, besides this observation, we also observe that another part of norms does not show, to a great extent, such a difference or change – for example 'for one, to keep one's word'. People in every culture or group are expected to obey – to follow or use – both these kinds of moral norms.

In view of this fact, the first distinction we have to make is between the norms of evaluation – the so-called value judgements – and the norms of behaviour or conduct, though they can be easily translated into each other. This distinction is important, because the roles they are expected to play are different.

Norms of moral evaluation – or general proposition on what is assumed to be good or bad – are expected to determine our personal evaluations, i.e. to be used in order to *determine the value* of an evaluated object – be it an action, a person, a situation etc. –, while norms of moral conduct or 'ought-should' propositions are expected to *determine our actions* in life. In other words, norms of evaluation are supposed to lead those who use them as criteria, to the knowledge of the value of given actions of yours or mine – which

is not the case –, while norms of behaviour – moral rules or principles – are expected to determine actions carried out in given situations – your actions, my actions etc. And the ‘ought’ or ‘should’ of these latter norms of conduct or behaviour are deduced from premises of different epistemic specificities and by different ways of reasoning.

Here, I shall confine myself to pointing only at two kinds of such norms: those deduced in different given historical conditions *from experience by a kind of induction* and those deduced *by the comparison of different given (human or historical) conditions in the light of the knowledge of the specific potentialities of the human being*, as they are reflected in the achievements of the human species in history, and which constitute what is called human dignity. The former may be justified – if wished – statistically, the latter by a reasoning similar to *reductio ad absurdum*.

At the origin of the first kind of norms (of behaviour) are given natural-social conditions, as well as the conceptions of different cultures concerning the human being. They are norms of behaviour relative to the existing conditions, possessing a *practical* function, in view of establishing or safeguarding *any* order in these existing conditions at the moment they are deduced. So long as the conditions in which they are deduced prevail, if deduced with sagacity, they are functional. But when these conditions change, they lose their function and meaning, i.e. the ‘oughts’ or ‘shoulds’ they express, lose their ground. Many traditional-customary ways of behaviour transmitted from generation to generation in a given cultural group, belong to this kind of norms. Thus we see that though in time the conditions wherefrom these norms are deduced do not exist any more – which means that there is no more a justifiable reason of the ‘ought’ or ‘should’ they express – people in this group try to keep them going. We even see attempts to revive obsolete norms.

Still, in time, new norms are deduced from the changed conditions, mostly incompatible with the old ones. And right here we find the point where the so-called ‘crisis of values’, to a great extent, arises from. It seems that those who insist on keeping valid such norms, are unaware of the source wherefrom the ‘ought’ or ‘should’ of these norms are deduced, i.e. that they are unaware of their epistemic specificities.

Norms of this kind – to which many proverbs or products of practical wisdom also belong – are deduced by evaluating *the effects* this or that way of behaviour has had, i.e. the benefit or harm they often caused to those who happened to behave in this or that manner. This kind of norm tell us, in fact, so much: when someone behaves in this or that way, *the probability of safeguarding* his benefit or interests, and sometimes those of the others, increases. In other words: when, in a given case, one is unable to make a right evaluation, but possesses the will to protect what is considered to be in such a case his benefit or interest – or that of the group he belong to –, it is *more probable* to protect it, if he behaves in the way the relevant norm (rule, etc.) demands. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that, in a given case, following this norm one causes harm to his benefit or interests and to those of the others. The different norms which distinguish one culture from another are mostly norms of this kind. This is also the kind of norm which those who advocate equal respect to all cultures invite us to respect, and which those who promote cultural identities wish to revive, without evaluating them, i.e. without taking into consideration the implications they bear, in the existing conditions, for the human beings who are born by chance by a mother and/or father brought up in a given cultural group.



As to the other kinds of norms (or 'ought'–'should' propositions), originating in the knowledge of the value of the human being: they are deduced from this knowledge, directly or indirectly, in the face of human or historical conditions which do harm to this value (e.g. 'thou shall not kill', 'no racial discrimination shall be made').

I would say that the reasoning which leads to the deduction of such a norm (or principle) is made – schematically – as follows: since the human species possesses such and such potentialities, no one belonging to this species – you, me – should do anything that abolishes or reduces *the possibility* of the actualization of such potentialities. Such norms are often worded in the passive, i.e. they demand that no one belonging to the human species should *undergo* any treatment which abolishes or reduces the possibility of the actualization of such potentialities (for example: 'no one shall be subjected to torture', etc.).

A typical example of these kind of norms are what we call human or basic rights. Human rights express – in fact, *intend* to express – *ethical* demands concerning how each and every individual belonging to the human species should be treated by and should treat other individuals *in general* (whoever they might be and whatever their special situation might be), if human dignity is to be protected in practice.

In positive law we find both kinds of norms. Legal norms express, among other things, *limits* within which real or legal individuals may move, *acts* that one should/may or should not/may not perform, as well as the treatment which one has to undergo when he transgresses or violates these limits. They also express arrangements of social relations, i.e. how real individuals, which assume the relevant roles should behave or treat, and be treated by, each other. These norms are what we call rights and their complementary duties.

Rights, in general, are 'rights of someone'. To use the Platonic concept of right, which I find quite appropriate: a right is something *due* (*ὀφειλόμενον*) to somebody by somebody else. In the case of human rights: they express the treatment which *is due* to each human being by other human beings.

It usually escapes attention that human rights demand a treatment in the active and in the passive sense – something that has negative implications, especially in the education of human rights. For example, human rights teaching mostly appears combined with civics, and not with ethics, i.e. it intends to teach people what *their* rights are and how they shall demand them, rather than to educate people who possess the will to protect human rights, and are sufficiently equipped with the knowledge necessary for this protection.

Human rights, as they are worded in the international instruments, intend to express demands concerning what direct and indirect treatment a human being and every human being should or should not *undergo*, so that a human individual may actualize, as much as each one can, the human potentialities – ethical ones included – which constitute what we call human dignity.

Still, too often, individuals do not treat other individuals in accordance with the demands of human rights. Then, who will do that?

If we look at the international human rights instruments – i.e. to the addressees in these instruments – the answer appears to be clear: the body which will safeguard – directly or indirectly – the treatment of individuals in the way that human rights demand, is *the State*, in every state.

Signing such an agreement is a *promise* that a (given) state gives to its citizens and to the other states involved. By signing such an instrument a state promises to its citizens and to the world community that it will implement – i.e. it will make determinant – the

demands that human rights express or the relevant right expresses; it guarantees (at least verbally, by a speech act) that individuals in that given country will be treated in the way that human rights demand. It guarantees that laws – legal norms – will be deduced from those basic principles in the conditions of the given country and that these laws will indeed be implemented by those who are responsible for their implementation – by state and public officers, the judges, the police, etc.

The knowledge of the epistemological specificities of these two kinds of norms makes us see, among other things, the following: all kinds of practical norms (of moral and legal norms), independently of the premises and the way they are deduced, aim at creating an order in a given group. And now the question arises: is the *very existence* of order – of any order – sufficient for the protection of human rights? If we can overcome the prevailing prejudice (or value judgement) that ‘order is good’, we can see that *not any order* makes possible the humanization of individuals – i.e. the exercising of their human potentialities. What human rights aim at, is the creation – the permanent creation – of *such* an order.

This makes us also see that not ‘law’ indiscriminately, but only law deduced in given historical conditions in the light of human rights, can contribute to the creation of such an order. It is very possible – as it often happens – to damage human rights through the law, not only because the legislator cannot take into consideration relevant complicated cases that may appear, but also because laws are often the legalization of cultural norms. And there are many cultural norms contradictory to human rights. How can we, then, be expected to respect all cultures equally?

Various other implications for our private and public lives, as well as for international affairs, follow from these epistemological differences of norms.

For our purpose here it will suffice, I think, to see, through these examples of my own personal adventure, the following: we derive philosophical knowledge from what is going on around us, this knowledge in turn enlightens reality, and this goes on. It goes on for more than twenty-five centuries. And this is perhaps the progress of philosophical knowledge.

## Notes

1. 80, b 1–5, translated by R.W. Mavkay, M.D., William and Norgate, Edinburgh, 1869.
2. For this point see: Ioanna Kuçuradi (1999) *Etik (Ethics)*, (Ankara third edition), pp. 15–77.
3. For the question of what cultures are, see: Ioanna Kuçuradi (1998), ‘Cultures and World Culture’, in *Philosophie et Culture, Actes du XVIIe Congrès Mondial de Philosophie IV*, Montréal, pp. 457–60.
4. See also: Ioanna Kuçuradi (1995), ‘Knowledge and its Object’, in *The Concept of Knowledge*, Ioanna Kuçuradi and Robert Cohen (editors), Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 170, (Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht), pp. 97–102.
5. See also: Jeanne Hersch ‘“Cultural Development” a Tentative Answer’, in *Philosophy and Cultural Development*, (1993) (Ankara), pp. 31–2.