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ZYGMUNT PUCKO

A PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE AFGHAN (PASHTUN) CODE OF HONOUR

Ethos expresses the hierarchy of values and model of behaviour of a given community. Often ethos was expressed in the form of codes setting out the ideal of moral principles. From them developed the theoretical discipline called ethics which attempts to establish according to which criteria something ought to be or not be done. Although codes of moral behaviour can be found in many cultures, not many of them reached the degree of moral consciousness that for example the Pashtun code achieved*.

Long before the relatively late attempts to write down the Pashtun Code of Honour, its principles were being strictly observed by the Pashtuns and passed on through oral tradition to new generations. The value of this particular code for philosophical ethics is based on the fact that the moral duties set out in it, in no way belittle the universal truths; on the contrary, they emphasise their significance. The ideal of moral behaviour is not attained by means of commands, interdictions or injunctions, but rather through the realisation of moral duty, which, among the Pashtun community has a very concrete meaning. Moral duty permeates many aspects of life including language among others. Language often expresses the manner of being of a Pashtun. The meaning and deep symbolism of many objects such as for example *tura* (sword), or *tizha* (stone), is inherent in their language. Language not only fulfils the function of expressing duty or its reflex, but also objectivises numerous individual moral experiences, expressed in the form of qualifying clauses containing the predicative expression *should*. Obligational clauses are vested in a specific character which resolves itself into the single expression of a certain duty. Over and above this, obligatory clauses refer only to rational beings, obliging them to undertake a given action. Keeping the above in mind, the moral duty in the Pashtun Code of Honour becomes fact. Therefore, the empirical orientation of the ethical model contained in the Code should reach the very source, or the cradle of all ethical dilemmas, namely to the moral consciousness of a Pashtun which can be isolated into several states. The essence of these states differs greatly from the other convictions held by a Pashtun as they communicate to him what action should or should not be taken. For example: a Pashtun should avoid those matters and things which bring discredit to personal dignity; a Pashtun should fulfil his moral dues; a Pashtun should not resort to intrigue or lies etc.

Duty is a summons to action in which a Pashtun ought to be involved, express himself, confirm himself... to take up or refuse the summons, to declare oneself *pro* or *anti* the summons. This, to a Pashtun, is as important as being or not being a Pashtun.

The first and foremost characteristic of duty is its all encompassing involvement of a Pashtun in "the game", involving the whole of his vital structure. The second characteristic accompanying the former is the "absoluteness" of duty which appears most often in situation of conflict. In such instances, duty tolerates nothing which might constitute a rival. The next characteristic of duty is its specific *imperativeness*, very much emphasised in the Code by the almost extreme deeds to preserve and confirm *Pashtunness*. It is always a matter of being or not being a Pashtun. The moral duty of an action as well as the essence of the action are presented to the Pashtun in the form of *absolute imperative*, as a task to be undertaken, not as a conditional acknowledgement. At such times the Pashtun is not asked for an opinion, but is faced with an absolute summons to take up a clearly defined action. Under the pressure of absolute duty to undertake a particular action, the Pashtun can not not take up a defined stand. He must declare himself for or against. He has no other option, as to refrain from an answer to the summons is also a choice and the declaration of a position. The decision to take no action is an action in itself. An Action must be undertaken, which means that a choice must be made.

For this reason, only in this sense can it be said that it is a situation without alternatives. The only possible alternative would be the alternative to deny one's duty. The act itself can be seen not only as an affirmation of duty, but also as the possibility of opposing oneself to moral duty. However the absoluteness of duty does not force the Pashtun to an action at the same time giving him no internal freedom. If the Pashtun declares himself *pro*, it is his choice, his free decision; if he declares himself *anti*, it is also his choice. The *alternative of right* as well as the *alternative of wrong* is an alternative of freedom. Each action which is forced upon an individual would be neither a good or bad action; more, it would not be an action at all. Just as a Pashtun does not exist outside of his deeds, so does he not exist outside of right and wrong. On the contrary, to be a human being, and also a Pashtun, is to act and choose within the boundaries of good and evil. It is entirely up to him which of these he chooses, whether it be to take up the summons of absolute duty or to act contrary to it.

In such a situation it is difficult not to ask: Why should a Pashtun? Why can he not divest himself of the burden duty casts upon him? Experience tells him he should. Does experience however also clearly say why the Pashtun should? Experience communicates on the one hand the absoluteness of duty, and at the same time on the other about the possibility of the relative ease with which it can be circumnavigated. Experience also speaks of the law which demands unconditional fulfilment of itself, sometimes even calling for the need to resign from one's life. It also sets out that this law can be surpassed. Absoluteness and a categorical nature go hand in hand with the possibility of

sidestepping them. So, if as the Code states, the Pashtun is free and knows how to guard his freedom, why then can he not do anything he wishes, including doing away with old and laying down new laws? If however he exists *according to the law* set out in the Code, why not in total compliance with it without any margin for freedom? Thus certain truths of moral experience have not yet been translated into logical truths.

These reflections allow us to understand the character of absolute moral duty in the Pashtun Code of Honour, which has in its nature an existential-dynamic structure, characteristic for its concreteness. Thanks to this concreteness, the absolute summons to action is always concrete and empirical, just as its essence or cognitive act. The something or someone towards whom a Pashtun directs a particular action is also concrete. This concreteness is perhaps evidence of the fact that it is the original moral situation, only presented in this concrete context. The moral *should* in the Code is expressed as *should categorically take this action here and now*. Moral experience places the Pashtun face to face with a categorical summons to perform a given action. Often the summons calls for self sacrifice, sometimes to the point of denying certain fundamental values, even demanding the resignation from life.

In the face of a concrete original situation and the obviousness of fact of a moral experience, the intellect asks: If the Pashtun does not have to, why then can he not do everything he wishes? Why should he do anything? Why should he do anything rather than nothing? Why should he rather have to than not have to? The Pashtun should this, should not that. For example: Every Pashtun should, according to the Code keep his word and unconditionally keep all given promises. What is this dependent on? What marks the boundary, why does it lie in this place and not in another, and from what is it dependent? Must it be this and no other way? Why? By asking these questions the idea is to find a philosophical explanation of not only moral duty, but also an attempt to define its origin. The simple explanation of this fact would constitute its irrevocable validation and justification and would demonstrate the decisive criteria of right and wrong, in other words, how and why the actions of a Pashtun are decisively good or bad. The solution to these problems would be the answer to the question: Why do these facts exist? Such matters give rise to the fundamental question of the authority governing moral law in general, as well as the Pashtun's Code of Honour.

In order to find an answer, an appropriate philosophical theory, which incorporates the existential concrete facts as characterised above, is necessary. So are the real moral dilemmas of a Pashtun, the context within which the question relating to the origin and essence of ethical issues in the Pashtun's Code of Honour arose. It seems however, that it is not sufficient simply to seek answers to the set questions without referring them to the Pashtun as a "territory", in which it is possible to find the reasons constituting ethical behaviour. Undoubtedly helpful in solving the mystery of moral duty in the Pashtun Code of Honour in the future will prove to be not only the unravelling of the ethical problem of mankind, but also an explanation of the etymology of the word *Pashtunness* which comes from the same

source as Pashtun and bears among others the meaning of honour, dignity and pride.

Maybe it would be fitting to place the afore mentioned dilemmas in the rich tradition of philosophy, bringing together the ethical issues with the problem of human nature. Whilst attempting to define the structure of the human we must remember his existential — dynamic context. Firstly because this context does not create the external framework of a human, but constitutes his most immanent dimension consisting of the essence of existence. Secondly, because moral experience reveals the instigator of absolute duty, forejudging whether he is or is not Pashtun as Pashtun, or looking at it on another level, whether he is or is not a human as a human. In light of the above, the explanation of the phenomenon of duty boils down to the definition of the internal links between that which is to be explained and the structure of man. The existential structure of man communicates the fact that a being does not exist his own existence; his is a chance existence, dependent on Existence which is the source, reason and potential for all existence. Hence man is oriented towards Existence, at the same time he is oriented towards the Act through action.

Classical philosophy describes the vital situation of mankind as the situation of being oriented towards self fulfilment. Therefore, man who is in this sense a potential being, is not yet a pure Act. But as he already exists, he is steered *ad actum*; he cannot not act. He must act! Each conscious and free decision of non-action is also a form of human action; it is a deed as any other. A human being *ad actum* remains oriented toward a goal, *ad telum actum*.

Thus a deed cannot of itself be accomplished. A deed cannot exist outside of good and evil. Just as existence on its own is impossible if it is not the existence of something, some purport. What is this force which gives direction? What determines the direction of an undertaken deed? Perhaps it is dependent on whom or what the person undertaking the deed is. Just as the ideal life and deeds of a Pashtun should be an expression of pride, honour and dignity, as the Pashtun endeavours to act according to his nature. Such a planned out course for man, bearing the traces of determinism, does not eliminate freedom, something which moral experience demands, and which would allow him to stray from the path. But even a protest is only available in a situation where something exists which cannot be annulled or changed. It is possible that along with his coming to existence man has a defined structure. He finds this structure embedded in himself and through study of himself discovers its dynamic character, aimed at self fulfilment. Therefore, structure may be the absolute summons through which man in undertaking the deeds he does, realises the plan he has received at birth. Thus a human cannot change the fact that he is a human, just as a Pashtun cannot change the fact that he is a Pashtun. Hence results a particular course of action belonging to him. Perhaps this course defines who is he and what.

Summing up these contemplations on dynamic structure, we can draw the following conclusions: Man-Pashtun cannot not act. His course of action and self fulfilment is stamped into his structure. An illustration of this situation is

the experience of not being able to *run away from oneself*. Finally, Man-Pashtun, by acknowledging a course of action, fulfils the life force realising his nature, his *humanity-Pashtunness*.

In light of the above reflections, in the context of the existential-dynamic life structure of a Pashtun, the facts of moral experience can not be any different from what they are. This life status of a human encompasses chance and potential and also freedom. In other words the Pashtun as Pashtun, (or man as man), is "condemned" to act in accordance with his structure, for self fulfilment but simultaneously he is "condemned" for irrevocable freedom. The mutual meeting and complementary nature of these two factors, freedom and chance, means that ruthless "condemnation" in the case of the Pashtun becomes his absolute duty; his absolute summons to, in freedom, through his deeds, become that which he is summoned to be. This indispensable summons is a result of chance existence. The summons defines the place of the Pashtun-man in relation to Existence. In light of the above, Existence cannot exist in any other way but that defined, being the fulfilment of a deed. Being its own Existence and fullness of deed means that everything that exists exists thanks to it and out of necessity is *ad actum*. The status of the Pashtun — man *ad actum* as a result of given him existence, is a status *under law* which cannot be changed even through freedom. Therefore in this context to say that man inflicts moral law on himself means as much as to say that he gives himself existence. Hence the ultimate explanation of these facts can only be on a metaphysical level as moral experience demands this level.

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* This interpretation takes as a basic source of text of the Pashtun Code of Honour a paper written by Jadwiga Pstrusińska *Pasztunwali — afgański kodeks postępowania*, "Etnografia Polska" XXI, 1977 no 2.

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