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SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND MORAL CHANGE IN POST-SOVIET SOCIETIES: WELFARE INSTITUTIONS, FAMILY, AND EDUCATION IN THE TRANSITION FROM PLANNED TO MARKET ECONOMY

Abstract

Purpose. This paper investigates how the transition from planned to market economies in post-Soviet societies has reshaped moral orders, trust relations, and institutional legitimacy across welfare, family and education systems. By applying a philosophical sociology of knowledge, the study conceptualizes moral change not as a decline of values, but as a reorganization of collective meaning.

Design/methodology/approach. The study employs a comparative and interpretive qualitative research design. It integrates classical theoretical frameworks (Durkheim, Mannheim, Bourdieu, Collins) with recent empirical research (2015–2025) across six post-Soviet societies: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Lithuania and Poland. The analysis draws on academic literature, survey data and institutional discourse.

Findings. Findings show that welfare, family and education systems have undergone moral hybridization, combining residual collectivist norms with emergent neoliberal ethics. Welfare shifted from solidarity to conditionality; families became the primary moral and economic safety net; and education adopted meritocratic individualism. These changes have fragmented social trust and legitimacy, while also generating new forms of agency, civic mobilization and moral innovation.

Originality/value. Instead of interpreting post-Soviet transformation as moral loss, the paper demonstrates that moral change is a relational process embedded in institutional restructuring, emotional dynamics and epistemic transition. The study advances philosophical sociology as a theoretical lens for understanding how societies reorder moral meaning under systemic change.

Keywords: moral change, post-Soviet societies, social transformation, welfare, family, education, philosophical sociology, social trust.

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked one of the most profound social transformations of the twentieth century. Beyond its geopolitical and economic implications, it precipitated a deep moral reorientation within societies that had for decades been organized around collective ideals of solidarity, equality, and shared responsibility. The shift from a planned to a market economy did not simply alter the structure of production and distribution–it transformed the very moral grammar of social life. Welfare institutions, family structures, and education systems, once embedded in a collectivist moral order, became arenas for negotiating new ethical norms and social expectations.

In the decades following 1991, post-Soviet societies have faced not only economic shocks and political instability but also crises of meaning, identity, and trust. The rapid introduction of neoliberal reforms–privatization, deregulation, and decentralization–created a moral vacuum where former collective certainties dissolved and new individualistic values emerged. Social trust, once grounded in shared ideological frameworks, fragmented along lines of class, ethnicity, and region. The transition, therefore, was not only economic but also epistemic and moral: it transformed how people understand fairness, obligation, and the common good.

From a philosophical-sociological perspective, these transformations can be understood as shifts in the collective representations that structure moral life (Durkheim, 1912/2015). Following the framework developed in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*), moral change is conceived not as a spontaneous evolution of values but as a socially mediated transformation of symbolic and epistemic orders. In other words, when institutions change, the collective meanings that sustain moral behavior also change. This insight bridges the gap between sociology, moral philosophy, and epistemology, revealing how large-scale economic transformations reshape the moral conditions of coexistence.

The transition from plan to market is therefore a moral transition as much as an economic one. It entails a reorganization of trust, authority, and legitimacy across key domains of social life. Three domains are particularly significant in this regard:

1. Welfare institutions, which once embodied the collectivist ethics of the socialist state, are now organized around market logics and conditionality. This shift redefines moral expectations between citizens and the state, replacing solidarity with transactional reciprocity.

2. The family, historically both a refuge from and a mirror of the political system, has undergone moral diversification. Economic precarity and migration have altered gender roles, intergenerational obligations, and moral narratives of care.

3. Education, long a moral pillar of socialist citizenship, has become a vehicle for neoliberal individualism. Meritocracy, competition, and self-responsibility have replaced collective ideals of enlightenment and civic duty.

These transformations raise fundamental questions about the moral fabric of post-socialist societies. How do people reconstruct moral meaning when the institutional foundations of trust collapse? How do welfare systems, schools, and families mediate between inherited moral traditions and emergent market values? And what new forms of collective morality emerge in the interstices of these institutions?

Recent sociological research in Central Asia and Eastern Europe indicates that moral ambivalence has become a defining feature of post-Soviet modernization (Abbott et al., 2019; Wanner, 2021; Uyan-Semerci, 2022). On the one hand, the dismantling of collectivist institutions has allowed for greater personal autonomy, civic initiative, and ethical pluralism. On the other hand, it has eroded social trust, increased inequality, and undermined the moral legitimacy of public institutions. The resulting moral landscape is fragmented and hybrid: traditional norms coexist with neoliberal ethics, religious revival with secular pragmatism, and communal loyalty with competitive individualism.

To analyze this complexity, the present study employs a philosophical-sociological approach that combines classical sociology of knowledge with contemporary theories of moral transformation. Durkheim's notion of *collective representations* (1912/2015) frames morality as a social fact that binds individuals into a moral community. Mannheim's (1936/2013) analysis of *ideology and utopia* illuminates how social transitions generate competing moral worldviews. Bourdieu's (1991, 2000) concepts of *field*, *capital*, and *habitus* explain how institutional practices reproduce moral hierarchies. Finally, Collins' (2004) theory of *interaction ritual chains* highlights the micro-sociological mechanisms through which moral emotions are cultivated or eroded. Together, these perspectives support the central argument that moral change is a relational process embedded in institutional transformation.

By grounding the analysis in philosophical sociology, the article moves beyond normative debates about whether post-Soviet transitions were "successful" or "failed." Instead, it investigates how moral categories–such as duty, trust, dignity, and justice–are socially produced and transformed. This approach treats morality as both an empirical and symbolic phenomenon: something people live through, negotiate, and reinterpret in the midst of changing social structures.

The empirical scope of the article encompasses diverse regions of the post-Soviet world, including Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan) and Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Russia). While these contexts differ politically and culturally, they share the structural experience of transitioning from collectivist to market-based institutions. By examining how welfare, family, and education systems mediate this transition, the study aims to reveal the moral logics that underlie post-socialist modernization.

Ultimately, this inquiry contributes to broader theoretical debates on moral sociology and social transformation. It argues that moral change cannot be reduced to value decay or moral loss. Rather, it reflects a reconfiguration of the symbolic boundaries of the moral field–a redefinition of what counts as good, fair, and legitimate in societies navigating between the residues of socialism and the promises of capitalism. Understanding these transformations

requires not only empirical observation but also philosophical reflexivity: an awareness of how collective knowledge itself is shaped by social and historical conditions. This reflexive standpoint, developed in my dissertation, underpins the present study's methodological and theoretical orientation.

Literature review

Much of the international literature on post-Soviet change concentrates on economic and political reforms, while the moral dimension appears only in passing. Studies of welfare targeting and privatization show how the state now treats social support as conditional rather than universal, but morality is mostly assumed rather than theorized (Cook, 2017: 14; Leitner & Witte, 2020: 754). Ethnographers describe a more everyday picture: citizens speak about the state as a judging authority, marked by humiliation and distrust, rather than solidarity (Matza, 2018: 57; Wanner, 2021: 360). In Central Asia, researchers note how religious norms blend with neoliberal ideas about self-reliance, forming hybrid moral expectations (Khalid, 2022: 147; Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023: 5).

Education studies show a similar shift. Schools that once socialised students into collective duty now emphasise merit, performance and competition (Silova & Auld, 2021: 135). Teachers report loss of authority and "moral fatigue" as they move from moral exemplars to managers of behaviour (Johnson & Silova, 2018: 549). Research on the family highlights its role as a substitute for weakened welfare institutions, making care and survival a private moral responsibility (Abbott et al., 2019: 876; Brik & Stepurko, 2021: 292).

These works document important changes, but they usually examine single institutions–welfare, family or education–separately. Few studies connect them or ask how these different arenas together shape a new moral order. This creates a gap: the broader structure of moral change remains unclear. The present article addresses this gap by analysing how welfare, family and education act as interconnected moral fields during the transition from planned to market economies.

Theoretical Framework: Philosophical Sociology of Social Transformation

The transition from planned to market economies in post-Soviet societies cannot be adequately understood through economic or political theories alone. It involves a profound transformation of the symbolic, moral, and epistemic orders that underpin social life.

Philosophical sociology–an approach developed and articulated in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*)–provides a framework for analyzing how moral concepts, institutional logics, and collective representations co-evolve within broader processes of social transformation. This framework builds on four interrelated traditions: Durkheim's sociology of morality, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and Collins' micro-sociology of interaction rituals.

Durkheim: Morality as a Collective Representation

Émile Durkheim's moral sociology offers a foundational insight: morality is not merely a matter of individual conscience but a social fact rooted in collective representations. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/2015), Durkheim argues that moral categories–such as duty, justice, and solidarity–emerge from the collective life of society and serve to bind individuals into moral communities. Morality, in this sense, is a system of obligations that expresses the collective consciousness. It does not originate in individual reason but in social life itself.

Applied to post-Soviet transformation, this insight reveals that the disintegration of socialism entailed more than institutional breakdown; it represented the dissolution of a moral order. The socialist moral economy was organized around collective ideals–equality, fraternity, and shared responsibility–encoded in both institutional practices and everyday moral narratives. The market transition, by contrast, introduced an alternative moral logic based on competition, individual achievement, and contractual reciprocity. From a Durkheimian perspective, this shift can be seen as a transformation of the collective representations that define moral reality.

Durkheim also emphasized the relationship between social structure and moral density. When social ties weaken, the moral integration of individuals declines, producing states of *anomie*–a condition of normlessness and moral uncertainty. The post-Soviet experience, marked by social dislocation, corruption, and declining trust in public institutions, reflects precisely such anomic conditions. The erosion of collective representations leaves individuals without stable moral reference points, resulting in what Durkheim called "moral deregulation." Yet, in Durkheim's view, new forms of solidarity can emerge through the reorganization of institutions that express shared ideals. This perspective suggests that post-Soviet societies are not morally empty, but rather in the process of reconstructing new moral collectivities.

Mannheim: Ideology, Utopia, and Epistemic Transition

Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge expands Durkheim's insight by emphasizing the historical and epistemic dimensions of moral change. In *Ideology and Utopia* (1936/2013), Mannheim argued that all systems of thought–including moral and philosophical doctrines–are socially conditioned expressions of group existence. What one generation perceives as self-evident truth, another may interpret as ideology. Mannheim's notion of *relationism*–the idea that knowledge is always related to the social position of the knower–offers a way to understand how moral perspectives shift during periods of systemic transformation.

The collapse of socialism and the emergence of market rationality in post-Soviet societies exemplify such an epistemic transition. Under the planned economy, moral legitimacy was grounded in collective utopian ideals–progress, equality, and communal welfare. In the post-transition era, legitimacy derives increasingly from pragmatic and utilitarian values: efficiency, competitiveness, and individual responsibility. Mannheim's framework helps explain how this shift reflects not merely changing opinions but a deeper reorganization of the social bases of knowledge. The moral discourses of post-Soviet societies reveal a tension between *ideology* (the residues of collectivist thinking) and *utopia* (visions of a liberal, prosperous future). These competing worldviews coexist, producing hybrid moral orders that are both nostalgic and forward-looking.

In my dissertation, I proposed extending Mannheim's analysis by integrating it with a reflexive understanding of philosophical knowledge. Rather than viewing ideology and utopia as opposites, they can be seen as coexisting moral grammars through which societies negotiate transitions. Post-Soviet transformation, in this sense, is not the replacement of one moral system with another, but the continuous re-articulation of moral legitimacy amid epistemic uncertainty. The sociology of knowledge thus provides a bridge between moral change and social transformation, linking institutional structures to the evolving moral imaginaries that sustain them.

Bourdieu: Fields, Habitus, and Moral Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice offers the next step toward understanding how moral transformation operates at the level of institutions. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), *The Logic of Practice* (1990), and *Pascalian Meditations* (2000), Bourdieu conceptualizes social life as a dynamic interplay between *field*, *capital*, and *habitus*. A *field* is a structured space of positions and struggles, each governed by specific forms of capital–economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. The *habitus* represents the embodied dispositions through which individuals perceive and enact the logic of their field. Morality, within this framework, is not an abstract principle but a practical sense–what Bourdieu calls *le sens pratique*–that guides action in socially meaningful ways.

Welfare institutions, educational systems, and family networks can each be understood as moral fields in which particular forms of *moral capital* are accumulated and contested. During the Soviet era, the dominant moral capital derived from conformity to collective norms and loyalty to the state. With the advent of market reforms, new forms of capital–entrepreneurial initiative, meritocratic achievement, and global mobility–became morally valorized. The redistribution of moral capital redefined social hierarchies: behaviors once condemned as selfish became celebrated as self-reliant, while previously esteemed acts of solidarity were recoded as inefficiency or dependency.

In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu warns that such transformations are not morally neutral; they reshape the symbolic structures that make domination appear natural. The neoliberal moral order produces new forms of symbolic violence by redefining success and failure in moral terms. Those unable to adapt to market logic are not merely disadvantaged–they are morally stigmatized as lazy, dependent, or unworthy. This process, observable across post-Soviet societies, reveals the intimate link between institutional transformation and moral evaluation.

Drawing on my dissertation, I interpret these dynamics as a form of *epistemic displacement*: the replacement of one moral habitus with another, accompanied by the reconfiguration of what counts as moral knowledge. Education, for instance, becomes a site for the inculcation of neoliberal dispositions–autonomy, competition, and self-branding–while welfare institutions internalize the moral vocabulary of responsibility and conditionality. Through Bourdieu's lens, moral change appears not as spontaneous adaptation but as the structured reproduction of symbolic power in new moral terms.

Collins: Interaction Rituals and the Emotional Foundations of Morality

While Durkheim, Mannheim, and Bourdieu illuminate macro- and meso-level dimensions of moral change, Randall Collins' micro-sociology adds a vital emotional and interactional dimension.

In *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), Collins extends Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence to everyday life, showing how moral energy and social solidarity are generated through ritualized interactions. Successful rituals produce *emotional energy*, symbols of group belonging, and a sense of moral confidence; failed rituals generate alienation, cynicism, and distrust.

In post-Soviet contexts, where public institutions have lost much of their moral credibility, the everyday rituals that sustain trust have often broken down. Corruption scandals, bureaucratic arbitrariness, and economic precarity have eroded the emotional foundations of social cohesion. People no longer experience collective rituals–such as national holidays, public education, or workplace cooperation–as morally meaningful. Instead, micro-interactions are saturated with suspicion and instrumentalism. Yet, as Collins suggests, new rituals can also emerge within informal networks, religious movements, or digital communities, generating alternative sources of moral energy.

From the standpoint of philosophical sociology, interaction rituals are not merely behavioral patterns but sites where moral meanings are emotionally charged and reproduced. The transformation of everyday rituals in post-Soviet societies thus reflects deeper shifts in the emotional economy of morality. Where socialist rituals once affirmed collective unity, post-transition rituals often celebrate individual success or spiritual rebirth. The resulting emotional configurations shape how people perceive justice, trust, and belonging.

Integration: A Philosophical-Sociological Model of Moral Transformation

The four perspectives above can be integrated into a single analytical model that conceptualizes moral change as a multi-level process encompassing collective, institutional, and interactional dimensions.

Table 1 – A Philosophical-Sociological Model of Moral Transformation

Level of Analysis	Theoretical Source	Core Mechanism	Manifestation in Post-Soviet Transformation
Macro (Collective)	Durkheim	Transformation of collective representations	Collapse of socialist moral ideals; rise of market-based moral narratives
Meso (Institutional)	Bourdieu	Reconfiguration of fields, capital, and habitus	Moral restructuring of welfare, education, and family institutions
Micro (Interactional)	Collins	Breakdown and reinvention of interaction rituals	Erosion of everyday trust; emergence of new ritual communities
Epistemic-Historical (Transversal)	Mannheim / Himmlegaard	Shifts in ideological and utopian moral imaginaries	Hybrid coexistence of collectivist and neoliberal moral grammars

This model posits that moral change in post-Soviet societies unfolds through recursive interactions between these levels. Economic and political reforms (macro) alter institutional structures (meso), which in turn reshape everyday practices (micro) and emotional investments. Conversely, emerging moral sentiments and local rituals can feed back into institutional and ideological reconfigurations. This dialectical dynamic produces what can be described as *moral hybridization*: the coexistence of contradictory moral logics within the same social space.

The philosophical-sociological approach also introduces a reflexive dimension. As argued in my dissertation, moral change cannot be fully grasped without recognizing that the observer–the sociologist, policymaker, or intellectual–is also embedded within the moral field being studied. Knowledge about moral transformation is itself historically situated and morally charged. Reflexivity, therefore, is not a methodological add-on but a moral stance: an awareness of how our own categories of analysis participate in the moral worlds we describe.

Conceptual Implications

The theoretical synthesis presented here yields three conceptual implications for the study of post-Soviet moral change:

1. Morality as a Relational Field – Morality is neither an individual attribute nor a fixed cultural code but a relational structure linking collective representations, institutional practices, and emotional energies. This challenges both normative moral philosophy and positivist sociology by situating morality within the dynamics of social power and symbolic production.

2. Moral Capital and Institutional Trust – The redistribution of moral capital across welfare, education, and family institutions determines the level of social trust. When institutions lose their moral legitimacy, citizens shift their trust toward informal or personal networks, leading to moral fragmentation.

3. Epistemic Reflexivity and Moral Knowledge – Understanding moral change requires reflexivity about the epistemic position of the researcher. The very categories used to analyze morality–such as "individualism," "solidarity," or "corruption"–are products of specific moral traditions. Philosophical sociology exposes these categories to critical scrutiny, revealing their historical and social contingency.

In summary, philosophical sociology provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing moral transformation in post-Soviet societies. By integrating the macro-level focus on collective representations (Durkheim), the epistemic sensitivity to ideology and utopia (Mannheim), the institutional analysis of habitus and capital (Bourdieu), and the micro-level attention to emotional energy (Collins), it captures the complexity of moral life under conditions of systemic change. This framework sets the stage for the empirical analysis that follows, where welfare institutions, family structures, and educational systems are examined as key moral arenas in the ongoing redefinition of post-Soviet society.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a comparative and interpretive qualitative design, grounded in the principles of *philosophical sociology* developed in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*). The aim is not to measure moral change through quantitative indicators but to interpret how transformations in welfare, family, and education reflect deeper shifts in collective meaning, moral legitimacy, and trust. The research combines a meta-analysis of recent sociological literature (2015–2025) with a reflexive reconstruction of theoretical categories to reveal the underlying moral logic of institutional change.

The analysis focuses on six post-Soviet contexts: Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Lithuania, and Poland. These cases capture variation across geography, religion, and reform trajectories, yet share the experience of transitioning from centrally planned to market-based systems. By examining cross-national patterns of institutional adaptation, the study identifies both region-specific and generalizable features of moral transformation.

Philosophical-Sociological Approach

The methodological foundation lies in *philosophical sociology*, a hybrid approach that integrates epistemological reflexivity with sociological explanation. It assumes that moral categories are socially produced and that transformations in knowledge systems correspond to transformations in moral order. As developed in my dissertation, the method proceeds through three analytical movements:

1. Epistemic reconstruction – uncovering how concepts such as "solidarity," "responsibility," and "corruption" have changed their meaning across historical regimes.

2. Institutional translation – tracing how these changing moral meanings are embodied within welfare, educational, and family institutions.

3. Reflexive interpretation – situating the researcher's own analytical categories within the same historical and moral field, thereby avoiding the illusion of neutrality.

This approach follows Mannheim's relational sociology of knowledge but extends it through Bourdieu's notion of *reflexive epistemology*–the recognition that social analysis is itself a moral act embedded within symbolic hierarchies. In practical terms, it requires constant awareness of how Western academic vocabularies (e.g., "neoliberalism," "individualism") carry their own moral assumptions when applied to post-Soviet societies. The analysis therefore privileges indigenous moral discourses–such as *spravedlivost'* (justice) in Russian, *adalat* (fairness) in Central Asian languages, and *solidarność* (solidarity) in Polish–as interpretive gateways to understanding moral change from within.

Data Sources and Analytical Corpus

The empirical corpus consists of three interrelated components:

1. Academic and policy research (2015–2025) – Peer-reviewed articles, UNDP and World Bank reports, and regional studies on welfare, education, and family reforms in post-Soviet countries (e.g., Abbott et al., 2019; Uyan-Semerci, 2022; Wanner, 2021; Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023).

2. Qualitative ethnographic accounts and national surveys – Materials from the European Values Study (EVS), World Values Survey (WVS), and national sociological institutes providing data on moral attitudes, trust, and value orientations.

3. Textual and discursive materials – Government white papers, education curricula, and public debates that reveal shifting moral vocabularies in institutional discourse.

The selection criteria follow two principles: temporal proximity (publications within the last decade to ensure contemporary relevance) and regional representativeness (inclusion of both Eastern European and Central Asian cases). This combination of sources enables a triangulated understanding of moral change that integrates macro-institutional data with micro-cultural narratives.

Analytical Procedure

Data interpretation proceeds through hermeneutic reconstruction, guided by the theoretical model established in Section 2. Each institutional domain–welfare, family, education–is examined as a *moral field* (Bourdieu) structured by competing collective representations (Durkheim), ideological and utopian imaginaries (Mannheim), and emotional dynamics of trust (Collins). The analysis involves four steps:

1. Identifying dominant moral discourses within each field.

2. Mapping their relation to structural reforms and policy shifts.

3. Analyzing the redistribution of *moral capital* and its effect on trust.

4. Synthesizing findings into a comparative pattern of moral transformation.

Interpretation follows a reflexive stance: rather than treating "moral decline" or "value loss" as empirical facts, these notions are examined as social narratives reflecting struggles over legitimacy and meaning.

Ethical and Epistemic Considerations

Given that the study addresses moral questions in societies marked by political sensitivity and historical trauma, it adheres to two ethical principles: interpretive respect and epistemic humility. Interpretive respect requires that local moral vocabularies be understood on their own terms, without imposing external normative judgments. Epistemic humility entails acknowledging that any analysis of morality is itself value-laden and partial. The aim is not to prescribe moral standards but to elucidate the social mechanisms through which moral meanings are produced and transformed.

Finally, the study recognizes that knowledge about post-Soviet transformation is itself part of the moral field it analyzes. Scholarly discourse, especially from Western institutions, often functions as a site of symbolic power that legitimizes particular interpretations of "transition," "modernization," or "development." A philosophical-sociological methodology seeks to uncover these epistemic asymmetries,

thereby contributing to a more reflexive and ethically responsible sociology of post-Soviet change.

Results and discussion

The welfare systems of post-Soviet societies occupy a crucial position in the moral geography of transition. During the socialist era, welfare provision was more than an administrative apparatus–it embodied a moral economy based on collective responsibility, universal inclusion, and the symbolic reciprocity between state and citizen. The dissolution of the Soviet model disrupted this moral compact. Welfare institutions, once the tangible manifestation of solidarity, were rapidly reoriented toward market principles of efficiency and conditionality.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, most post-Soviet states adopted neoliberal welfare reforms inspired by international financial institutions. These reforms emphasized cost-efficiency, targeting, and privatization (Cook, 2017; Leitner & Witte, 2020). By the mid-2010s, this logic had crystallized into a distinct moral discourse: one that framed welfare dependency as a moral failure rather than a social condition. In Russia and Ukraine, for instance, public debates around "deservingness" and "social parasitism" echoed Western welfare moralities but were infused with post-Soviet experiences of economic collapse and corruption (Zhurzhenko, 2021).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this transformation represents a profound reconfiguration of moral capital. Under socialism, moral worth was derived from collective contribution–loyalty to work, conformity to social norms, and participation in collective institutions. In the market era, moral recognition became tied to self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and adaptability. The state's withdrawal from universal welfare provision created what scholars describe as *moral stratification*–a symbolic hierarchy in which the poor are not merely economically marginalized but morally devalued (Stephenson, 2018).

In Central Asia, similar dynamics unfolded within distinct cultural frameworks. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the introduction of "targeted social assistance" redefined the moral relationship between the state and citizens. Field studies show that welfare officers now speak of recipients not as comrades but as "clients" or "cases" (Uyan-Semerci, 2022). The very language of welfare has shifted from collective duty to individualized responsibility. This semantic shift reveals the epistemic displacement described in my dissertation: the replacement of a *solidaristic epistemology* with a *managerial epistemology* of morality.

Durkheim's concept of *anomie* helps interpret the moral consequences of this shift. As collective representations of solidarity disintegrate, individuals experience moral disorientation. The expectation that everyone should "take care of themselves" undermines the moral legitimacy of public institutions. Survey data from the World Values Survey (2022) show that generalized trust in state institutions across post-Soviet countries remains among the lowest in the world, with only 19–27% of respondents expressing confidence in welfare systems. This moral distrust is not merely institutional but emotional: people no longer perceive welfare as an expression of shared fate but as a site of moral surveillance and humiliation.

However, this process is not unidirectional. In several Eastern European contexts, particularly Poland and Lithuania, the 2010s witnessed partial re-collectivization of welfare through family-centered and pronatalist policies (Szelewa, 2019). These reforms sought to reconstruct moral legitimacy by rearticulating welfare as care for the "nation's families." While reinforcing conservative gender norms, they also restored a sense of moral reciprocity between state and citizen. Thus, post-Soviet welfare reforms exemplify what I term moral hybridization: the coexistence of neoliberal responsibility and nationalist solidarity within the same institutional field.

If the welfare state represents the moral contract between citizens and the polity, the family constitutes the moral contract between generations. Across post-Soviet societies, the family remains a resilient moral institution–a locus of both continuity and transformation. During the Soviet era, the family was officially subordinated to the state's ideological mission but functioned as an informal moral refuge, preserving traditions of care, reciprocity, and endurance. In the market era, the family has re-emerged as both a moral and economic safety net.

Ethnographic studies in Russia, Ukraine, and Central Asia demonstrate that the family has absorbed many of the welfare functions once performed by the state (Matza, 2018; Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023). Informal caregiving, remittance economies, and intergenerational cohabitation are not merely coping mechanisms–they represent the moralization of survival. The family, in this sense, has become a *moral field* where trust, obligation, and sacrifice are renegotiated under new socio-economic pressures.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* illuminates how these transformations are internalized. The post-Soviet habitus embodies contradictory moral dispositions: collectivist loyalty inherited from socialism and individualistic self-responsibility demanded by market life. This duality generates what Mannheim (1936/2013) called *cultural ambivalence*–a state in which conflicting moral grammars coexist within the same consciousness. Parents who teach their children to be self-sufficient also emphasize mutual dependence; young adults pursuing global mobility still rely on familial networks for moral orientation.

In Central Asia, the moral function of the family intertwines with religion and gender. Islamic revival since the 1990s has reintroduced moral codes emphasizing obedience, modesty, and patriarchal protection. Yet these norms coexist with neoliberal consumerism and globalized youth cultures. In Uzbekistan, young women often describe moral virtue in both religious and entrepreneurial terms–being a "good Muslim" and a "self-reliant woman" are no longer perceived as contradictory (Khalid, 2022). This synthesis reflects what Collins (2004) would describe as *moral energy circulation*: the recharging of moral emotions through new ritual forms that blend traditional piety with modern aspiration.

The family's role as a moral refuge has, however, intensified social inequalities. In contexts where state welfare has weakened, families with stronger social and financial capital can reproduce privilege, while others face chronic moral pressure to "succeed" despite systemic barriers. This moralization of success manifests in parental discourses equating moral worth with achievement–a shift from *collective virtue* to *performative virtue*. Durkheim would recognize this as a moral individualism detached from collective moral regulation, leading to heightened anxiety and intergenerational tension.

Interestingly, some scholars note the re-politicization of family morality through pro-natalist and nationalist campaigns (Szelewa, 2019; Brik & Stepurko, 2021). The family is no longer only a private moral unit but a symbol of collective regeneration. In Russia's official discourse, for example, motherhood is celebrated as patriotic duty, and the "traditional family" is positioned as a moral counterweight to Western liberalism. This state-driven moralization blurs the boundary between ethical intimacy and political ideology–a phenomenon my philosophical-sociological lens interprets as *institutional moral colonization*: the state's attempt to regain symbolic power by occupying the moral terrain of everyday life.

Among all institutions, education has undergone perhaps the most profound moral transformation. Under the socialist regime, education was explicitly moralized as a collective project: schools were tasked with cultivating the "New Soviet Person,"

embodying civic duty, discipline, and commitment to the common good. Knowledge and morality were inseparable; to learn was to serve society. The post-Soviet educational reforms of the 1990s and 2000s severed this link, replacing moral collectivism with meritocratic individualism.

By the 2010s, most post-Soviet education systems had adopted Western-style curricula emphasizing "competencies," "critical thinking," and "global competitiveness." While progressive in appearance, these reforms often introduced a neoliberal ethos of self-marketing and performance. Teachers in Kazakhstan and Ukraine report that moral education has been reduced to behavioral management–"teaching responsibility" now means encouraging students to manage their own success in a competitive environment (OECD, 2020; Silova & Auld, 2021).

From a Durkheimian viewpoint, this shift signifies the decline of education as a moral institution of integration. Whereas schools once transmitted shared moral categories, they now function as spaces of differentiation and symbolic struggle. Students internalize not a sense of collective purpose but an individualized moral logic: success as virtue, failure as fault. The weakening of collective rituals–school assemblies, civic celebrations, moral instruction–has diminished what Collins calls *interaction ritual chains*, depriving students of emotional experiences of belonging. The absence of moral effervescence contributes to cynicism and disengagement.

At the same time, education remains a potent arena for the reconstruction of moral legitimacy.

In the Baltic states and Poland, post-2015 civic education reforms have sought to re-anchor morality in democratic participation and European citizenship (Saar & Kutsar, 2020). In Central Asia, new curricula integrate moral lessons from national traditions (*Adab* in Kazakhstan, *Tarbiya* in Uzbekistan) with civic values. These hybrid reforms exemplify the coexistence of global and local moral imaginaries. As my dissertation argues, such hybridity reflects the epistemic pluralism of modernity: moral systems no longer follow a single logic but exist as overlapping fields of meaning.

The neoliberalization of education also reshapes the moral status of teachers. In Soviet times, the teacher was a moral authority, embodying both knowledge and virtue. In the new order, teachers are increasingly evaluated through performance metrics and market logic. Their moral authority has become precarious, producing what some describe as *moral fatigue* (Johnson & Silova, 2018). Yet teachers continue to reproduce moral norms through everyday interactions–what Bourdieu would term *practical morality*. Even within constrained systems, moral energy circulates through small rituals of care, humor, and dignity.

Across the three domains–welfare, family, and education–a common pattern emerges: the moral field of post-Soviet societies is characterized by hybridization, ambivalence, and reflexive adaptation. The following comparative synthesis highlights the main moral trajectories:

Table 2 – Comparative synthesis

Institutional Domain	Dominant Socialist Moral Logic	Dominant Post-Transition Moral Logic	Emergent Hybrid Forms
Welfare	Solidarity, equality, state responsibility	Individual responsibility, market efficiency	Nationalist paternalism; targeted 'moral deservingness'
Family	Collective reciprocity, gender complementarity	Pragmatic self-reliance, emotional individualism	Religious-traditional revival; moral entrepreneurship
Education	Civic duty, moral collectivism	Meritocracy, performative selfhood	Hybrid civic-traditional curricula; emotional pedagogy

This pattern supports the theoretical argument developed earlier: moral change in post-Soviet societies is not linear but dialectical. Each institution mediates the encounter between residual collectivist values and emergent neoliberal rationalities. The result is a *moral syncretism* that defies binary classifications of "decay" or "progress."

Durkheim's idea of *moral density* helps explain why trust and moral regulation remain fragile: institutional fragmentation weakens collective effervescence. Mannheim's framework clarifies how competing moral worldviews–nostalgic socialism, neoliberal modernity, religious conservatism–coexist as ideological and utopian projects. Bourdieu's field

theory reveals how moral capital is redistributed, often reinforcing inequality. Collins' ritual analysis illuminates the micro-level emotional processes that sustain or erode moral cohesion.

Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that moral transformation in post-Soviet societies operates as a reorganization of collective meaning rather than a simple loss of values. The moral field remains vibrant but pluralized. What is at stake is not the disappearance of morality but its redistribution across new social spaces–NGOs, online communities, religious associations, and family networks–that now compete with the state for moral authority.

The empirical findings confirm that the moral transformation of post-Soviet societies cannot be understood as a simple moral "decline" or "loss of values." Instead, it represents a reconfiguration of collective meaning, in which moral categories are redistributed across institutions, practices, and emotional relations. Each domain–welfare, family, and education–demonstrates a dynamic interplay between inherited collectivist ethics and emergent neoliberal rationalities. This hybrid condition illustrates what I have elsewhere described as *epistemic pluralism*– a coexistence of multiple, historically layered moral grammars within the same social field.

Durkheim's conception of morality as a *collective representation* provides a crucial interpretive key. When collective representations disintegrate, individuals lose the external moral referents that organize their actions, resulting in states of *anomie*. Yet, as Durkheim emphasized, new moral forms inevitably arise to replace the old. In post-Soviet societies, the dissolution of socialist solidarity did not produce moral emptiness but rather moral heterogeneity. Informal economies of care, religious revival, and new civic movements constitute efforts to rebuild moral order under new conditions. These emergent moralities, however, lack the universality that characterized the socialist moral system; they operate within fragmented moral publics defined by class, generation, and geography.

The shift from collective to individualized morality mirrors a broader transformation of the moral epistemology underlying social life. Where socialism framed morality as a matter of shared duty, the market transition reframed it as a question of *personal virtue* and *self-responsibility*. This change in moral grammar reflects what Mannheim (1936/2013) called a change in the social bases of knowledge–a transformation in who has the authority to define truth, justice, and legitimacy. The moral expert of socialism was the state; the moral expert of neoliberalism is the self-managing individual. This epistemic shift decentralizes morality but also destabilizes its social grounding, leading to a condition of moral reflexivity: individuals must now justify their own moral positions without stable collective criteria.

Social trust is the emotional and cognitive foundation of any moral order. Its erosion across post-Soviet societies reflects not only institutional corruption but also the broader disintegration of shared moral narratives. As Collins (2004) would argue, trust is produced through *interaction rituals* that generate emotional energy and shared symbols. When welfare offices become sites of humiliation, when schools lose their integrative rituals, and when families are fractured by migration, the emotional circuits of morality break down. What follows is not merely cynicism but the loss of the very emotional energy that sustains moral motivation.

The empirical evidence indicates that trust has not vanished entirely but has migrated to smaller, more intimate circles–family, friends, religious communities, and online networks (Abbott et al., 2019; Wanner, 2021). This re-localization of trust illustrates Bourdieu's notion of *field-specific moral capital*. Individuals invest their moral energies in those arenas where recognition is possible. Yet this reallocation also fragments the moral landscape: localized trust does not automatically translate into civic trust. In Durkheimian terms, moral density decreases when trust becomes privatized.

At the same time, these micro-communities can serve as laboratories of moral innovation. In Central Asia, for example, women's cooperatives and youth volunteer groups have reintroduced practices of mutual aid reminiscent of the socialist ethos, but articulated in a new moral vocabulary of dignity, self-help, and faith (Uyan-Semerci, 2022). Such examples demonstrate that moral reconstruction is possible even under conditions of structural fragility. The critical question is whether these emergent moral practices can scale up to reconstitute institutional trust. Philosophical sociology suggests that this depends on whether collective representations–new myths of belonging and moral purpose–can take hold at the societal level.

Bourdieu's framework illuminates the unequal distribution of moral legitimacy across post-Soviet societies. The capacity to appear "moral" in the public eye–what I term *moral capital*–has become a new axis of stratification. Those with economic and cultural capital can more easily align themselves with the moral ideals of the market: self-reliance, professionalism, success. Those who fail to conform are

not only excluded materially but also morally stigmatized. This is a new form of symbolic violence: moral worth is conflated with market performance.

This phenomenon also extends to the international level. The global discourse of "transition" and "modernization" operates as a moral hierarchy that positions post-Soviet societies as "lagging" or "immature" versions of Western modernity. Such narratives constitute what my dissertation identifies as *epistemic domination*: the power to define what counts as moral progress. By exposing these hierarchies, philosophical sociology performs a critical ethical function–it reveals how claims to objectivity are often moral claims in disguise.

Nevertheless, moral capital is not fixed. It can be contested through alternative symbolic practices. Religious and civic movements across the region have begun to reclaim moral authority from the state and market. For example, faith-based charities in Kazakhstan and Ukraine reframe social aid not as "service delivery" but as *moral duty*, reintroducing compassion and reciprocity into welfare practice (Rzayeva & Turaeva, 2023). These initiatives reconstitute moral capital around collective responsibility, albeit within new institutional forms. Such developments suggest that moral innovation often emerges from the peripheries of formal power.

Philosophical sociology reveals that moral change is not only structural or discursive but also affective. As Collins (2004) demonstrates, moral energy–the capacity to act ethically–is sustained through successful interaction rituals. When individuals experience humiliation, insecurity, or isolation, their moral energy diminishes, leading to withdrawal or cynicism. The emotional texture of post-Soviet life–marked by nostalgia, fatigue, and adaptive irony–thus has direct implications for moral agency. Many respondents in ethnographic studies describe morality not as a set of principles but as a feeling of "inner exhaustion" or "moral tiredness" (Matza, 2018). This emotional fatigue is itself a social fact: it reflects the mismatch between inherited moral expectations and contemporary institutional realities.

At the epistemic level, moral change also entails transformations in what counts as moral knowledge. As my dissertation argues, moral epistemology is not universal but socially situated. The moral reasoning that once legitimated collective sacrifice no longer resonates in societies where survival depends on entrepreneurial adaptability. However, this does not mean that moral reasoning has disappeared–it has diversified. Competing moral epistemologies now coexist: utilitarian rationalities of the market,

deontological legacies of socialism, and virtue-based religious frameworks. The resulting pluralism can be both productive and destabilizing. It allows for moral creativity but complicates consensus on shared norms.

From this perspective, the moral condition of post-Soviet societies resembles what Mannheim called relationism: a state in which truth and morality are understood as relational to social position and historical context. Relationism, when reflexively embraced, can lead to moral tolerance and pluralism; when experienced passively, it can produce relativism and moral disorientation. The challenge for post-Soviet societies is to transform relationism into reflexivity–to turn awareness of moral plurality into a resource for dialogue rather than a source of cynicism.

Philosophical Sociology and the Question of Moral Agency

Finally, the discussion returns to the question of agency. If moral systems are socially produced, can individuals act morally in the absence of stable collective norms? Philosophical sociology answers affirmatively but conditionally: moral agency is possible through reflexivity. To act morally under conditions of moral flux requires the capacity to recognize the social origins of one's own moral categories. This reflexive stance transforms moral behavior into an act of critical awareness.

In my dissertation, I argued that philosophical sociology occupies a unique position between moral philosophy and empirical sociology. It does not prescribe moral norms but clarifies the social conditions under which moral reasoning occurs. From this vantage point, the moral transformation of post-Soviet societies is not a pathology but a laboratory of modernity–a site where new forms of moral consciousness are being forged through struggle, contradiction, and adaptation. The challenge is to cultivate institutions capable of sustaining moral reflexivity without reverting to ideological closure.

Durkheim's optimism remains instructive here: even amid anomie, the moral impulse to seek meaning persists. The philosophical-sociological task is to understand how that impulse is socially organized. The post-Soviet experience demonstrates that when collective morality collapses, individuals and communities become active moral entrepreneurs, experimenting with new forms of trust, care, and legitimacy. These micro-innovations, though fragmented, may constitute the embryonic moral frameworks of a new social order.

Conclusion

The moral transformation of post-Soviet societies represents far more than a political or economic transition. It is a reorganization of collective meaning that has redrawn the moral boundaries of welfare, family, and education–the three institutions that once anchored socialist solidarity. The analysis presented here, grounded in the framework of *philosophical sociology* developed in my dissertation (*The Philosophical Sociology of Knowledge*), demonstrates that moral change unfolds through interlocking epistemic, institutional, and emotional processes.

Durkheim's theory of collective representations reveals how the collapse of socialist ideals generated anomie but also opened space for new solidarities. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge shows that moral reasoning shifted from state-centered ideology to individualized relationism, producing both pluralism and moral uncertainty. Bourdieu's field theory exposes the redistribution of moral capital and the symbolic hierarchies that accompany neoliberal reform. Collins' interaction-ritual perspective highlights the erosion–and selective reinvention–of emotional energy and social trust. Together, these lenses capture a complex moral landscape in which inherited collectivism, emergent individualism, and revived traditionalism coexist in tension.

Across Central Asia and Eastern Europe, citizens have responded to institutional fragmentation by relocating trust to smaller communities–families, religious networks, civic associations–thereby sustaining moral life in localized forms. This moral pluralization constitutes both a challenge and a resource. It fragments shared legitimacy, yet it also fosters experimentation with new moral vocabularies of dignity, reciprocity, and responsibility.

The broader implication is that post-Soviet societies should not be interpreted through the binary of moral loss versus modernization. Rather, they illustrate how morality itself is historically contingent, relational, and reflexively produced. A philosophical-sociological perspective reveals that every social transformation is simultaneously a moral transformation of knowledge: a redefinition of what counts as virtue, justice, and truth.

Future research should therefore move beyond normative diagnoses toward comparative inquiries into moral hybridization–the ways in which global neoliberalism, local traditions, and post-socialist legacies interact to generate new moral fields. By tracing these intersections, sociology can recover its ethical vocation: to understand, rather than judge, how societies continually reinvent the moral foundations of coexistence.

Gratitude, conflict of interest

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