

Moral Indifference as a Social Communication Trend

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Abstract—The article discusses the problem of moral indifference and its impact on the social system functioning. The emphasis is laid on the transformation of individual relations into public communication. The social causes of this phenomenon in specific historical periods are analyzed. The article also reveals the interconnection between crisis situations related to the reevaluation of the common standards and perception of the individual's own essence. The potential possibility of transformation of moral indifference into behavioral forms, representing social danger, is stressed.

Keywords—moral indifference; public communication; society; antisocial behavior; egocentricity; public interest; generally significant

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the topic of moral indifference is moving from the category of theoretical studies into the plane of searching for practical solutions to this problem. Its relevance is extending to the areas of civil responsibility, social communication, and public activity of the population. Lack of interest in the dynamics of the social process, in the reforming of the relationships between an individual and society, a citizen and the state, in eliminating the negative phenomena in public environment, and improving the structure of interpersonal relations is the cause of ineffectiveness of many government projects and undertakings. Expansion of the field of antisocial manifestations is associated with the destruction of both personal manifestations and the social status of a person, due to the discrepancy in the understanding of the value requirements between an individual and society. Disruption of social unity initiates ethnic disunity, political crises, and transformation of national consciousness. In this context, moral indifference can be viewed as a social phenomenon with its own specifics, historical genesis, and influence on the self-realization of the individual.

The following current trends should be noted in the philosophical literature devoted to this subject. A French researcher P. Hadot is convinced that the phenomenon of indifference has developed from a skeptical tradition, which took shape in ancient Greek philosophy. Fixation on the unknowableness of the world and the inability to predict your own life becomes the cause of indifference toward others and yourself. [1] In the post-industrial period, this topic is interpreted on basis of the changed conditions of existence. According to D. Bell, a person loses the need for dialogue and compensates for it with an increase in material

consumption, losing interest in others [2]. A.S. Panarin regards “indifference to morality” as a consequence of breaking ties with tradition and striving for hedonistic existence [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]. American psychologists and anthropologists tend to interpret the phenomenon of indifference as a consequence of children's mental trauma, lack of adequate social partners, clash with borderline situations, discrepancy between external and internal processes around a person (L.A. Peplau) [8] [9].

II. MORAL INDIFFERENCE

The study of the indifference phenomenon implies a complex character: the ethical aspect is complemented by the means of social philosophy. The usage of a historical and comparative method when considering the moral indifference problem allows to analyze the determination of behavioral standards within a specific historical era, define its content, and establish the typical features of this phenomenon. In this text the concepts of indifference, insensibility, disinterest, and detachment are used as synonyms.

The attitude of the individual to himself, to others, to the community in which he dwells characterizes the moral atmosphere prevailing in society. Perception of the value of a human life, of generally valid principles, rights and obligations, as well as civil duty serves as a criterion for personal and civil development. Effectiveness of social communication depends on the harmony and trust established between the citizen and the state. Interest and participation in social activities creates a sense of belonging with other community members, thereby recognizing the system of moral priorities that governs relations in society, which relies on civil solidarity as a sign consensus of participants in the social process.

A fundamental feature of moral indifference is a break with traditional axiology dictating goals, patterns, motivation for individual actions, which implies formation of other behavioral stereotypes. The meanings of existence in such context are determined by an egocentric principle, which takes social problems beyond an individual perception of the world, as being of no interest in achieving personal well-being. The main stimulus of activity becomes the satisfaction of material requirements, fulfillment of ambitions, positioning of one's own exclusiveness. Conscious indifference is declared as an adequate choice in relation to the society where aversion or distrust of the established system of values, common significant goals, and civil efforts

is concentrated. In this perspective, another person ceases to be perceived at a level of independent value and this attitude is transferred to the social environment of which he is a part. The demonstrated indifference to the surrounding reality initiates a rigid barrier with other individuals. At the same time, responsibility for the obstacles hindering the expansion of an egoistic manifestation space is placed on society, and the rating scale adopted in it loses its significance or is considered non-binding. At the same time, the influence of public opinion is devalued. The struggle to achieve one's own interests develops into the idea of opposing the "hostile" world. The main moral regulators of interaction with fellow citizens, such as censure and public honors cease to be effective; their impact does not find an emotional response. Sympathy, mutual assistance, compassion, participation are considered as meaningless actions, and in this respect interpersonal communication is reduced to vital contacts that do not include social dialogue. Exchange of efforts, opportunities, knowledge, energy, directed towards the common good, with the social system becomes unjustified, since the sphere of contact between the man and the community has been lost or strictly formalized. In such a situation, moral indifference is transformed from a personal worldview into a social factor that determines the state and perspective of a state life.

Indifference contradicts the principles of social solidarity, recognized as the basis of civil communication. Disinterest in the results of joint activities, which are of importance to the majority of population contains a destructive potential for the entire social system. The danger of this phenomenon is manifested in critical circumstances: military actions, man-made disasters, natural disasters, and spiritual threats. Inactivity, elimination, and indifference create conditions for conflict situations between citizens and contribute to the violation of the social system integrity. The moral component in this case can acquire the features of a political, material, and national confrontation. Perception of indifference as a personal quality is transferred to the level of perception of society, its mobility, unity, ability to respond to external challenges. The scale of the moral indifference phenomenon creates a sense of decline, lack of prospects, and crisis of the social system and becomes a motivation for reducing commitment aimed at the realization of socially significant goals.

III. MORAL INDIFFERENCE AS A SOCIAL TREND

Indifference forms a feeling of disconnection between fellow citizens, the loss of a binding beginning, performing a unifying function. The skepticism about fundamental ideas is based on a discrepancy between the declared and the implemented by society, which should justify the principle of non-participation in the social process. The initial premise of moral indifference is accusing society of lies and hypocrisy, and then it develops into distrust of significant events, figures, presented as role models, and strengthens the individual in the pursuit of self-destruction. Self-isolation basically coincides with indifference by evaluative criteria. A refusal to provide interaction, mutual assistance, mutual understanding, and mutual assistance acquires social implications; it reveals the attitude to the community. In this

case, the deformation of the part occurs through the rejection of the whole. Social fragmentation prevents the establishment of a clear moral position and can be interpreted as a result of moral indifference.

In critical epochs, there is a change in ideological systems associated with violation of the previous forms of public control, changes in the state perspective, and deformation of the moral paradigm. The content of social communication between citizens is getting filled with new priorities due to the transformation of value systems. This is especially true of presenting the individual to the society through a set of generally valid actions. At the early stage of ancient history, the civil principle prevails over personal interests. The collective principles of survival, existence, participation in the social process excluded the phenomenon of indifference as such. The moral dignity of a citizen was determined through contacts with fellow tribesmen and performance of civic duties. 'The Roman people, the freedom of the people, the duty to serve all the forces of Rome at any place, in any role — such was the basis of the Romans' value system in the heyday of their city-state' [10]. Compactness of residence, few inhabitants of the polis created the conditions for transparency of the moral component of any individual. Common goals, common good, common heroes stimulated social activity. During the reign of Roman emperors, a change in the value scale takes place. The collective beginning gives way to individualistic manifestations associated with self-interest, struggle for power, and vain ambitions. Moral indifference as a form of survival is derived from public sentiment, recognizing wealth, eminence, and place in the social hierarchy as a definition of a person's merits. Indifference to others becomes a means of self-actualization in the world.

Moral indifference can take various forms: detachment, autonomous existence, and solitude. It has to do not with the depreciation of human dignity, but with a sense of inability to improve the social structure. L.A. Seneca notes: '... in order not to be afraid of either people or gods, in order not to wish either shameful or unnecessary, in order to become the sovereign master of oneself...' [11]. Turning to the individual self, the individual fixes on his own problems, considering them as the most significant and immediate, and because of this loses interest in social life, preferring to engage in personal self-improvement, rather than social reform. The authority of public opinion, not supported by examples of decent behavior of the majority, loses its influence on the individual, leaving the person to himself. In such a situation, moral indifference coincides with basic tendencies of the social state and serves as a defensive reaction for self-preservation.

In the medieval period, as a result of economic and political modification of the social relation structure, the regulators of moral behavior change. The institution of the church and the professional corporation (workshop, village community, knightly community, monastic brotherhood) control moral manifestations of the individual, make an assessment of his personal qualities. Close cooperation in the industrial, military, spiritual sphere, dependence on the professional community, obedience to the rules of estate

strata limit the selfish motivation of actions. The interests of a trade union, which for the most part coincide with the benefits of its individual representative, force a person to perceive them as the main ones and to defend them as their own. Moral indifference does not receive an opportunity for explicit expression, remaining a latent quality of an individual; it is limited by effective barriers that restrain the egocentric principle. Professional solidarity extends to estate interests, as they concentrate common goals and opportunities. Exile, loss of disposition, deprivation of estate and professional privileges are social measures that prevent the emergence and development of moral indifference.

Social attitudes in the moral component coincide with the church provisions. The person, allegiance or position of the person, the time of his life, and the property he owns are combined into an inseparable whole. Everything should be used for the benefit of the individual and at the same time in the interests of the social whole, and these interests are represented in a sermon in a usual religious form, as a fulfillment of God's will' [12]. The impetus for the universally significant activity is following the Gospel commandments, which do not change depending on the political and state situation. Helping one's neighbor, compassion, charity are the criteria for a true Christian life, and since the church community, as a rule, coincided with the professional group, and religious and social requirements regarding morality were identical, these moral qualities became universal and were demanded in two main planes of personality realization.

Christian morality has formulated the main thesis of communication: virtue gives rise to agreement, vice gives rise to isolation between individuals. The church in its sermons developed humility, which helped to overcome the barrier of pride, destroying the integrity of the world, stimulating false autonomy, creating a sense of superiority, which leads to detachment from the generally significant. 'Let it be the soul of a brother, not an outsider, not the soul of the sons of others, whose mouths speak lies, whose right hands are the right hands of untruth, but the soul of a brother who when approves of me - rejoices for me, when blames me - grieves for me, since no matter when he approves of me or condemns me - he loves me' [13]. Involvement with others through faith, as the highest manifestation of a person, and a profession, as a means of survival, forces the individual to limit egoism and as a result to overcome manifestations of moral indifference.

In the 17th century, a worldview changes in European history; it is related to the development of industry, scientific revolutions, and changes in the social structure. Public opinion dictates new behavioral stereotypes, which reflect the ideas of personal freedom and independence. Material well-being becomes the fundamental criterion of social recognition. Competition and rivalry are the main ways to achieve success. Ambition, vanity, and egocentrism are justified on basis of the natural essence of men. Moral indifference becomes an effective factor of correspondence between the conditions of existence offered by society and personal aspirations to prosperity. Self-interest justifies any actions that are not in the field of jurisdiction. Public

communications are built on basis of mutual advantage and mutual benefit. The task of society is to determine the generally significant meanings, where both the interests of an individual person and the interests of all are represented, and thus the disintegration of the state system is not allowed.

The authors of the New Age (F. Bacon, T. Hobbes, and others), considering the problem of indifference, used the concept of 'natural', filling it with natural desires and laws. A person acts at his own risk and therefore relies on ideas of self-preservation. All others are perceived as potential enemies that can harm the interests of the individual. In such a situation, solidarity with others becomes absurd. Only fear for one's own life makes one look for opportunities for social unification. The emotional desire for involvement is replaced by a rational message about the benefits of moral maxims. Indifference is not condemned, but it is suggested to modify indifference into the rules beneficial for oneself. '...if others agree, a person must agree to give up the right to all things to the extent necessary in the interests of peace and self-defense' [14].

Fear for one's own life stimulates social activity in order to prevent undesirable manifestations. In the New Age philosophy, egoism is given a social status governed by state laws. Indifference is not condemned by public opinion but unified in the form of givenness of relations between people. The balance of the individual and the collective is maintained through rational justifications. The moral sphere is fixed in legal provisions: civil laws prevent manifestations of injustice, arrogance, and violence. Thus, the demonstrated indifference to social issues contradicts the requirements of the mind and does not get any understanding in the public environment. The European states and civil societies, starting from the 17th century, gradually build a policy of using human egoism for the benefit of all, based on the formation of a rationalistic worldview, when a person is involved in a social process, on the assumption of the obvious advantages and benefits for him.

Acceleration of life dynamics, new informational opportunities, positive improvements in the life standard transform the understanding of a person's own essence. In the 20th century, the relevance of survival gradually loses its original meaning, and with it the need for social contacts changes. To a large extent they are filled with joint leisure, pastime, and entertainment. The collective nature of existence as a form of resisting hunger, cold, and disease becomes unwanted. The value of a social system is determined through the provision of comfort and social guarantees. Indifference harmonizes with the general rhythm of life, moving from the category of moral vices to everyday life. 'If a person does not belong to any community, if his life does not acquire any sense or direction, he feels like a speck of dust, and the feeling of his own insignificance suppresses it' [15]. Indifference becomes a response to alienation from the social system. Interest in another person loses its former value due to self-sufficiency of the individual and is regarded as a forced form of life, devoid of full-fledged communication. Social ties are formalized, as they lack a binding beginning, filled with common meanings. A person finds himself in a situation of total loneliness, filled with

pessimism, disbelief, and a cynical attitude towards fellow citizens.

The loss of moral authorities, a gap with society, designed to control human behavior, form an antisocial lifestyle. Indifference takes a protest version of self-presentation. Refusal to accept the moral requirements of society declares disagreement with the social system. Opinions, assessments, views of others are perceived aggressively. Society and the state have not justified the expectations placed on them in the eyes of a disappointed subject and, therefore, do not have the right to restrict alternative forms of existence. Marginalism, nihilism, and escapism carry out a rigid demarcation with the civilian component of the individual. The lifestyle and mindset focused only on selfhood does not include another person in the circle of significant values. The conflict with the generally accepted exempts the individual in his mind from social duties and responsibilities. 'The logic of exchange of values is no longer valid. The logic of rejection of value and meaning comes into force' [16]^{p.230}. Indifference becomes a socially dangerous phenomenon.

IV. CONCLUSION

Therefore, public communication deprived of generally significant interests loses its attractiveness in the eyes of most citizens and, as a result, initiates the development of the moral indifference phenomenon. Violation of personal ties and indifference to another person cause the social system fatigue, even though a person is an integral part of it. In this context, a moral problem moves into the category of negative social factors that impede the positive reform of state and public structures. The discord of personality and society forms the attitude of non-acceptance of civil solidarity on the main issues of community existence (security, survival, self-identification, and preservation of spiritual traditions). Openness of authorities, interest in universal prosperity, realization of the civil rights can contribute to a change in the vector of individual activity.

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