

# **The Impact of Spiritual and Moral Values on the Likelihood of the Establishment of Reciprocal Understanding in Culturally Diverse Environment**

Nadezshda A. LYURIYA and Tatiana A. Titova  
Tomsk State Pedagogical University

## **Abstract**

In this paper, the authors argue that it is necessary to recognize the key role of the spiritual factor in the policy of cooperation between the states as concern the proposals originated at the United Nations, UNESCO and other international organizations that are designed to implement the initiative of peaceful nonviolent coexistence. A particular attention is paid to the examination of the real potential of the system of education for the teaching of a nonviolent way of living.

## **1 Introduction**

In contemporary world, globalization is becoming a prominent but often an appalling feature of our planet. War, terrorism, ecological catastrophes do not have borders, and no country is really safe. A number of countries, big and small, on all continents seem to be not ready to deal with the global issues not only because of some sort of technical causes, but also because these countries are divided by the differences in political systems, religions, opinions, or ideologies.

Globalization is one of the clear confirmations of the fact that human race has entered a **new evolutionary phase**, and it is necessary to find an adequate answer to this global challenge. In the global age, the one of the most important tasks is to assure a better understanding and **unity** of all the peoples in order to find the way to survive. The humankind must close the ranks to secure the unification of people and the formation of the global collective consciousness so as to reach peace, prosperity, and the well-being for the entire planet and not for a limited number of states. In other words, the human race will be over the hill of global issues if an adequate answer, or factor, is uncovered. In this paper, we argue that this factor is the priority of spiritual values and it is necessary to accept the spiritual factor as the key value of inter-state interaction. Hence, we would like to show below the main achievements of the preceding stage of evolution,

the major characteristics of the world we live in today, and how to assure the upward tendency of civilization.

The unconditional condemnation of all kind of violence towards the individual is an overriding achievement of our civilization. At the global scale, the reflection of this condemnation is two-fold:

- Firstly, it is the foundation of the United Nations, a global organization created as an answer to the concerns raised by the Second World War in order to solve the global issues and to facilitate the interaction between the peoples. Soon after its foundation, on December 10, 1948 the United Nations adapted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and human dignity, liberties and equality of all people irregardless of their national, religious, racial and other differences had been declared the supreme human values
- Secondly, it is the disintegration of the colonial system, and, most importantly, the achievement of independence by India through nonviolent civil resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi.

-

One can find the remaining legacy, or challenges brought about by the two events, in our days as well. For example, many countries support the ideas of democracy. However, not all of them support the Declaration of Human Rights. That is because there are significant differences in the understanding of the relations between the State and the Individual. The Western tradition is rooted in the idea that the rational search for a best model of human coexistence is possible. But in the countries with the dominance of religious values, the management of state affairs is closely linked to the beliefs that the laws of coexistence is a God-given knowledge, and a human being should strictly obey them and maintain the tradition although on the voluntary basis. Therefore, in these countries, the social structure and the society's proper existence is considered less dependent on the ruler, the political system, or external impact. This explains the stability of the caste system in India, the survivability of many monarchies, etc., i.e. in those cases, in which the sustainability of the state structure is assured by the stability and power of the faith.

As for the ideas of democracy, the major values are defined as a result of the assumption of the causes of injustice and violence. As a rule, **the material factors** like the enrichment of ones at the expanse of others, forcible redistribution of property, suppression, conquest, aspiration of power, illegal enrichment, exploitation and other kind of oppression and inequitable attitude are assumed to be the causes of injustice and

violence. That is why these factors have been condemned in the Declaration and the following values have been proclaimed supreme: the right to life, liberty, and security of person (Article 3), the freedom of conscience, religion, opinion, expression, association, and assembly; the freedom from arbitrary arrest; the right to a fair and impartial trial (Article 1), inadmissibility of tyranny and oppression (Article 19), the right to work under favorable conditions and to receive equal pay for equal work, etc. All these values are rooted in the major idea, namely, to prevent any kind of violence; the aim that was considered as urgent as ever right after the world was shocked by the atrocities committed by Fascism. In other words, the message is that the ideas of violence must not be supported anywhere in the world. However, the Declaration does not contain articles that would protect **the spiritual values**. That is because the impact of ideas, words or beliefs can be either a positive or a negative one.

## **2 The Importance of Spiritual Values**

In contemporary world, there is a clear trend towards the inadmissibility of the oppression of immaterial values. On the other hand, it seems that the further development of two above-mentioned opposite approaches to societal organization have reached a deadlock. In political systems with the emphasis on democratic values, it is often underestimated that the spiritual factor is more powerful in terms of its impact on the individual than any other factors. In other words, the fact that there is a unity of all supreme values and that the priority must be awarded to immaterial ones is not widely acknowledged as yet.

For example, when Danish journalists publish caricatures on Mohamed or when Dan Brown discredits the life of Jesus Christ, it is considered the execution of the right to the freedom of expression and conscience. However, neither Danes nor Brown even try to realize that they offend the supreme values of the believers. Every human being has supreme values. For some, these values are equated to the notion of «life», which is protected by the Declaration and the law system, whereas for many others there are values that exceed the value of human life. A certain individual may voluntarily renounce his or her life, freedoms (i.e. the supreme values in democratic countries) in the name of some other values, beliefs that we call “spiritual”, or the supreme values of human existence. This is precisely how the term “spirituality” is used in this paper. The

offence of these values is inadmissible for anyone. Tolerance towards public offences of supreme values is not the freedom of expression but rather a high degree of permissiveness and dissoluteness, because this kind of “tolerance” inevitably leads to conflicts and the lack of stability and peace. Therefore, despite of the diversity of value systems in today’s world, it is necessary to recognize the priority of spiritual values over any other in order to prevent the conflict.

But what exactly constitutes the spiritual values? How to avoid the ambiguity of interpretation of one and the same events?

Firstly, we would like to argue that the spiritual values are at the core of all religions:

- All religions advocate love to one's neighbor, mercy, tolerance, forgiveness
- All religions advocate moral values of human being and facilitate the eradication of one's own evil
- In order to maintain peace and reciprocal understanding, the individual has a simple point of reference, or moral rules of coexistence, which basically all like the Ten Commandments
- No religion advocates violence

Although some Muslims advocate fundamentalism, this is not indicative of the Islamic model of inter-state relations since this fundamentalism is a reflection of an intra-confessional divergence that exists in any religion. Besides, those who sacrifice their lives in the name of «supreme» values and kill innocent people cannot be considered «spiritual». At a significant degree, their doings are not rooted in the religion *per se* but rather constitutes a response to the oppression by the former colonial powers in the past and the divergence in the methods to solve the disputes. For instance, consider the following: ‘We believe in God and that which has been revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them [the prophets], and to Him we submit’ (Koran, Sura 11: 130).

Secondly, atheists have supreme values as well. According to Gandhi, «God is everything; He is even the atheism of atheists, if an atheist is allegiant to the truth». Family, scientific truth and patriotism are some of atheists’ sacred ideals.

Thus, by spiritual values we understand the values that have the following characteristics:

1. They are based on centuries-old traditions. They cannot emerge recently or be up-to-the-minute. They should be tested by time.
2. They facilitate the contacts with supreme values of a particular culture, people, country, or confession.
3. They facilitate the unification of people, countries, nations, of the entire human race and prevent disengagement, conflicts and discord. The unity is the most important property.
4. They help forward peace, concordance, solution to all contradictions and conflicts based on the principles of harmony, peace, mutual understanding and tolerance.
5. They disclose all that superb and moral in human being.

Based on the above examination of the importance of the spiritual values, it is clear that documents that serve as references for the advanced countries of the world should reflect the importance of the spiritual values because of the challenges brought about by these values to the modern civilization:

- Firstly, international organizations (UN, UNESCO, etc.) must award the priority to spiritual values as the basic principle of inter-state relations. This should be reflected in some related documents, or, possibly in the amendments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Secondly, it is necessary to call upon the states that support fundamentalism to start a dialogue with other confessions and to find areas of agreement, not disagreement.
- Thirdly, school curricula and other programs of education for the younger generation should have a clear emphasis on the priority of the spiritual values.

Education is the most important item in the above enumeration. In today's system of education, it is crucial to build curricula based on the reflection of the essence of spirituality as the way to achieve a supreme unity of the entire human race. Teaching the ethics of nonviolence is an essential part of the work, and this is one of the subjects of our examination in the next section of the paper.

### **3 Teaching the Ethics of Nonviolence**

We consider the spread of the ideas of nonviolence and tolerance amongst a large number of representatives of various cultures the high priority measures. The system of education is capable of facilitating this process, in particular, through the classes in ethics-related subjects. In educational environment, the ethics of nonviolence can make part of a general ethics' curricula or be taught as a selective subject. In addition, the ethical issues of nonviolence can be included in the so-called "humanitarian cycle",

consisted of several subjects such as literature, history, political science, and psychology, in relation with the main themes of war, revolution, liberation movement, or conflict.

At the same time, from our point of view, it is necessary to broaden the studies of the theme “ethics of nonviolence” to a full independent course. The ontological approach based on the ideas expressed by Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, Russian religious philosophers and by other representatives of the positive philosophical view of the world as well as the studies of the practical nonviolent historic experience should be at the core of the curriculum. The introduction of the subject “ethics of nonviolence” to the school curricula will surely facilitate the formation of the students’ own nonviolent view of the world as their personal existential experience. This is definitely in line with the current humanitarian educational strategy and pedagogical activities. The exigency to overcome violence is becoming a conscious act, the most important layer of one’s worldview, volition, the goodwill for nonviolent way of living and the primary condition for the moral integrity of a human being.

Let us provide here a small overview of some of the key items in the course’s curriculum. The course may start with the description of various approaches to define “violence”. However, the following definition seems to be the most appropriate one: violence is the oppression of a human being that takes various forms (direct and indirect) and manifestations (physical, economic, political, psychological, etc.). The limitation of the living conditions and possibilities for human development imposed by other people, social groups and institutions, for example, by the State, for a number of reasons is one of the manifestations of violence.

From a moral perspective, violence can be defined as the social attitude expressed by the individuals or a social group through the act of compulsion in order to subordinate people, limit their abilities, and challenge their properties with the use of internal or external force. Most importantly, in a narrow meaning of the notion, violence means “usurpation of the free will in its actual being” (Hegel). Following Leo Tolstoy, “to violate means to do something that someone, who is violated, does not want”.

Ceaselessly multiplying forms of violence, above all in the politics, is a sad feature of modern civilization. This cultural-civilizational antinomy of violence can be covered in the course of political science: students identify various cases of violence in

the past and in the present whereas teacher helps the students to classify and structure the phenomenal line of violence by explaining the features of a particular type of violence and emphasizing the moral aspect of violence. For example, violence can be understood as a form of commanding relations like the domination of the State over the individual will, attempts to deforce someone from making his or her own moral choice, assessment or individual moral responsibility. Violence can be considered one of the forms of commanding relations between the individuals as well. As Kant noted, power can be defined through the notion of strength whereas strength can be defined as the ability to overcome big obstacles. Following Kant, the same strength is called the power (Gewalt) if it is capable of overcoming the resistance of the other force (see Kant 1965, 268).

Next, let us turn to the moral aspect of violence since, historically speaking, the nonviolence principle is rooted in the stroma of early primitive moral. The taboo on killings within one's cognate tribe is the first major moral requirement. And "thou shalt not kill" is becoming one of the most important religious principles. Therefore, the ethics of nonviolence curricula should contain ample explanations concerned with the primary regulative function of the moral phenomenon. The basic meaning of moral regulation is the prescription of altruistic value of a deed because the final aim is to achieve the good as a result of the execution of the free will of a human being. In the context of ethics, violence is a conscious act, and, since it is a reasoned deed, it is regarded the absolute evil.

The exigency to legitimize and protect the right for violence is one of the peculiar characteristics of this type of violence. This is perfectly corresponding to the consummate guile of the evil that wishes to acquit itself. That is why it is impossible to understand and define violence without taking into account the moral motivation. Allow us to repeat once again that in the moral context violence is not all and any type of oppression, but the oppression of the will. In other words, we are referring here to the usurpation of the freedom of will of a human being, social group(s), society or societies.

Whereas the previous characteristic is an example of the intrusion upon the freedom of will, the deformation of one of the most important ontological human property leads to the distortion of the proper human nature, his wheels of life, and to the multiplication of sufferings because of the impossibility to act according to one's

conscience. For example, in the second part of *Arhipelag GULag* written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, there is a chapter entitled “The Tormented Will”. In this chapter, the Russian writer pictures the moral impoverishment of a huge mass of people with the suppressed will to moral self-identification. They are suppressed of conscience, dignity and responsibility as well.

From the examination of the ontological aspect of the ethics of nonviolence it is easy to switch our attention to the issue of the purpose of the being, which is closely related to the aspiration to comprehend the world from the perspective of harmony and coexistence of diversities. We are talking here precisely of “coexistence” in the direct meaning of this term, and not of disengagement, oppression or distraction. From this angle, the driving forces of the society can be considered positive. According to Mahatma Gandhi, who devoted his entire life to the nonviolence movement and cleaved to the nonviolence principle even under the threat to his physical integrity, if to agree with the presumption that animosity is the driving force, then it is also necessary to agree that the world has been already destroyed (Gandhi 1987). Therefore, the need to overcome violence is a conscious act, the most important condition of the moral integrity of a human being, his or her moral “self-state”. As Rabindranath Tagore argued, “[i]f you wish to force me to beat humans, you should first destroy my humanity by known methods that deaden my will, deafen my thoughts, automate my movements, and then... you will receive that abstraction, that baneful force, which has nothing to do with human truth, and, therefore, is easily transformable into a brute and mechanical one” (Tagore 1922, 30-31)

Nonviolence is a moral principle because morality per se is a nonviolent way to regulate human relations, a method of self-identification and of finding one’s behavior towards other people from the perspective of the good and the evil. This kind of behavior is not a destructive but a preserving one, which multiply the living richness whatever the latter might be. In other words, the ontological roots of morality fit well with the essential laws of the being. Gandhi defined the observance of a personal nonviolent behavior principle in the following way: “[f]or me, nonviolence is not simply a philosophical concept but the law and the essence of my life” (Gandhi 1987, 247). Hence, this great citizen of the world equates morality and the truth. As Gandhi further argues, “[m]y persuasion that moral principles is the foundation of everything

and that the truth is the essence of morals has deep roots in my mind. The truth is my only goal” (Ibid).

Basic ideas of the ethics of nonviolence can be explained in the 20th century history or literature classes because it is in the 20th century when the principles of nonviolent movement have been shaped. The most in-depth and advertent thinkers of the 20th century like Leo Tolstoy, Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King and others anticipated horrible socio-political catastrophes. These thinkers created the whole new doctrines, wrote pamphlets, and actively responded to the world wars. However, as noted by T. Grigorieva, “[t]he call of devotees did not turn the minds towards the freedom, although the seeds of doubts had been planted. Millions (and not only in Russia) believed to Tolstoy, but the world did not choose the path of nonviolence, and the Evil occurred. The Evil of unprecedented scale: two chilling, senseless right from the beginning, wars stroked the balance of ‘The Will to Power’ signifying the final stage of the downfall of a muddled mind that aspired for the global dominance by any means” (Grigorieva 1992, 8)

The posture of nonviolence is an absolute principle. Therefore, a successful examination of this principle requires the study of the issues of the absolute and the relative in the context of the ethics’ theory and practice. The dialectics of panhuman and specific-historic are also important. As concern the teaching of ethics, this approach matters not only as the issue of methodology but also as a tool to facilitate the formation of a practical culture of nonviolent behavior.

Let us first describe the issue of panhuman, or “common for all mankind”. In today’s world, “panhuman” is the phenomenon, which is just taking its clear shape. That is because in the real human history there is still nothing “panhuman” for there is no united human race. Yet, we constantly talk about moral absolutes presuming that they are shared by any “civilized” human being. Put it differently, we constantly talk about human race, as it is something integral and unified by history proper.

It is possible to agree with the contemporary philosopher Yu. Borodai, a scholar of the origins of morality in early anthropogeny, that “the departure point of history of ‘moral creatures’ is not the ‘human race at large’, but many super-biological enclosed blood-related societies struggling for survival, from cannibalism to the modern day’s economic and military-political oppression. It is extremely difficult to achieve the

transformation of the global socium of many micro- and macro- societies with diverse degree of social-ethical density (tribe, common, ethnos, nation, class, etc.) into a unified 'family'. This is the family, in which private and public become the whole, and in which the individuals acquire their freedom in the conditions of a true collectivity, through and because of the universal association. The tasks of the transformation lie not only outside the scope of anthropogeny but also outside history at large, since the implementation of these tasks in practice means a genetic jump no less important than the proper anthropogeny" (Borodai 1976, 99-100).

According to Borodai's hypothesis of anthropogeny, it is precisely the introduction of ethical requirements like taboos, talions, the Ten Commandments, etc. that signify the beginning of the formation of any ethnos, or ethnic group, and of any human culture. In other words, there are some common important stable "panhuman" components of the development, which are alike for many peoples. Moreover, morality is the expression of the public necessity for regulation. Despite of the differences between various moral forms, they all have a "common root". Hence, the relativism in ethics is unfruitful: "Moral relativism was invented by theorists, and it exists as an abstract and not as a real possibility. Actually, there is no one, even an out-and-out villain, who opposes "the golden rule", or "Categorical Imperative". Initial foundations of ethics are the same for all. This unity is not a metaphysical, but a factual one. There is only one panhuman morality; no alternative morality exists. Therefore, there is no need to give ground for the genesis of ethics"(Maksimov 1991, 11-12). Thus, it is obvious that the panhuman in morality can be considered the ideal form of the really existing historical phase of the ethics. Therefore, the panhuman exists not only as an abstraction, or as an idea, but also in the particular historical, national, ethnic form as well as in the individual, personal, or human format.

How to understand nonviolence as an absolute principle? First of all, nonviolence means the inadmissibility of any form or degree of violence because the ethical absolute presumes clarity of the principle. Then, in the quality of an absolute, the nonviolence principle must be a religious one. All world religions contain this principle in one way or another. In any religion, the world is organized reasonably and its creator is benign. As the enlightener G.I. Gurdzshiev noted, "God is not all-powerful, God is merciful". The world is moved forward by the creative and guarding love. There is no

atheistic form of nonviolence precisely because atheists have enough evidences in the real, earthbound, material life, i.e. in such life, in which violence is everlasting. Of course, from the atheistic point of view, it is wrong to commit violence and multiply sufferings, but if violence is effective in moving people and any historical moving is not free from violence, the latter is regarded as inevitable, really existing and irremovable feature. For an atheist, to fight violence is useless and thoughtless.

Another important notion of nonviolence ethics is that any violence breeds only new violence. We can easily find many confirmations of this notion in our real life. Fighting violence by violent means is useless and immoral: evil comes from evil. What should be done, then? There are several ways to answer this distressful and topical question. But only one leads to the absolute renouncement of violence, to the implementation of the nonviolent principle as a worldview and as a practical solution. However, it is extremely difficult to follow this way since, from the highs of the absolute nonviolence principle, many of our deeds seem to be full of violence, which could not be avoided. Yet, we would like to emphasize that the acceptance of nonviolence principle as a guiding one for a human being cannot but change the individual.

The issue of nonviolence is closely linked to the traditional and particularly relevant for today's world ethical theme of non-resistance to evil. In the course of the ethics of nonviolence, it is advisable to examine the issue of non-resistance in more detail. The polemics between Tolstoy, the ardent supporter of non-resistance to evil, and his "corrective opponents" Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ivan Ilyin, and Vladimir Solovyov can be an appropriate departure point of the discussion. In this paper, however, we would like to point out the principles of nonviolent behavior that can be used as practical recommendations for the students:

- a) renouncement of the monopoly on the ultimate truth; pursuit of dialogue and compromise;
- b) self-critique in order to identify and understand the one's deeds that may provoke and fuel animosity of others;
- c) evaluation of the conflict situation through the opponent's eyes in order to find such a solution that would allow to preserve the dignity by everyone involved;
- d) openness of one's behavior, absence of lying, hidden agenda, tactical cunning.

#### **4 Concluding Remarks**

Behind the above principles of nonviolent behavior, there is a major aim: a human being should not be treated as a mean, because violence is born as a result of such treatment. Au contraire, people should be regarded as the absolute value. Not mistakenly, this moral requirement is at the core of Kant's Categorical Imperative. Here, it is possible to talk about an important property of the moral attitude, namely, mercifulness. Mercifulness is different from love because the latter is selective whereas the former is independent from sympathies and preferences, i.e. applies to everyone. Another way to look at this human quality is to view mercifulness as a reflection of the fact that guiltiness and piteousness exist. This is our very important moral knowledge.

Mercifulness creates our ability for nonviolent relations and diminishes human sufferings in this world. Mercifulness is salvatory, because it gives the feeling of care, custody, and protection. As the state is the most important cultural-civilizational institution, it has a certain possibility to diminish the degree of legitimate judicial oppression and punishment based on the mercifulness principle. On the other hand, nonviolence should become a moral responsibility of each and every individual, or rather a component of the purpose of living and an existential task. Therein lay the strength of teaching the nonviolence ethics.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Borodai, Yu. (1976), *Erotica. Death. Taboo*, Moscow (in Russian)  
Gandhi, Mahatma (1987), «All men are brothers» in *Opening up India. Philosophical and ethical views in India in the 20th century*, Moscow (in Russian)  
Grigorieva T. (1992), *Dao and Logos. The Return*, Moscow: Nauka (in Russian)  
Kant, Immanuel (1965), «Critique of Judgment» in *Immanuel Kant. Works, in 6 vol.*, Moscow (in Russian)  
Maksimov, P.V. (1991), *The issue of the foundation of morality. Logical and cognitive aspects*, Moscow (in Russian)  
Tagore, Rabindranath (1922), *Nationalism*, Petrograd (in Russian)