

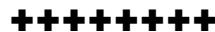
The *Majdan* vs. Utilitarianism: Reflecting on Emerging Moral Patterns in Ukraine¹

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Abstract

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The author analyzes the moral underpinnings of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine to suggest that its participants were not motivated merely by a base consideration of individual socioeconomic or political welfare understood in utilitarian terms. Utilitarianism – as understood by Thomas Nagel, Peter Singer, John Stuart Mill, Charles Taylor, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Scheler, and Pope John Paul II – is analyzed to demonstrate that what happened in the public square (the “*majdan*”) in Kyiv in the Orange Revolution was not utilitarianism proper but rather a “geopolitical seismic shift” as Ukrainians, manifesting a new spiritual maturity, exercised their hard-won freedom to reject political corruption and to protest electoral fraud precisely by coming together as a community united by the higher values of love and self-sacrifice and a recognition that the transcendent dignity of the human person and the defence of human rights must be the foundation for a true culture of life.



¹ The *majdan*, is, our course, the public square, and, in the current context, the square in mind is Independence Square in Kyiv, where the Orange Revolution occurred in 2004.

Two Moral Patterns and Democracy

In my presentation today, I would like to offer to you my thoughts and reflections about some emerging moral patterns in Ukraine. I will limit myself to just two, namely, to what is traditionally referred to as utilitarian morality and to a different kind of morality which so many Ukrainians have experienced, manifested, and relived from within during the Orange Revolution in 2004.

Let me begin by quoting the words of John Paul II from *Evangelium vitae* about the relationship between democracy and morality. He writes:

Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a “system” and as such is a means and not an end. Its “moral” value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behaviour, must be subject.²

The idea that the process of building democracy presupposes certain moral frameworks and that the value of democracy itself depends on conformity to the moral law is of crucial importance for the present reflection.

The Ukrainian nation in its most recent history has clearly demonstrated some fundamental level of self-consciousness and maturity. Ukrainians are actively exploring various dimensions of their country’s independence as well as of their individual freedom. Sometimes these explorations lead them towards wonderful results, and sometimes they turn out to be very painful and devastating. Among the dimensions explored, the moral one is all the more often coming to public attention.

At the very outset, I should mention that I will omit from my consideration one of the patterns of moral behaviour which results from the various types of relativism. Such an omission

² *Evangelium vitae*, no. 70.

is not because moral relativism plays a very minor and insignificant role in the Ukrainian context. It would be worthwhile to analyze the roots and consequences of the increasing relativization of morality and culture on its own. I am convinced that the spirit and morality of the *majdan* was clearly opposed to any form of moral indifference or relativism, demanding some fundamental level of respect for human freedom and dignity. In my opinion, the kind of opposition between the two moral worldviews, namely moral relativism and the *majdan*'s morality, has already received some philosophical and theological reflection. I suggest paying more attention to what I consider to be a more subtle and less analyzed distinction between the moral principles manifested during the events in Ukraine and the kind of morality exemplified in utilitarian civilization.

Additionally, my specific focus in this presentation was inspired by and is due to the recent parliamentary elections in Ukraine, wherein no political party and no politician was openly and publicly professing any form of relativism. Practically all of them were extremely confident as to what the common good is and what would serve the interest of all Ukrainian people best. It was openly declared that their main reason for participating in the elections was the maximization of the well-being of an increasing number of Ukrainian citizens.

While listening to various campaign speeches and debates, I wondered whether there is at least some chance that publicly declared concern for the common good will remain a powerful motive after the elections are over. Secondly, I was wondering to what extent utilitarian concepts and philosophy have penetrated the minds of those who, I hope, were at least to some extent sincere in their concern for the common good. However, my ultimate question was whether the moral principles and stance manifested by millions of Ukrainians during the Orange Revolution have any resemblance to the utilitarian worldview and morality. The millions of protesters were clearly hoping for a better life, and they were clearly hoping for a better life for many of their fellow men. Thus, one may be tempted to promptly conclude, there was a great deal of utilitarianism present in their thinking and acting.