

REGARDING A CERTAIN AXIOLOGICAL “PARADOX” OF THE NEW SILK ROAD

The initiative running under the name of the New Silk Road is still *in statu nascendi*. On the one hand, it is so because the project is still being structured and concretized. On the other hand, because being *in statu nascendi* is an inherent part of its essence, or more specifically, its openness to the adoption of new initiatives, new trends, which make this very idea dynamic.

Being *in statu nascendi* is a condition that has its good and bad points. It is good because we are able to think about the project in practical terms and to adumbrate directions along which we need it developed and implemented. This correlation (and benefit) is self-evident because of its being inseparable from the prospective direction along which human activities are to be pursued. The future is still open to it, whereas the past, that which has happened, is irreversibly closed. This being so, the project *in statu nascendi* remains open to transformation, modification, dynamization, correction, but also to termination, negative criticism and rejection. This positive side of the project is also attended by its “negative” side. The negative side of being open to modification is its being undefined, which *per se* constitutes a problem for analysis, mainly because of its constitutive lack of definition. This opposition between good and bad sides is, however, only a relative one. And yet this lack of definition creates a chance for whosoever may like to attempt it to propose one.

The Belt and Road Initiative, like any other specifically human component, is built on values. That is a constitutive relation regardless of how these values are to be understood, what type of existence is to be ascribed to them, what immanent axiological relations are to be distinguished. Man is a teleological being, always acting with regard to some goals, whereas the human goal is in its essence of referential value. Such reference is no doubt made in relation to human activity, that is, any *activity* that is sentient, purposeful, intentional, as being distinct from instinctive behaviour triggered by a chain of reflexes or changes in the physical natural realm of a human being.

The fact that all specifically human works, such as acting in the strict sense of the word, moral action, works of art, technology and its products, are axiologically marked finds its expression in two types of such “saturation”. The first type is “natural” because it is linked to human teleology and its reference to values. The second type is extreme, exaggerated and in

a manner of speaking "oversaturated." The former is instanced in real political programmes, real social programmes, etc. The latter is exemplified by utopias. As regards recent socio-anthropological positions, it is possible to demonstrate many elements of the axiological utopia in transhumanist programmes. It is most forcefully argued in the transhumanist view expressed in the belief that there are values that we might like to want, even though we do not currently want them, because we have not yet clearly comprehended them. We may be able to fully appreciate them as soon as our current deliberative capacities are less limited, but to achieve this we need to promote a transhumanist world, ie, a world based on values the importance of which we will be able to recognize in retrospect. (Bostrom, 2003).

It would be necessary to examine separately and determine whether, and if so, to what extent and in whatever meaning, one can discern the manifestations of Utopian thinking in the set of values lying in the Belt and Road project. To make myself clear: I do not question the real extent of this project nor its real impact; to do this would be to deny the facts. The implementation of every cultural project is always only partial or otherwise partitive; a full implementation of a project is impeded by our limited forecast, by changes occurring in the world itself and effected by human freedom. But perhaps you can also say that part of that which is not implemented has Utopian traits, and as long as it is a Utopianism it may not be implemented.

But do Utopias not play a positive role? Are not they helpful in criticizing the social world, in rebuilding, improving and re-creating this world? That is why the fact that the analysis of the values proclaimed as the basis on which the New Silk Road project is based may support the hypothesis that in many respects what we have to do with is an axiological utopia, may not exempt us from seeking important positive elements in this project, both in its practical and, what is of more interest to me, in theoretical aspects.

I will now endeavour to demonstrate them by citing just one document: *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*. Although the analysis may not be exhaustive (as it refers generally only to this document and therefore only selected values are investigated), it will be possible to use it to diagnose the axiological paradox which makes its appearance here and venture to solve it accordingly.

One more reservation must be made. I look at this project in the context of coherence and ability to jointly implement the values proclaimed. I am therefore using a standard which may be applied at a level other than that on which the project is being developed. However, adopting such a perspective is firstly justified by claims contained in the essence of the philosophy of politics, and especially in claims raised by the axiology of politics. Secondly, I feel encouraged

to adopt this perspective by some assertions in which the authors of the document explicitly refer to the relevant values.

To outline a fuller background for further analysis, I need to refer to a set of meanings and values that Adam Nobis gave in his description of the New Silk Road. These are the following meanings and values: Afro-Eurasia, Asia, security, gate, China, time, dialogue, wealth, roads, energy, Eurasia, globality, trade, harmony, hegemony, history, infrastructure, integration, Silk Road, communication, benefits, partnership, money, peace, position, friendship, understanding, economic development, equality, equilibrium, diversity, socialism, resources, sharia, tolerance, transportation, tourism, hub, multicentricity, multiplicity, influences, East and West, community, cooperation, exchange, reciprocity, trust (Nobis, 2016, 33-53). They are all listed alphabetically to reflect the lexicographical nature of A. Nobis' work.

Let me add to the list presented above the following values: rivalry, self-interest, national interest, sustainable development, wisdom, creativity, support, inclusiveness, respect for others, people-to-people bands, education, NGOs, environmental protection.

These values should be explored in various respects. It would be necessary, for example, to identify which of them are of prime character and which are "secondary" values, the less fundamental ones; subsequently, what types of foundations interact between these values. Besides, a value can be seen as fundamental as used in different meanings. Firstly, a value can be seen as a fundamental value because it is the foundation without which another, any less fundamental value, does not exist at all. Secondly, the value construed as fundamental in this sense can only support the other value, without being its component, but it could also integrate this value as its component (Hartmann, 1962, 251-253). For a theoretician, this problem will be all the more interesting because, by following this reasoning, i.e. by seeking a foundation for a given value, and then a foundation for that foundation, he may hope to detect the most original values, the most fundamental values. At this point, as I am merely delineating this issue, I do not want to address the problem in a systematic and orderly manner. I am just saying it is necessary to address it. Meanwhile, I will take a closer look at how these values are arranged in terms of objectives, instruments and the setting for human activities. Hence, the analysis cannot be complete as the operating subject (person, agent) and the values involved will not be analyzed.

Human activity, individual or collective, has its purpose, uses specific instruments, tools, is pursued in specified settings, whether favorable or disruptive, natural or cultural. Each of these levels is associated with its related values.

The first value class is one that sets goals. The Belt and Road initiative includes the following values: security, prosperity, harmony, hegemony, integration, infrastructure, benefits, com-

munication, culture, independence, economic development, equality, diversity, tolerance, multi-centricity, multiplicity, influence, community, cooperation, exchange, reciprocity, self-interest, national interest, sustainable development, wisdom, creativity, support, inclusiveness, respect for others, people-to-people bands, education, environmental protection.

The second value class comprises instrumental values; their worth is determined by the fact that they are an effective tool for implementing goals that accomplish value related goals. The instrumental values include the following values: security, gate, time, dialogue, roads, energy, global, trade, hegemony, infrastructure, integration, communication, benefits, culture, people, gentleness, bridge, responsibility, peace, position, friendship, understanding, economic development, equality, diversity, resources, tolerance, transport, hub, multicentricity, multiplicity, influences, cooperation, exchange, reciprocity, trust, rivalry, self-interest, national interest, sustainable development, wisdom, creativity, support, inclusiveness, respect for others, people-to-people bands, education, non-governmental organizations.

Lastly, there is one more group of values that comprises values of the "environment", which are fostered in geographical or cultural settings, thus becoming a dimension in which the project of the new road is to be implemented. These are such values as Afro-Euro-Asia, Asia, China, roads, Eurasia, globality, infrastructure, culture, people, bridge, economic development, diversity, resources, multicentricity, multiplicity, East and West, rivalry, creativity, people-to-people bands, education, non-governmental organizations.

As regards values of the settings or the "environment", there are two variants. The first variant comprises positive values. I mean those values the implementation of which is conducive to the initiative in question. They are, for instance: extensive communication network, openness to other civilizations, tolerant attitudes. The second variant comprises negative values, such as barriers impeding or hampering the implementation of the initiative. For example, they can be identified as the negative value of a poorly developed communication infrastructure or educational isolation, such as is manifested in a negative attitude towards educational or scientific mobility.

However, it is remarkable that such negative values are merely relational with respect to their negativity. With regard to the project in question, they become positive, emerging as an area of its influence, and the "Recipient", as it were. This inexplicit reference of negative values to activity which makes a negative aspect assume a positive aspect is a more general phenomenon. I pointed them out when discussing values occurring in the context of creative activity (Kopciuch, 2015, 170-173).

As shown in the listing presented above the same values appear in the Belt and Road project, even though they play different roles. They may be intended or goal values, both instrumental and/or “environmental” values. How is that possible? How can a situation arise where the value of the goal, that is the value of something that has not yet materialized, is at the same time the value of the “environment”, that is the value of something that already exists. A similar tension is produced if one admits that the value can also be instrumental, and, hence, the value also for something that has materialized. After all, only an effectively existing tool may in effect be useful. This is what I call the axiological paradox of the New Silk Road (though I do not argue it is its only paradox).

A clear example of a situation where the same value appears as the value of the goal or and as the value of the environment is the value of diversity. First and foremost, this diversity is a dimension, an area or a level that is the field of action: “Accelerating the building of the Belt and Road can help promote the economic prosperity of the countries along the Belt and Road and regional economic cooperation, strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between different civilizations” (VaA, 2015). Secondly, diversity is also included in this area, which is to emerge as a result of the implementation of the road: “The Initiative is harmonious and inclusive. It advocates tolerance among civilizations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilizations” (VaA, 2015); Thirdly, this diversity is also an instrument: “Countries should work in concert” (VaA, 2015).

However, the situation reported above is an ostensibly paradoxical one. At least partially so. It is important to note that even though diversity exists here on three levels each level has a sort of different diversity. The difference becomes manifest when diversity at the level of the goal is contrasted with the diversity at the environmental level. The goal of the Belt and Road project is, *inter alia*, to attain increased cooperation and increased level of development and prosperity of various entities. Various levels of development at the level of the environment and the intended goal highlight the difference with which we are concerned. I think that in a similar way diversity regarded as a tool could be distinguished. I mean that the effective value of diversity as a tool rises when diversity is identified and described as a tool, and, most importantly, when it is accepted and properly tested. John Stuart Mill wrote in the nineteenth century about the positive role of such manifold diversity in answering the question regarding the origin of the historical greatness of Europe, referring to the “plurality of paths” for its progressive and many-sided development of individual states and nations. (Mill, 2003, 109). The historical role of diversity, albeit in a completely different way, was also emphasized by Samuel P. Huntington,

who pointed out that the great divisions among humankind were the source of the conflict between civilizations in the modern world. (Huntington, 2004).

It cannot be disregarded, however, that different levels of development are external to diversity as such. One who is looking for precise language and phrase can rightly say that when it comes to diversity itself there is no essential change here.

But there is another variety that exists both at the level of the goal and the level of the environment, even though on both levels it is one and the same, unaffected diversity. Is not such a dimension of cultural diversity, which, on the one hand, is a trait of different peoples or civilizations, and, accordingly, the Belt and Road project is bound to unite them as diverse; whilst, on the other hand, it is what sets a goal and forms the basis for a respectful attitude towards other entities and civilizations, respect their distinctiveness and cultural integrity: "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit" (VaA, 2015). In this context "peace", "cooperation", "openness", "inclusiveness" are not casual words. If one speaks of peace, then one of the assumptions is the diversity of individuals or subjects among whom peace is to prevail; if one speaks about cooperation, then one of the assumptions is the diversity of cooperators; if one speaks of openness, then one of the assumptions is the difference of opinion as to what is to be open; finally, if one speaks about inclusiveness, then one of the assumptions is the multiplicity and difference in relation to what is being asserted.

The value of interpersonal relations does not appear to have such a threefold status. Unquestionably, these relations are interpreted primarily as a supporting instrument for the implementation of the project One Belt and One Road: "People-to-people bond provides the public support for implementing the Initiative" (VaA, 2015). At the same time they are understood very broadly, permeating all realms of life, such as economy, higher education, even tourism: "We should enhance cooperation in and expand the scale of tourism; hold tourism promotion weeks and publicity months in each other's countries; jointly create competitive international tourist routes and products with Silk Road features; and make it more convenient to apply for tourist visa in countries along the Belt and Road. We should push forward cooperation on the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road cruise tourism program. We should carry out sports exchanges and support countries along the Belt and Road in their bid for hosting major international sports events" (VaA, 2015). Such interpersonal links or relations may, however, have the status of a goal and, therefore, its value. The primary value of those links is instrumental, but the secondary value is the value of the goal. In order to comprehend this properly, you must also consider values that fulfil the goal role in the project, i.e. prosperity, tolerance, community, cooperation.

A particularly valuable role is to be assigned, I think, to what has been identified as prosperity. Generally speaking, two interpretations could be attempted at this point. The first interpretation is quite obvious and appears to be of vital interest to the authors of and participants in the New Silk Road. The second interpretation is a philosophical one; it is much deeper and therefore more interesting. It was defined in the 20th century by José Ortega y Gasset (Ortega, 1982, 248-263). Both interpretations contain a common motif that is relevant to the issue in question. In the first interpretation, prosperity is understood as material prosperity, and everything that constitutes it. In the second interpretation, prosperity is understood as well-being, i.e., being that we consider valuable. Whenever prosperity is thus defined, it is not only economic and commercial factors that come into play, but also concepts and evaluations needed to answer the question of how to live a worthy life. I cannot resist the conclusion that such a basis inherent in human evaluation, recognition and acquiescence is also afforded by the first interpretation of prosperity. If interpersonal links or relations are incontestably seen as an instrument required to create prosperity, then interpretations of prosperity as those offered above are also part or element of it: they are an important component of building a valuable life.

Similar reasoning may be pursued in regard to tolerance values. On the one hand, a tolerance value is such an element of attitude that facilitates “subject-oriented” [personhood-oriented], “partnership-based” cooperation with others. In that sense its value is strictly instrumental. In order to enlist the cooperation with another subject (person, agent), I have to treat him or her as a subject (person, agent), with respect to his or her entire specificity and difference. Of course, it may succeed if a genuine partnership based cooperation is secured. But on the other hand, there are differing degrees of tolerance (Kopciuch, 2014, 242-248), and at least some of them also represent a goal whereby one is motivated to fight or just work to promote tolerant attitude.

Both of these examples are crucial if viewed from the perspective of the value theory. In expounding the categorially different values of the New Silk Road project which have interpersonal relationships, we may reasonably conclude that the categorially pluralist position of the same value is in some cases related to the content specificity of a given value. In contradistinction to the reason we have investigated earlier (which was a different degree of realization of a given value), there is a less general reason here, which holds true and matters in reference only to some values.

This categorial diversity may offer other explanations. The first explanation is the distinction between conditional values and reciprocal values; the second explanation is the distinction between formal values and their “material” (substantive) concretization; the third explanation is the consideration of the phenomenon of partiality and transitivity of our goals.

The first explanation, the distinction between conditional and reciprocal values, refers to Hegel's idea of "reciprocal nature of labour", according to which a labourer not only works upon nature, but also on himself. While working on material nature a person develops his or her skills and abilities. In transferring this correlation to the level of axiological relations, a certain relation is attained: the subject (person, agent) and his values (a condition for the realization of some other value) are reaping gains on this realization, because that subject (also within the scope of the above-mentioned conditional values), achieves a higher level in his development. This is an interpretation I am offering with regard to the well-known, often repeated, notion that good reciprocates. Good reciprocates, because its realization enriches the operating subject. The distinction between conditional and reciprocal values demonstrates how it is possible that the values which in the Belt and Road project have the status of the value of the environment may also be the values of the goal.

Yet another aspect of value is touched upon in the distinction between formal values and their concretizations. All these values have their own content. It may be more or less general content, more or less related to the specific, time-bound and space-dependent individual conditions of the human situation, including the levels of human activity. They may be exemplified by diverse concretizations, expressions of patriotism as a value which during wartime finds its fulfillment in heroic sacrifice or readiness to sacrifice one's life on the battlefield, while during peacetime, it is realized by people working diligently or paying taxes honestly.

Consequently, if the same value appears in the Belt and Road programme at different levels (as the value of the goal, the instrument, or the environment), then this may be an expression of the formal value being expressed at different levels.)

This conversion of the instrument value into the value of the goal (or vice versa: the value of the goal into the value of the instrument), however, has still another explanation. I mean a phenomenon that is associated with most human endeavours. Most of our goals (if not almost all of them) are "partitive" or "transitional" or "transitive". Their partitivity means that they are a component of larger aggregates, other goals, or more general objectives. In turn, their "transitionality" or "transitivity" lies in the fact that when we accomplish them, then other goals are built on their foundation, irrespective of whether they follow or part company with the original goals. Both of these phenomena are often interrelated, mutually and intricately intertwined. But they point to two different dependencies. These mechanisms also appear among values contained in the New Silk Road programme. Accordingly, tolerance can attend the goal, but can also attend the instrument; the same goes for diversity or interpersonal links or relationships.

There is one more element identifying all the above explanations: a dynamic side of action is emphasized in them, and an obvious and “normal” fact is related to them, namely, that action, implementation of initiatives or projects are always carried out over time. That is why what is now an instrument may subsequently be a goal. What is initially a goal may then be an instrument and an end. What, at a particular time, is developed in a certain way, may at a later stage develop itself even further.

Let us assemble all the distinctions and explanations. The co-occurrence of the same values at different levels of action, as the Belt and Road programme says, may be motivated by the fact that:

1. at different levels of action the same values may appear, but at a different, more or less advanced, stage of realization;
2. some values (such as prosperity or tolerance) allow such multileveling due to their specific nature;
3. at different levels of action we can deal with various concretizations of the same formal values;
4. at different levels of action we can deal with partitivity of goals and their transitivity;
5. the ability to belong to different levels of action is also related to the dynamic nature of the action itself and its location over time.

The above comments are just a sample of a prospective analysis that requires to be performed painstakingly. This is just a sample or “flagging” of the problem, performed in a general and randomized way. But this mere sample may be used to indicate in part that also in the case of political and economic programmes, the axiological analysis should focus on building specific value tables designed for them. If it is true that human life, individual as well as collective life, is permeated with values, then they are to be detailed, specified, individualized values. Their consequence is not only the diversification or diversity of the human world, but also its richness. To grasp the gist of it and determine its trends should be a critical task of reflection. A current vibrant tendency to focus on practical aspects of cognition and knowledge has its good merits. But so does theoretical knowledge: the point is not just to change the world, but also to understand it.

Literature:

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