

УДК 37.017.924

## Universals and Pragmatics as Substantial Reference Points of Modern Ethical Education

Elena N. Viktoruk<sup>a\*</sup> and Olga S. Ardykova<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University  
named after V.P. Astafev*

*89 A. Lebedeva st., Krasnoyarsk, 660049 Russia*

<sup>b</sup>*Siberian State Technological University*

*82 Mira, Krasnoyarsk, 660049 Russia*

Received 24.11.2012, received in revised form 15.01.2013, accepted 07.02.2013

---

*The present article analyzes the substantial change in the content of ethical courses under shift of educational paradigms. On the data of the questionnaire survey of four groups of students, the authors of the article consider the limits and prospects of practical and applied ethical education. The article arrives at the conclusion that general ethical problems are fairly well mastered during the study of practical and applied courses, if there is a particular educational and motivational space, “the zone of proximal development”, as called by psychologists. The authors note the distinctive features of the zone of proximal ethical and moral development in adult education, related to the “universal” vision of the studied material, and a significant increase of its efficiency when studied in small groups.*

*Keywords: ethical education, applied ethics, practical ethics, moral philosophy, ethical universals, ethics for adults, the zone of proximal ethical and moral development.*

---

**The relevance** of the current research is caused by the fact that the most efficient ethical education today is developing not in the theoretical field (such as moral philosophy), but in the practical and applied one, where it is fulfilled in the form of user programs. There is no doubt that ethical education can be efficient, especially considering the general Russian and international tendencies, which claim that the main task of today’s higher education is to provide students with the sort of knowledge may serve as a “tool for building up their social career” (Semenkov, 2004). Besides the traditional classification

of knowledge into theoretical and practical, sociologists come up with two more dichotomies: “conceptual / descriptive” and “user-defined / researcher-defined”. At the same time there are some concerns connected to the fact that the focus on radical pragmatics dilutes the contents of ethics itself, replaces its socially significant functions, the main of which is preserving the humane in a human.

In June 2012 we carried out a research aimed at **revealing the limits of pragmatic content in applied and practical courses of ethics**, on the basis of such metaphors as “radical”, “obvious”

and “unobvious” pragmatics suggested by V.I. Bakshtanovsky, the Director of Research Institute for Applied Ethics (Tyumen State University of Oil and Gas). In our opinion, these metaphors, characterizing the form and content of ethical courses, serve as good markers for reflection of “multilayered” and not so transparent process of paradigm shift in the modern ethical education. The studies of this specificity of ethical education development is carried out within the framework of scientific and educational project “Applied and Practical Ethics Laboratory” (Koptseva, 2010).

**Methods of research:** questionnaire survey, interview, expert poll, debriefing as a training tool.

**Object of research.** To reveal the relations between universals and pragmatics within the ethical course content, we conducted a survey in four groups of students studying ethics according to different practice-focused programs:

- post-graduates and PhD students of Siberian State Technical University, specialty course “Ethics of Science” (20 class hours);
- third-year part-time students, “Professional Ethics” course (16 class hours);
- participants of “Human Resources Management” program at the Institute of Advanced Professional Education of Siberian State Technical University “Higher School of Business, Management and Psychology”, “Business Ethics” course (24 class hours);
- unemployed citizens registered at the Employment Bureau, taking the program “Assistant Director”, “Ethics of Business Relations” course (44 class hours)

**Main clauses.** Having studied the relations between universals and pragmatics in the content of ethical applied courses, we arrived at the

following conclusions: a) there are some ethic courses distinctive with their “radical pragmatics”; within the framework of the current research, it is the course “Ethics of Business Relations” for the unemployed; b) “obvious pragmatism”: is typical for “standard” university courses formed in accordance with some approved educational standards; in the present research it was noticed in the professional courses of ethics for part-time students and courses of business ethics for managers; c) course with a great “universal” ethical component, harmoniously complemented with radical and obvious pragmatics, like “Ethics of Science” for post-graduates. The number of respondents in some groups is quite little (total number of respondents is 56 people), as filling in the questionnaire was voluntary, anonymous and was offered only after passing the exam for the sake of higher verity.

**Examples.** In the questionnaires for part-time students and unemployed people the first question was formulated as a request to evaluate the usefulness of ethical knowledge on a 1-10 scale. The results are the following: 54 % of part-time students evaluated the usefulness of the studied discipline as 10, 24 % and 19 % chose 9 and 8 correspondingly, and only one respondent (3 %) evaluated the usefulness of the course as 7. The average value for the group is 9,27. In the group of the unemployed, 43 % evaluated it with 8 and 14 % – with 6 score. The average value for the group is 8,57. As we can see, no one put a score below 6 points; the students admit the necessity of the knowledge, skills and habits.

The second question: “Are the knowledge and skills in business (professional) ethics applicable for solving ethical problems in personal and social communication?” was asked in order to define whether the students are capable of extending the narrow practice-focused topics on the whole range of ethical problems they may face in their lives. 92,3 % of part-time students, 83,3 % of “Human

Resources Management” program participants, 85,7 % of the unemployed and 93,3 % of post-graduates gave the positive answer; the negative answer (in the number of 1 or 2) was present in every group; in the group of unemployed people, one person replied, “never”.

The third question was included into the questionnaires for all the four groups of respondents to find out, whether the students are aware of the connection between ethical pragmatics and universal ethical issues. The question was formulated as follows: “Is the knowledge of business (professional) ethics helpful for understanding general ethical issues? Describe in a 1-5 scale” (see Table 1).

The offered 1-5 scale was intended to reflect the potential of the universal ethical “background” of the students. Self-evaluation as a factor of feedback can reveal, which issues of moral philosophy were “identified” and problematized, opening up the space of theoretical ethics. The

figures in Table 1 rather reflect the virtual level of digesting general ethical issues, self-evaluation of the received ethical knowledge. It is quite likely that a test carried out in these group according to traditional methodology or in the form of a spoken exam would show some different figures, but formulating the question this way, we attempted to reveal the fact of identifying universal ethical knowledge as such, taking into account possible insincerity of answers, incomplete understanding on the question and involving people with lack of special knowledge (among the respondents there were people who had missed a part of the course).

In the analysis of the received data it is important to consider not only average figures (Table 1), but also the “extreme” ones, meaning that the respondents evaluate their knowledge of this or that topic either as very high or very low. “Ones” or “twos” are absent in the group of those studying business ethics, and there are very few

Table 1. Self-evalutaion of understanding general ethical problems, average figures for groups

General ethical problems	Part-time students. Prof. Ethics	“HR Management” participants. Business Ethics	Unemployed. Ethics of Business Relationships	Post-graduates. Ethics of Science
Criteria of good and evil	3,42	4,00	3,29	3,53
Moral choice	3,92	4,13	3,86	3,67
Freedom and freedom of choice	4,19	3,88	3,29	3,67
Ratio of ends and means in the situation of moral choice	3,73	3,88	3,71	3,73
Meaning of life and mission of human	3,92	3,88	3,43	3,33
Justice – injustice	3,85	4,38	3,14	3,47
Moral duty and responsibility	4,31	4,25	3,57	3,60
Consciousness	4,08	4,00	3,71	3,47
Moral regulations, principles and ideals	4,08	4,13	3,57	3,53
Nature and origin of morals	3,58	3,88	3,71	2,93
Structure and functions of morals	3,81	4,13	3,71	3,33
Moral values	4,12	4,63	4,00	3,67

“threes” in self-evaluation. In the group of the unemployed studying business ethics, there are no “ones”, but quite a lot of “twos” and “threes”. Probably, this self-evaluation is quite fair, as the content of the course was different from the other courses with higher radically pragmatic mindset considered in the article, which we will discuss later. A small number of “ones” and “twos” and a greater number of “threes” is typical for the self-evaluation of understanding general ethical problems by part-time students, at the same time there are quite a lot of “fours” and “fives”. In the groups of post-graduates the diversity of the score was the largest; the ones who answered with a “one” or “two” to this question were the ones who highly evaluated the general usefulness of the course.

The data of Table 1 presented as a diagram demonstrate that general ethical issues studied in an “indirect” way stimulate the inner effort for ethical and moral development of the students. The lowest mark, lower than three points, was given only to the topic on nature and origin of morals in the group of post-graduate students. We explain it with the higher level of education

of this group and the corresponding standards of self-evaluation: this topic was not among the deeply studied issues.

Fig. 1 demonstrates the diversity of self-evaluation of understanding the general ethical issues in the groups: the topic of moral values is chosen as the deepest studied in the group which studied business ethics. The fact that all the groups marked the topic “nature and origin of morals” as the least studied proves the verity of evaluation: it is true that to this very topic little attention was paid. Part-time students put high score to the topic called “moral duty and responsibility”, which is also understandable, as the motive of professional duty as the core of professional ethics was strongly emphasized in the course. In all the groups the topic “criteria of good and evil” looks as less studied in comparison with those concerning moral choice.

The data of Table 1 converted into a diagram (Fig. 2) shows that “universal” ethical issues, according to the students’ self-evaluation, look as well studied. Trying to understand the reasons of such active and spontaneous interference of general ethical problems into the practical

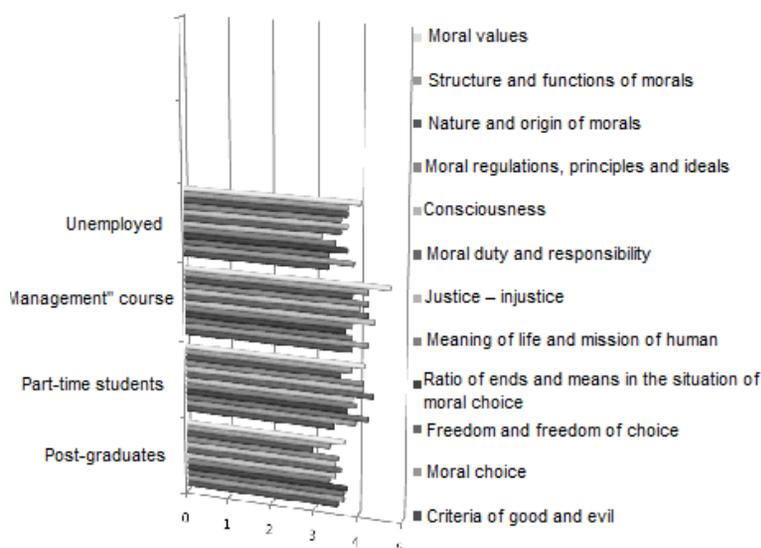


Fig 1. General ethical problems for each surveyed group

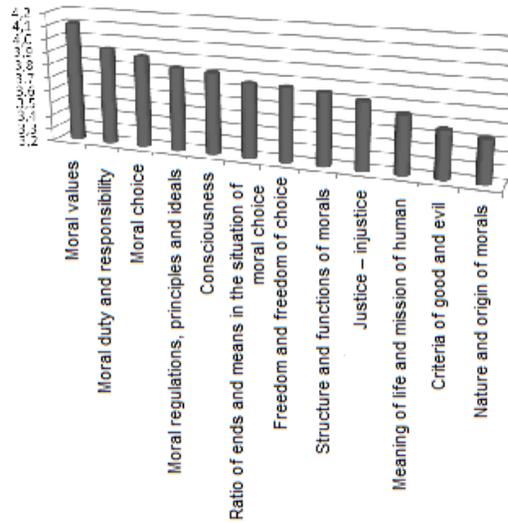


Fig 2. Self-evaluation of understanding general ethical problems studied at practical and applied courses of ethics, common for all the surveyed groups

educational medium, we found the explanation in what psychologists usually call “zone of proximal development<sup>1</sup> (ZPD).

Both in child and adult psychology “zone of proximal development” means a space of higher motivation, emotional intensiveness, where obvious examples of competent acts provided by an adult (a teacher) demonstrate a model of success. This leads to higher educational results, significantly exceeding the expected ones. The data we received conducting the survey indicates, that the radical pragmatics of the applied ethical courses create the “zone of proximal ethical and moral development”, thereby stimulating the studies of universal ethical issues.

Let us study the representative groups for radical, obvious and unobvious pragmatics. As we have already mentioned, obvious pragmatics is more typical of “standardized” university courses than radical pragmatism. The group of part-time students studied the following topics: objects and tasks of professional ethics, principles of professional ethics, professional and ethical codes, professional duty, business

etiquette and etc. A large part of the course was conducted in the form of seminars and practical classes with workshop elements. The form of “radical pragmatics” was used in teaching the topics concerning business etiquette, which explains the total impression of high usefulness of the course (according to the first questions of the questionnaire).

In this group, which was the largest in the number of polled, the answers to the question “Which ethical problems would you like to study on your own or with a guidance of a specialist?” are especially interesting. Here are some of the answers: conflicts (4 people); verbal communication, business communication, specificity of personnel management, how to behave in stressful business situations, career growth in business, rules of behaviour for a business person, “boss-employee” relations, etiquette of an administrator (2 people); problems with work and employment (2 people); moral duty and responsibility, moral values, meaning of life. The answers are listed in the order of increasing the universality of the ethical problems. But

generally there are hardly any universal ethical topics in the “zone of proximal ethical and moral development”. The reason is the dissatisfaction of the ethical and practical inquiry.

In the second group, the participants of “Business Ethics”, we traditionally observe the contradictory combination of radical (unfounded) pragmatics and the amorphous inquiry “to see what business ethics is and what it does”. The issues studied during the course, beginning with ethical violations in business and their consequences in micro and macroprospects (corruption, thefts, fraud, extortion, unfair discrimination), are characterized with “obvious” pragmatics. The program of the course provides some vast theoretical and methodological material on the ethics of administrative decision-making, and the survey on the students’ expectation often does not go beyond the boundaries of radical pragmatics.

Our experience shows, that one should not ignore such inquiries; they can be used for forming a universal ethical platform, a fundament for studying conceptual, theoretical knowledge. Inquiries for radical pragmatics should be taken positively as they reflect the faith in Ethics as a tool of perfecting private and social life up to the desired “decent”, “deserved” level; the hope for it as a kind of knowledge that can help solving some real problems of life. On the example of the next group, which is the unemployed, we will see the **limits** of ethical pragmatics: narrow (etiquette or behaviour) topics with the well-mastered methodology run dry quite soon, thereby provoking the turn to universal ethical topics.

Radical pragmatism of “user-defined” programs is distinctive in the business ethics course for the unemployed. “Assistant Director” advanced course was financed by the municipal Employment Centre. The radically pragmatic mindset of the course was strongly recommended by the management of the Centre, which

corresponded to the expectations of the students: the result should be clear and applicable “right here and now”. Main topics: greeting, introduction, appearance of a business person, business card, speech etiquette formulae, “boss-employee” relationships, organization ethics, manager ethics, business presents, phone conversation etiquette etc.

The studies were carried out in conformity with the set tasks, but the self-evaluation results for understanding general ethical problems in this group are just as high as in the others. As we see it, the reason can be the presence of the “zone of proximal development” activated not only by the obvious pragmatics of the course (workshops and case studies), but also by the existential factors of “unemployment” provoking some deep personal contemplations on “justice/injustice”, cause-effect relations in the terms of destiny, happiness, consciousness, meaning of life and other universals of moral philosophy. The term “zone of proximal development” within the framework of ethics explains the interdependence of “radical pragmatics” and general (theoretical) ethics rather than its boundaries. Studying the phenomenon of “zone of proximal development”, psychologists remark its specificity in teaching adults. The difference is that **unlike children, adults can construct their own zone of proximal development**. This is exactly what we observe at ethical courses aimed at radical and obvious pragmatics.

Studying the distinctive features of the “zone of proximal development” in adult education, specialists emphasize that an important factor is various forms of work in **small groups**. They are not only efficient methods of teaching, which can help solving various problems connected with the content and upgrading character of teaching. They are necessary because from the very beginning of studies they teach **building up the whole logic of the studied material, seeing not**

**only its separate parts and elements studied at the moment, but its ultimate results which constitute the content of studies for quite a long time** (Grandars, 2012). “Zone of proximal development” is the gateway to universal ethical problems.

These distinctive features of the “ZDP” in adult education are completely confirmed by the results of work with one of the most interesting groups in our poll, which is, post-graduates. The topic “Ethics and Axiology of Science” is quite an independent section in the general course of preparation for qualifying exam in “History and Philosophy of Science”. Within the framework of this section for the past several years we have been conducting an ethical and didactic experiment that we described (Viktoruk, 2009). The post-graduates’ group is the key to understanding the boundaries of pragmatics and universalism in applied ethical courses.

The experiment in “radicalization” of obvious ethical pragmatics in studying the issues of science ethics has been lead since the year 2006. Understanding of world outlook and practical significance of this subject for post graduates (future members of scientific community, managers and administrators of higher education establishments) provoked the search for the forms of ethical and practical knowledge that may give some ethical and awareness-raising result, positioning ethical knowledge as something modern, dynamically developing, matching modern educational technologies. For this reason the lecture that describes the theoretical and methodological issues on the borderline between general ethics and science ethics gradually turns into a seminar on teaching the skill of administrative highly ethical decision-making. The content of this four-hour lecture includes both the obvious pragmatics of science ethics (regulations, principles and ideals of the academic community, social commitments of the

academic community, international conventions on the role of science in the society and scientist status, etc.), the “unobvious pragmatics” of moral philosophy (history of relations between ethics and science; moral evaluation of progress in science and technology; ethical understanding of global problems of the humankind etc.). Radical pragmatics of the course is caused by the application of case study for solving ethical dilemmas in the sphere of science and stakeholder analysis, a tool of business ethics, used as a method for resolving cases.

The post-graduates’ questionnaire included some questions intended to find out, how efficiently the “radically pragmatic” mechanism of stakeholder analysis (training is considered to be the main target of the practical seminar) opens up the topics that belong to obvious pragmatics: moratoriums on various kinds of research, scientific inquiry and human rights, necessity to admit mistakes in public, moral qualities of a scientist, ethics of scientific corporations, unconsciousness of scientific research, prohibition of inhumane experiments, authorship, coauthorship, intellectual property in science etc. The question is formulated as a request to mark “ethically disputable spheres of scientific research where stakeholder analysis is efficiently applicable”. In the questionnaires, from 4 to 14 topics of those listed above were marked. This question was supported by the next one which offered to describe the applicability of stakeholder analysis to solving ethical problems on a 1-10 scale for such fields of study as clinical and medical research, environmental studies, space research, information and computer technologies, psychology, pedagogy, biotechnologies, genetics, economics and management.

To reveal the limits of radical pragmatism and its connection to obvious pragmatics, the following open questions were intended: “Which ethical dilemmas in the sphere of science you

consider to be the most acute, is it possible to solve them with stakeholder analysis? Here are some answers: using unreliable information in computer systems, plagiarism, ethical dilemmas in economics, changes in biology, genetic experiments, usefulness and harm of scientific discoveries, socially hazardous research, cloning, experiments on humans, humanity of research. Generally speaking, these three questions should indicate whether the method of stakeholder analysis is distractive for the studies of science ethics problems as such. The results of the survey allayed our fears.

As the subject matter is science ethics, we offered the respondents the following question: "Which topics would you like to learn with the help of a teacher or independently?" Here are the answers, from particularly ethical to more general ones: ethics of providing psychological service, genetics, use of natural resources, plagiarism, scientific database, problems of relationships within the academic community, social commitments of scientists, humanity, justice. Here, just like in the group of part-time students, the inquiry for advanced knowledge is more aimed at ethical pragmatics, though the self-evaluation of understanding universal ethical problems was quite high, as we could observe in Table 1 and in Fig. 2.

### **Conclusions:**

1. "Radical pragmatism" in the inquiries for ethical education is a consequence of the fact that in our country it has been focusing on ethics as a science of morals (theory) for inexcusably long time,

ignoring the necessity for the obvious pragmatism of professional ethics, and radically pragmatic calls of applied and practical ethics. The analysis of forms and content of the practical and applied ethical courses reveals the natural limits of "down-to-earth" user programs, the doubtless advantage of which is forming the zone of proximal ethical and moral development, where the self-inquiry for conceptual content of Ethics with a capital and its unobvious pragmatics is produced.

2. The well-developed methodology of workshop activities on ethics a) form trust for the teacher as a specialist who has good command of ethic programs of successful work; b) create a "small group" climate, so that synergetically united experience of the adult people and the teacher forms the "zone of proximal ethical and moral development" and brings an ethic and educational result, which exceeds the obvious "planned" expectations.

3. Ethical didactics cannot but consider the studies on the dynamics of moral subject and its moral growth (L. Kohlberg, C. Gilligan in psychology; S.I. Gessen, J. Habermas and K.O. Apel in philosophy; J. Maxwell in management). The fundamental clauses of theoretical ethics, moral philosophy become more accessible to the person involved into labour and social practice with its moral dilemmas. The strong side of such engagements is the powerful motivation of students creating the "zone of proximal ethical and moral development" where the general vision of ethical problems is restored, and the studied "narrow" topics become the content of studies for a long time.

<sup>1</sup> The term "zone of proximal development" was first introduced by L.C. Vygotsky for characterizing the process of "moving up the psychic development along with education". This zone is indicated by the content of those tasks the student can solve only with a help of a more competent person (an adult), but after the experience of joint solution they become capable of solving similar tasks independently.

## References

1. Semenov, V.E. *Sotsiologiya obrazovaniia: uchebno-metodicheskoe posobie* [Education Sociology]. Saint Petersburg: Sociological Society of M.M. Kovalevsky, 2004, p. 9.
2. Koptseva, N. P. Integration of humanitarian education in Siberian Federal University. Higher education today, 2007 (Issue 4), 6-8.
3. Grandars (2012), Available at: <http://www.grandars.ru/> (accessed 24 November 2012). *Psikhologicheskie osobennosti vzroslykh* [Psychological Characteristics of Adults] Available at: <http://www.grandars.ru/college/psihologiya/psihologiya-vzroslogo.html> (accessed 24 November 2012).
4. Viktoruk, E.N. (2009). Paradigms of applied ethics. *Vedomosti*, (35), 185-199.
5. Viktoruk, E.N. (2009). Axiology of Ethics and Acience for Graduate Students and Competitors (Experience at Siberian State Technological University). Scientific and Theoretical Journal on the General Methodology of Science, Theory of Knowledge and Cognitive Sciences. Epistemology and Science Philosophy XXI (3), 95-106.

## Универсалии и прагматика как содержательные ориентиры современного этического образования

**Е.Н. Викторук<sup>а</sup>, О.С. Ардюкова<sup>б</sup>**

*<sup>а</sup>Красноярский государственный педагогический  
университет им. В.П. Астафьева  
Россия 660049, Красноярск, ул. Ады Лебедевой, 89*

*<sup>б</sup>Сибирский государственный  
технологический университет  
Россия 660049, Красноярск, пр. Мира, 82*

---

*В статье проанализировано существенное изменение содержания этических курсов в условиях смены образовательных парадигм. Опираясь на данные, полученные в ходе анкетных опросов четырех различных групп учащихся, авторы рассматривают пределы и перспективы практико-прикладного этического обучения. Делается вывод о том, что общие этические проблемы достаточно хорошо осваиваются в ходе изучения практико-прикладных курсов, если возникает особая учебно-мотивационное пространство, называемое психологами «зона ближайшего развития». Авторы отмечают особенности зоны ближайшего этико-морального развития в обучении взрослых, которые связаны с «универсальным» видением изучаемого материала и значительным повышением эффективности его освоения в микрогруппах.*

*Ключевые слова: этическое образование, прикладная этика, практическая этика, моральная философия, этические универсалии, этика для взрослых, зона ближайшего этико-морального развития.*

---