

Universal Values and the East-West dispute in the Russian War against Ukraine

Andrei Rodin

April 13, 2023

The Myth of the Framework 1

One of the most disturbing features of intellectual life at the present time is the way in which irrationalism is so widely advocated, and irrationalist doctrines taken for granted. In my view, one of the main components of modern irrationalism is relativism ([, that is,] the doctrine that truth is relative to our intellectual background or framework : that it may change from one framework to another), and, in particular, the doctrine of impossibility of mutual understanding between different cultures, generations, or historical periods.

The Myth of the Framework 1

I suggests that the greatest step towards a better and more peaceful world was taken when the war of swords began to be supported, and sometimes even to be replaced, by a war of words. This is why my topic is of practical significance.

Karl Popper 1976

Is rational moral discussion possible?

Are fundamental moral concepts such as justice and freedom relative (w.r.t. cultures, generations, etc.) or absolute (after the model of truth)?

My Popperian answer : They are “absolute” in the sense of being subjects of critical rational discussion, which results from a clash of conflicting cultural and historical traditions.

Like in case of the concept of truth an ontological grounding of moral concepts (“moral realism”) is possible but not necessary for the argument. The argument goes through if one assumes that the rationality is a social construction based on social experience that involves conflicting elements.

Relevance to the current political situation in Russia

The ongoing political discussion in Russia (or perhaps an ersatz of discussion) is in terms of opposition of “Western” or “European” political model and moral values and their “Asian”, “Euroasian” or “specifically Russian” counterparts.

Relevance to the current political situation in Russia

The ongoing political discussion in Russia (or perhaps an ersatz of discussion) is in terms of opposition of “Western” or “European” political model and moral values and their “Asian”, “Euroasian” or “specifically Russian” counterparts.

Cf. “European way”, “European choice and the like political labels. Even if, politically; I naturally belong to the “pro-European” camp, I disagree with the language. A rational moral and political discussion cannot and should not be defined in such geographical, cultural, historical or geopolitical terms.

Relevance to the current political situation in Russia

The ongoing political discussion in Russia (or perhaps an ersatz of discussion) is in terms of opposition of “Western” or “European” political model and moral values and their “Asian”, “Euroasian” or “specifically Russian” counterparts.

Cf. “European way”, “European choice and the like political labels. Even if, politically; I naturally belong to the “pro-European” camp, I disagree with the language. A rational moral and political discussion cannot and should not be defined in such geographical, cultural, historical or geopolitical terms.

Rational political discussion is the best way to gaining the political intellectual independence, which is so much desired by the proponents of the Russian *Zonderweg* (osobyi put, specific way).

The zonderweg of Russian political Relativism

As Karl Popper rightly remarks, the relativism about truth and about moral and political values is a wide intellectual trend. But in today's Russia this trend has some specific origins, namely

The zonderweg of Russian political Relativism

As Karl Popper rightly remarks, the relativism about truth and about moral and political values is a wide intellectual trend. But in today's Russia this trend has some specific origins, namely

- ▶ relativistic notions of truth and moral value in the Soviet Marxism

The zonderweg of Russian political Relativism

As Karl Popper rightly remarks, the relativism about truth and about moral and political values is a wide intellectual trend. But in today's Russia this trend has some specific origins, namely

- ▶ relativistic notions of truth and moral value in the Soviet Marxism
- ▶ rejection of any state-sponsored ideology

Relevance to the ongoing War

Even if at a larger historical scale the Russian invasion to Ukraine can be plausibly seen as a continuation of Russian imperial politics dating back to (at least) 17th century, the attempted revenge for the lost Cold War is, in my view, another important historical factor.

Relevance to the ongoing War

Even if at a larger historical scale the Russian invasion to Ukraine can be plausibly seen as a continuation of Russian imperial politics dating back to (at least) 17th century, the attempted revenge for the lost Cold War is, in my view, another important historical factor.

The lack of independent judgement in political matters made Putin's government's political choices unprincipled and purely pragmatic. Since Russia could not simply "choose the right side" in the perceived post-ColdWar political arrangement (because it represented one of the two sides itself), it tried to reassemble a new Anti-Western coalition but had a very limited success.

Relevance to the ongoing War

Even if at a larger historical scale the Russian invasion to Ukraine can be plausibly seen as a continuation of Russian imperial politics dating back to (at least) 17th century, the attempted revenge for the lost Cold War is, in my view, another important historical factor.

The lack of independent judgement in political matters made Putin's government's political choices unprincipled and purely pragmatic. Since Russia could not simply "choose the right side" in the perceived post-ColdWar political arrangement (because it represented one of the two sides itself), it tried to reassemble a new Anti-Western coalition but had a very limited success.

The Russian military aggression projected internationally and the invasion to Ukraine in February 2022 is underpinned by the perceived incapability to counter (or counterbalance) the "Western influence" by any other means.

Rather than making an absurd choice between East " and West or Europe and Asia Russian intellectual community need to treat issues of political justice, including the international justice, rationally.

Rather than making an absurd choice between East " and West or Europe and Asia Russian intellectual community need to treat issues of political justice, including the international justice, rationally.

Rationality does not belong to any particular culture or nation or world power but is a human capacity to surpass, in thought and discussion, all cultural, historical and geographical barriers.

THANK YOU!