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OBJECTIVE STUDY OF MORALITY AND CONTEMPORARY ETHICS

AUTHOR'S SUMMARY

of

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The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, notes, and literature; the total length is 258 pages. The list of cited sources contains 301 titles, of which 210 are in Cyrillic script (titles in Bulgarian and Russian) and 55 are in Latin script. There are 11 publications on the dissertation topic, of which **1 is a published monograph on the topic.**

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1. BRIEF SUMMARY

The dissertation presents a little-discussed topic: the specificity of objective studies on the sphere of morality, and their connection to contemporary ethics; as well as the influence of ethical analysis on the methods with which we study moral phenomena.

As an interdisciplinary scientific field, moral psychology draws strength from the theory, social research and instrumental resources of experimental psychology, which is not only enriching its methods but is also moving towards a new research object: moral judgment, moral reasoning, moral rules, moral conduct, moral feelings, etc. With regard to the topic under study, moral psychology is an exceptionally fertile field both for the application of objective methods

of research on morality and for giving an ethical perspective to the research approaches and results. The dissertation identifies the ethical risks and applies ethical principles, which are particularly salient in studies on children and youths.

The criteria for choosing the quantitative and qualitative approaches and for defining the competencies of moral psychology within the framework of the psychological are important preconditions for analyzing the contemporary trends in applied ethics. In limiting the researcher's expectations to the conditions that are necessary but not sufficient for moral development, these criteria guide academic training to the necessary preconditions of moral fulfillment.

In this sense, the analysis of trends in Bulgarian ethics is a successful basis for tracing the on-going processes in contemporary ethics, for identifying the trends and stages in applied ethics in terms of the application and development of objective approaches and methods, in close connection with the social context and the national social policies.

The interaction of ethics and social psychology is based on the organic connection of the phenomena that represent their natural object of study: morality and the social psyche. The study of morality in the context of the civilizational process directs the researcher to the sign-related characteristics of "ethical instances" and to interpreting external and internal regulation of the personality as a regulation-through-moral-signs. The populating of social and individual space with moral signs is the exceptional step that transforms the former into a cultural environment, and the latter, into an environment of personalities.

Moral autonomy has its individual and cultural history and is closely and inseparably connected with the heteronomy of socialization and sociality. Along with this genetic level, moral autonomy and heteronomy are connected in the regulative aspect. They function in a competitive environment, which is problematized in ethics (Z. Bauman) in terms of "the duality of moral life".

The central importance of the social psyche for moral autonomy and for the formation and functioning of ethical regulation proper, determines the sustained interest in objective studies of morality, which refer to the social-psychological layer of the formation and regulation of morality.

2. AN IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION

Throughout the presentation, we use the term “objective methods”. It refers to all empirical methods that study moral judgments, reasoning, rules, conduct, feelings, etc. These methods may be those of social psychology, psychology, sociology, but are most often a complex combination. They are not qualified as “empirical” in order not to give greater weight to the sociological methods; nor are they an “experiment”, as the social psychologist or psychologist would generally describe them – not only because some important details would be lost under this label (in social psychology, “experiment” has a narrow and a broad meaning, and besides, not every social study is an experiment), but also because here we uphold the position of ethics, which is defended in the course of the presentation.

Studies that take as their object the world of morality and are conducted using objective means, are designated in this dissertation as objective studies of morality.

The preference for the designation “objective study”, “objective methods”, “objective approach”, has been influenced by Prof. Mincho Draganov and his desire to overcome the conflict between the concepts “experiment” and “ethical”.

3. INTRODUCTION

Topical relevance and significance of the problem under study

Moral psychology is **an exceptionally productive interdisciplinary field**. The first studies were published in 1928 and 1932 (Hartshorne, May, 1928; 1929; Piaget, 1932), and these topics were further developed in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. We are, if not followers, at least witnesses. In the stream of publications testing the results of Jean Piaget, there appeared early on in the 1950s the name of Lawrence Kohlberg, who a little later, in the second half of the century (his main works were published in the 1960s), would be a very stimulating thinker associated with revolutionary expectations for the “decoding” of the “enigma of morality”. Likewise in the 1960s and 1970s, social psychology adopted moral behavior as one of its objects of study. In the second half of the century, original research was also produced by a constellation of Soviet psychologists who defended their views on the psychological basis of moral conduct. Relatively more recent were the studies on basic emotions, on emotional strategies and rationality, on moral feelings and their ambivalence: these became a topic of research interest after 2000.

We have witnessed the expansion of the problem field, the establishment of new methods, the defense of theoretical models, and the separation of a common research territory. J. Piaget and L. Kohlberg did not simply coexist with A. Buss, A. Bandura, S. Milgram, W. Mischel, J. Aronfried and M. Hoffman, or with L. I. Bozhovich, T. E. Konnikova, E. V. Subotski, with Freud and his followers, with P. Grinspa, C. Izard, P. Griffiths, R. Solomon, etc. All of them built a united research space, **which defines itself as “moral psychology”**.

The main focus of attention of scholars is on separate theories, their premises and sources, the methods used in them, the research conducted, its results and interpretations. In contemporary discourse, **the connection between objective study of morality and the modern trends in ethics remains insufficiently researched**.

How and why has a philosophical discipline such as ethics become linked to scientific cognition and objective study? What is the value of objective study for contemporary ethics? What are the boundaries of its cognitive value? What is the mode of use of objective knowledge in contemporary ethics?

These questions direct attention to a little-discussed topic: the specificity of objective methods applied to the study of morality, and their connection with contemporary ethical research; as well as the influence of ethical analysis on the methods applied to the study of moral phenomena.

The topical relevance of the theme is connected with contemporary trends in ethics. The attention of objective scientific research to the topic of morality has a history and sources of its own – theory, method and practice. However, the history can be viewed and told from the perspective of ethics, i.e., how and why ethics acknowledges the objective methods of study as its own. One of the strands of this storyline follows the development of applied ethics, which is a very prominent area in the field of ethics today.

The differentiation of scientific cognition and the inevitable entry of new technologies and scientific achievements into practice, lead to increased specialization of activities, to the rise of social and ethical risk, and hence, to the development of professional and applied ethics. The consequences for morality are significant, especially with regard to its monotony of values, the status of the “moral subject” and the distance between ethics and social practice.

If we may believe Z. Bauman, what we have today is a “life in fragments” (Bauman, 2000; 2001). Moral space is made partial, which is very important for the topic under study. At least because, in addition to ethical topics like moral duty, moral principles, moral categories (which foster universalist trends in ethics), now becoming visible in the field of ethics are moral topology, the moral situation, etc. They presuppose studying morality in specific (temporal,

spatial, etc.) dimensions that escape the ethical approach, **but are achievable by means of objective scientific study.**

In place of the authority of ethical prescriptions, there comes moral uncertainty, ethical confusion. In place of the ethical competence of specialists in ethics (philosophers, educators, preachers), whose authority is both legislative and judgmental, there comes the recognition of the “ethical competence” of ordinary people in the primary circumstances in which they make their moral choice – because “that’s what people do.” In the place of “universal correct conduct”, the duty of ethical universality, there come “the loneliness of the moral subject” and “the unbearable silence of responsibility” (Bauman, 2001). Morality becomes individualized. This implies that the individual, with his/her moral qualities, moral choices, moral decisions, moral reasoning, moral feelings, etc., is a basic object of study; thus, the **focus of ethical analysis changes.** The individualization of the object of research requires **applying objective scientific instruments.**

With the development of applied and practical ethical knowledge, ethics moves towards social practice. On the one hand, the **complexity** of ethical study is enhanced. On the other hand, **the distance between ethics and social practice is reduced.** From being a practical philosophy, ethics is *transformed into social policy, which makes it an inseparable element of the dynamics of social life* (Gasper, 2006; Bayertz, 2002; Goulet, 1976, etc.).

Although not sufficiently treated on a theoretical level, **objective studies of morality have a very real impact on contemporary applied ethics and development ethics.** Already *academic applied ethics*, which strongly leans on Kohlberg’s early research, introduced “business ethics games” as a means of moral education for “decision-makers”. Later on, references to Kohlberg’s theory of stages of moral development became customary in business ethics, environmental ethics, etc. Global innovative tendencies, (particularly the development of biomedical technologies) open new perspectives for academic education in ethics and require

the correct formulation of educational goals in the spirit of necessary but not sufficient conditions – a salient topic in Kohlberg’s philosophical and ethical studies. Moreover, the grounds for choosing modern means of ethical education refer to moral psychology. Modern educational practice refers to the concept of moral sustainability, moral development, moral maturity, moral character, social control, autonomy, etc., and to the information on them accumulated in the framework of various research paradigms.

For their part, the ethical principles define the limiting framework of objective studies focused of morality (as their topic) and on children and youths (as the object) of research. For this purpose, it is necessary to rethink the research procedure in the perspective of ethical principles and ethical risk (Milgram, Buss, Bandura, etc.) Ethical analysis impacts on the development of the field of objective studies and on the enlargement of resources for their realization.

Research problem

The main research problem is related to the question whether objective studies of morality have a place and future in contemporary ethics studies.

Object of the study

The objective studies of morality are analyzed in terms of: competencies and specificity of the applied methods and approaches, their ethical framework, their importance for contemporary ethics studies, and their place in Bulgarian ethics.

Basic hypothesis

Moral autonomy and moral heteronomy are mutually complementary in the genetic, regulative, and personality aspect, which determines the mutual connection between morality and the social psyche, as well as the importance, for ethics, of objective studies of morality, and its typical methods.

Basic goal

To demonstrate that objective studies of morality, albeit not typical for ethics, are valuable to, and play a role in, the development of ethics, especially applied ethics and development ethics, as well as educational policies and social practices related to them.

Research tasks

To demonstrate the specificity of objective studies of morality in outlining the framework of their competencies. To present the specificity of the approaches and methods through which moral phenomena are studied.

To outline the ethical framework of objective studies of morality and the methods they use.

To show the influence of objective studies of morality upon the Bulgarian ethical tradition.

To show the influence of objective studies of morality upon applied ethics, their connection with development ethics and with contemporary social practices.

Research methods and approaches

The study is **interdisciplinary**. Along with classical ethical analysis, we have also used approaches and methods typical for psychology, social psychology and sociology. In view of the set goals and tasks, secondary analysis is conducted with regard to a large range of studies. The research involves analysis of the methods with which moral psychology studies moral judgments and moral reasoning, personal morality and moral feelings. Although the objective methods and procedures used in the study of morality are not presented exhaustively, the aim has been to give an adequate picture of the means by which moral psychology studies its object.

Limitations of the study

The study does not set itself the task to present, systematize and analyze the basic theories, currents, studies and the leading authors in the field of moral psychology. The task is limited to

one aspect: objective studies on moral psychology and their place in contemporary ethics studies.

The study also lays no claim to being comprehensive with regard to the research procedures, accomplished researches, and their variations, or the methods used. The author is focused on the main goal and research tasks.

Information sources

The study is based on a comprehensive knowledge of the sources related to moral psychology, its main currents, theories, authors, their interpretation in literature, the research that repeats, verifies, discusses, complements and corrects the main results, conclusions and hypotheses in this interdisciplinary area, as well as the literature on which they are based (psychology, social psychology, psychology of personality, age psychology, psychology of development, ethics, pedagogy, etc.). The author has written three monographs and numerous publications in this field. The study also leans on sources related to the modern trends in applied ethics and development ethic. It implies a good knowledge of Bulgarian ethics and its trends, which enables the author to trace the basic research goals and tasks.

This mass of information sources forms the information base of the study. The literature refers only to the cited sources.

4. CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION

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5. SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

In the introduction of the dissertation, the author discusses the topical relevance of the problem under study, formulates the research problem, the object of the study, the basic hypothesis, the main goal, the research tasks, the research methods and approaches, the limitations of the study, and the sources of information.

The first chapter, *Objective studies and moral psychology*, shows how the application of the new research approach to the study of morality leads to the formation and growth of a new interdisciplinary field – namely, moral psychology, which has sources of its own but is strongly motivated by social expectations and demands. Throughout history, morality and mores have been a topic of special public interest. They have been the object of attack, reproach and concern, but also of important social projects. It seems that in social consciousness there hovers the dream of a universal ethical prescription, and of possessing guarantees for the ethical predictability of the moral subject. These expectations are not fulfilled and this failure is seen

as ethical weakness. Could it be that the key to morality and mores can be found outside the domain of ethics?

Thus, it is not at all accidental that moral psychology has emerged, and defines itself, as psychology, i.e., the initial impulse for its development should not be sought in the field of ethical reasoning of morality. Of course, ethical analysis does have a part in moral psychology, but this happens at later stages, when the need arises to interpret the obtained results and to systematize the research process. And since the object and methods of study have undergone turnabouts, the ethical aspect of analysis has its dynamics. A good example in this respect is structuralism; encouraged by its initial successes, this trend was driven to achieve (although at a formal-psychological level) a solution that would reveal the common regularities of the cognitive, the social and the affective functioning of the integral Man, and also to decode the secret of moral development. It seeks a universal explanation that will be concretized in the formula of reversibility of operational structures. Formal-psychological analysis, however, clashes with ethical analysis and redirects research to social psychology, bringing about social experimentation, with its potential to analyze social reality and moral conduct. The revival of the topic, but now on the basis of social psychology, once again ends in ethical provocations that are problematized in terms of moral autonomy, social control and determinism.

Every ethical interpretation of the results of objective studies of morality is connected with an expansion of the object of study; thus, it stimulates experimenting with new methods. The chapter presents the variety of methods used in the study of morality. These include the clinical conversation method, focused interview, participant observation, survey, case study, social quasi-experiment (field and laboratory), statistical methods, psychological games and other game methods. They have been demonstrated in the best-known, most effective, or most scandalous objective studies conducted by scientists with various theoretical views. Such are: Jean Piaget's Game of Marbles and Story-telling, Kohlberg's Moral Dilemmas, the Just

Community Approach, typical for structural cognitivism; Cutting in Line (the line experiment), the Subway Experiment, the Forbidden Toy, Postponed Support, the Bobo Doll, the Aggression Machine, the Prison Experiment, for social cognitivism; and Alone in the Room, War Game, the Golden Key, for the activity theory approach. The development of methods is associated with the four basic approaches that define this scientific field: the structural-cognitive, social-cognitive, activity, and psychodynamic approach. They are defined according to three criteria: 1) a common basis of ideas; 2) common methodology; 3) a common conceptual basis.

Our study outlines the frame of competence of moral psychology. Objective studies of morality are shown to be essentially psychological; the conclusions have the value of a psychological expert assessment on the characteristics and development of the moral phenomena under study. It is pointed out that the ethical problems of society cannot be solved by social-psychological means. Together with this, the sustained interest in moral psychology refers to the nature of morality and of the social psyche, and their interaction as essential to their existence.

Against the backdrop of the best-known objective studies of morality, the balance is traced between quantitative and qualitative approaches to the choice of means; the correlation between the two is determined by the research tasks and the theoretical scheme of interpretation in which they are formulated; by the degree of the researcher's control over the research process; by the degree of research, social, and ethical risk involved in the procedures. The methods used in moral psychology are analyzed as to content and form.

Chapter Two, *Objective studies of morality: ethical frameworks*, touches four important topics, through which are analyzed the separate methods and techniques of objective study and formation of morality in the perspective of the ethical framework, specificity, goals and tasks of the study.

The first topic is entitled “Ethical regulation of objective studies of morality in children”. It is demonstrated that there are emphatic ethical requirements involved in the objective study of morality due to the specific object and the high risk of damaging the moral self-assessment, moral dignity, and moral value of the persons under study. This raises very high expectations regarding the ethical competence of researchers, their professional and moral stance. It is shown that every empirical study of morality – whether it be sociological, social-psychological, or mixed – is guided by strict scientific rules and requirements, goals and priorities, and not by commercial interest or personal motives.

Special attention is devoted to the precautionary principle in studying morality. The so-called substitution procedures are analyzed, i.e., assumed consent, preliminary general consent, monitoring, disclosing the truth, as well as their specificities in the case when recipients are children. It is pointed out that high-risk studies contribute to understanding the ethical risks and to normalizing the research procedures. In the perspective of the ethical principle of precaution, there are heightened requirements regarding objective studies of children and youths. The techniques used are made more precise, the procedures are enriched and complemented with legal mechanisms.

Analysis of focused interviews (derived from the clinical conversation method) is used to demonstrate the negative effect for the person under study, and the complementary compensatory techniques these effects require, as well the effects that stimulate the individual’s moral reasoning and moral conduct.

The positive results that appear along with the negative effects of the study of moral judgments in children raise questions regarding the positive range of the ethical principle of precaution. In addition to command not to cause harm, the duty to prevent evil and to remove evil, this principle has positive demands related to sustainable beneficence (“enhancing the good”) (Hristova, 2014, 70 – 75).

Since the objective methods of study of morality have, or may have, a stimulating effect, questions inevitably arise regarding the use of the most effective of these methods as a means of ethical formation. In a next step, in the course of applying research techniques and enhancing their formative potential, questions are asked regarding necessity and sufficiency. This tendency is illustrated with the methods developed and used by Kohlberg.

The positive dimensions of the precautionary principle does not exempt the researcher from the need to restrict the research procedure within ethical limitations. On the contrary, the negative, restricting regulators of research extend to the obligation “to do good” and “to multiply the power of good”. Doing good is also an act of precaution; research is performed in taking into account the possible damages, and not “at all costs”. Beneficence has an ethical framework. Just as when evil is prevented or removed, the positive command is to do good and multiply its power, so too must beneficence be performed with an eye towards the risk of doing damage. The positive and negative prescriptions of the precautionary principle are interconnected. They set the prohibitive and permissive mode of functioning of the principle, the dark and bright sides of an integral ethical regulation, through the establishment of ethical norms for the research process.

The precautionary principle is linked to the categories of necessity and sufficiency. When the pedagogical goals that are identified in the course of research are seen as a guarantee for moral development, in the sense of a “sufficient” precondition, then the risks of negligent communication between the researcher and the person under study increase. When moral development is interpreted as a necessary-and-sufficient-condition for moral realization, then excessive expectations from the pedagogical process lead to damages for the person under study, who is also the target of pedagogical influence (the damages may be emotional, value-related, etc.). A very important consideration is that there is a risk of ethical grading of the

person under study based on ethical comparison of the expected and achieved results. Thus, the damages may be moral as well, or may have a moral meaning.

The second concrete topic discussed in the chapter is related to the influence of objective studies of morality upon the modern practice of using moral dilemmas as a research and pedagogical instrument. The task is separately specified in the field of bioethics, medical ethics, and development ethics. Through comparative analysis of Kohlberg's moral dilemmas and ethical case studies, the author traces goal setting in contemporary applied and practical ethics. The connection between ethical cases and Kohlberg's dilemmas serves here as a fruitful basis for analysis of the transformation of the objective methods from methods of research and regulation, into methods of ethical training – a shift that is exceptionally important in the perspective of modern development ethics.

The analysis on the third topic, "*The game of marbles: equal treatment as a condition of moral development*", proceeds from a focused interview in Jean Piaget's book (what he calls a "clinical conversation") and establishes a connection with the dynamics of the contemporary social environment in which Bulgarian children are growing up. The objective study of how children play with rules points our attention to the distorted social space in which our children live, and to the objective risks arising to the formation of social relations of equality and dialogue, which during certain age periods are decisive for the moral and personal formation of the individual.

The connection between social relations and moral development is discussed in the fourth topic through Kohlberg's "*just community approach*"; here the relation to the pedagogical environment and educational policies in Bulgarian schools is also discussed.

Chapter Three, *Bulgarian ethics and objective studies of morality*, is divided into five parts. In them, it is made evident that the importance of the objective study of morality is not limited to moral psychology as an interdisciplinary field of science. Objective methods have

successfully moved on from being a means for the study of moral phenomena (moral judgment, rules and reasoning; moral conduct; moral motivation; moral feelings and their origin) to being used in training in ethics and in modern academic education in connection with the demand for ethical competencies and expertise generated by the ethical risks arising in our time – a demand that is also associated with innovations and technological development. This transformation of methods from a means of research into a means of training is traced through concrete developments in Bulgarian ethics from the second half of the 20th century until now. In two consecutive topics – “*On how Bulgarian ethics allowed objective studies into its home*” and “*Objective studies of morality in our country after 1999*”, the author retraces how Marxist ethics, through sociology of morality and applied ethics, adopted objective methods to study morality. It is shown how, after the year 2000, two lines of objective studies of morality were established: those applied in sociology, social psychology and psychology, but adapted to the needs of ethics due to their strong ethical messages; and those applied by ethicists in ethical analysis. The third topic is entitled “*Applied ethics and objective studies of morality*”. The pace of development of Bulgarian science, and specifically of Bulgarian applied ethics, along with the features related to our lag behind world science, provide an exceptional opportunity, through comparative analysis, to explain the processes at the stage of their emergence, and to trace the basic trends. Information on ethical practicum drawn from the recent history of Bulgarian ethics reveals the characteristics of the academic stage of development of applied ethics and ethical expert activities. This information also helps explain some current trends and risks in the development of applied ethical research. In the following two parts, “*Applied ethics: contemporary challenges to academic education*” and “*Ethical debate and the culture of growth*”, the author touches on two “soft” means of influencing social growth. Special attention is devoted to the impact of practical ethics on ethical education. On the one hand, it is assumed that changes must be made in ethical education as part of the university training program –

changes that follow from the logic of the cognitive process but are also dictated by the needs of practice. Developing a culture of interdisciplinary research, the introduction of the situational approach, solving dilemmas and cases, sensitivity to the processual nature and the dialectics of the problems under study, enlargement of the variety of research tools, etc., are part of university training, and as such they help students attain a professional level of training that corresponds to the innovative processes and needs of society. On the other hand, practical ethics dictates the need to build a system of specialized knowledge that develops the professional's ethical education in the direction determined by social practice. Serious progress has been made in our country with regard to training in bioethics and business ethics. This training improves the ethical culture of future professionals as well as that of highly specialized people working in areas involving high social and ethical risk, who are daily obliged to make expert decisions and important choices.

The directions in which Bulgarian applied ethics is developing its new potential are indicative of the very important role this modern branch of science plays in building a new cultural environment in which the progressive development of society at the global and local level is thinkable and successful. Contemporary applied ethics, with its specific ethical goals and means, must be viewed as an inseparable part of this new global culture of growth.

In this case, progress of Bulgarian society would be unthinkable without the participation of modern applied ethics. Together with this, the risks arising with the growth of modern Bulgarian society are a challenge to Bulgarian ethics. Today, applied ethics, with its specific ethical goals and means, is an inseparable part of the new global culture of growth. Ethical debate is one of the successful instruments contributing to the social status of applied ethics and its political role for social progress.

The last, **Fourth Chapter**, is devoted to *the connection between morality and the social psyche*. It is shown that it is not enough to relate the emergence and development of moral

psychology to the “horizontal” interaction between ethics and psychology. The sustained interest in studies of morality using objective methods is interpreted in terms of the organic connection between the phenomena that are the object of study of ethics and those of social psychology, i.e., morality and the social psyche respectively.

The study of morality in the context of the civilization process points attention to the semiotic nature of “ethical instances” and the interpretation of regulation external and internal to the personality, in terms of a regulation-through-moral-signs. The populating of social space and the space of the individual, with moral signs represents that exceptional step that transforms the former into a cultural environment and the latter into an environment of personalities.

It is shown how the social psyche, which is a domain with an impressive history and accumulations, in developing its specific social-psychological forms and mechanisms, activates morality and transforms it into a regulator of conduct. A process of transformation of the social-psychological potential into an ethical one takes place; this transformation is analyzed through the dynamics of stimuli, situation, models and patterns.

Social anxieties give rise to moral psychology, which emerges in the search for moral sustainability. In objective studies of morality, the predictability of the moral subject is interpreted through the concepts of *sustainability*, *moral character*, *moral maturity*, and *harmonious personality*. Through analysis of objective studies related to the concepts listed above, the author shows that **no certain proof has been found that there are sustainable accretions in development and coordination, that can guarantee moral autonomy.**

The conclusion is in the spirit of the modern ethical view of the *moral subject as an “open project”*. Every moral choice brings us back to the start of the road. Similarly to the “identification, never ending and always completed and incomplete, open to the future of the activity in which all of us are, out of necessity or consciously, involved” (Bauman, 2001, p. 192), the moral subject hesitates again and again, chooses, decides and maintains his choice.

The responsibility inherent to moral autonomy is also subject to continuous validation: “responsibility never completed, never exhausted, never past. We expect the Other to exercise his right to command, a right that no already given and fulfilled commands can ever revoke” (ibid, p. 125). This incompleteness is shown to have personal manifestations in continuous rambling, hesitation and doubt about the correctness of one’s choice (ibid, p. 114). Viewing the moral subject as an “open project” *corresponds to objective studies of morality*, which show the moral subject as a carrier of the “*potential for moral realization*”. The author recalls again that objective studies, in using a wide range of research means, do not discover reliable signs of sufficiency. Studies on moral reasoning and moral conduct have not found such signs in the cognitive, social and personal layers of moral formation.

The discussion briefly revisits Piaget’s “two moralities”, and addresses the question whether this formulation is metaphorical. In his very early studies on moral judgment in children, Piaget registers the joint presence of two types of regulation: external, proper to the social psyche, and which may be described as an attitude of unilateral respect and personal heteronomy, and internal, moral regulation proper, in which are maintained the autonomy of the moral subject and relations of mutual respect, which are formalized into reversible operational structures. These two types of regulations are in a **competitive relation**.

With regard to the main topic, it is emphasized that autonomy lies at the core of morality, but heteronomy also has a place in moral life. Moral autonomy has its individual and cultural history and is closely and inseparably connected with the heteronomy of socialization and sociality. Along with this genetic level, moral autonomy and heteronomy are connected in regulative terms. They function in a competitive environment, which is problematized in ethics (Z. Bauman) in terms of “the duality of moral life”.

The social psyche is of central importance for moral autonomy. Without it, the formation and functioning of ethical regulation as such would be impossible. This

determines the sustained interest in the social-psychological parameters of moral reasoning, conduct, consciousness, feelings, etc. , as well as the interest in objective studies of morality, which correspond to the social-psychological layer in the formation and regulation of morality.

Conclusion

Moral psychology is an interdisciplinary field which studies the moral consciousness, conduct and attitude of the individual. The empirical study of morality is something customary for moral psychology. Its scientific field is defined by an **object of study, methods and scientific history of its own.** It emerged when an ethical task was clearly formulated in experimental psychology. Its emergence and intense development are based on **its theoretical premises, the development of methods and social interests.** This led to the accumulation of an **enormous amount of varied and significant** studies of morality, conducted by means of **many different methods and on the basis of different theoretical premises.** These studies not only imply but also **demand an ethical interpretation.**

Society is the basic consumer of this knowledge. It formulates its questions and **expectations for “predictability of the moral subject”** and seeks guarantees for this predictability. At the same time, moral psychology, using the means specific to it, and **which are here defined as “objective”**, reaches conclusions that do not show these expectations to be justified. But the community is inclined to turn its back on inconvenient results and ignore them, seeking newer and newer proofs that its judgment is correct. Social demand motivates the researcher to expand the object of study by using new, never before applied, methods of study of moral reasoning, and later, moral conduct, character, feelings, etc. As a result of this, moral psychology is enriched with new approaches (the structural-cognitive, social-cognitive, activity, and psycho-dynamic approach, defined according to three criteria: 1) a common basis

of ideas; 2) common methodology; 3) a common conceptual basis. These criteria determine the structure of the scientific area in question and lead to new research and new results.

The problem of the competencies of moral psychology becomes inescapable, because contemporary analyses (in business ethics, ecology, medical ethics, etc.) **allow ethical grading of individuals**, according to the degree of development of their ability for moral reasoning, with an **inappropriate reference to the same objective studies**, or else **set educational goals** that have been proven **inadequate** by moral psychology.

It is established and argued that **objective studies of morality are of a complex nature; the competencies of moral psychology are psychological; the conclusions have the quality of a psychological expert assessment of the characteristics and development of the moral phenomena under study.**

It is demonstrated that the competencies of moral psychology and of its objective methods remain within the framework of psychological expert assessment; here, the author has identified the ethical risks arising from the endeavor to cross these boundaries and enter into the territory of ethical assessment.

The study of morality by means of objective methods has some specific features, determined by the object and topic of study; this specificity should be clearly described.

On the one hand, the **methods** used have some unique dimensions stemming from the object and topic of study. They may be defined and analyzed **in the perspective of an empirical social study**, and this has been done in the analysis. The clinical conversation method, according to the specification of social study, may properly be defined as the focused interview method. Jean Piaget's analysis of the game of marbles demonstrated the virtues of participant observation even before this method was problematized in sociological literature. The method called "experiment" in the terminology of empirical social studies, is inapplicable here, in the

domain of morality. But while a true experiment is impossible, it is possible to conduct a research procedure with incomplete, partial control. It is shown that the success and adequacy of a quasi-experiment depends on the formulation of the problem and the choice of adequate research strategies. .

From an **ethical** viewpoint, the study discusses the risk arising in the study of morality of vulnerable social groups. Also, the question is asked whether there is such a thing as a harmless procedure. The **ethical principle of precaution** is analyzed; this principle sets **high requirements** with regard to the study of morality, especially when it concerns the morality of **children and adolescents**. The study presents an analysis of the situation of **ethical and social risk** arising in the use of research procedures for the study of morality; this situation is presented concretely for the case of respondents who are children or youths. The study analyzes the **positive and negative commands of the principle of precaution**. Just as when evil is prevented or removed, the positive command in effect is to do good and multiply the power of good, so too, beneficence must be performed with an eye towards the risk of causing damage. The author demonstrates that the two are interconnected and seeks to relate the problem to the formulation of educational goals and tasks.

Moral autonomy situates morality as coming before sociality. But there are no, and cannot be any, guarantees for moral choice. Every autonomy is a **potential** autonomy. Every moral choice **takes us back** to the start of the road. But this is not the road “through nowhere”. It has been paved **by sociality** – a sociality that makes us free to choose the road and follow it. **In a genetic and culture perspective, sociality does not precede morality; it always remains with us.** It remains with us so that we may “stand up for ourselves”. It remains with us, so that there may be a choice. So that there may be conscience, duty, responsibility. Our choice is

always a struggle between “the voice within us” and “the voices around us”, the voices that try to set us on some road or other, to make us this or that kind of person. Competition, clash, is part of our standing up for ourselves, part of morality.

The fact that moral autonomy is not guaranteed does not mean **heteronomy is always stalking the personality**. Heteronomy is prepared to fill in every hesitation and every space that is free of autonomy. Particularly **vulnerable risk groups are children and adolescents**, in whom morality is in the process of becoming, and among whom the social psyche, with its forms (stimulus, model, pattern, role, etc.) and mechanisms (suggestion, contagion, manipulation, etc.) is a channel of morality. Also highly vulnerable is **the person in a situation of risk**.

The first of these risk groups points our attention to the problems of **moral development and formation**, while the second focuses our interest on social and ethical risks, which are the object of **applied ethics and its branches** (bioethics, medical ethics, computer ethics, business ethics, etc.).

Moral psychology uses a **wide range of objective techniques** to study moral reasoning, moral cognition, the moral situation, the external and internal factors and their interaction, the “ethical instances of the personality”, “moral feelings”, the subconscious layers, etc. It persistently seeks guarantees for **moral sustainability** (in terms of integrity and developed morality), in order to define the goals of moral formation and moral upbringing. Such guarantees are **not found** through formal-structural analysis, the logic of stimulus and response, the resources of activity analysis, or the psychodynamic research paradigm. Moral sustainability remains unattainable, when conceptualized in terms of predictability of the moral subject, and, in moral psychology, when conceptualized as the “sixth stage of development of moral judgment”, “moral character”, “moral maturity”, “all-round development of the