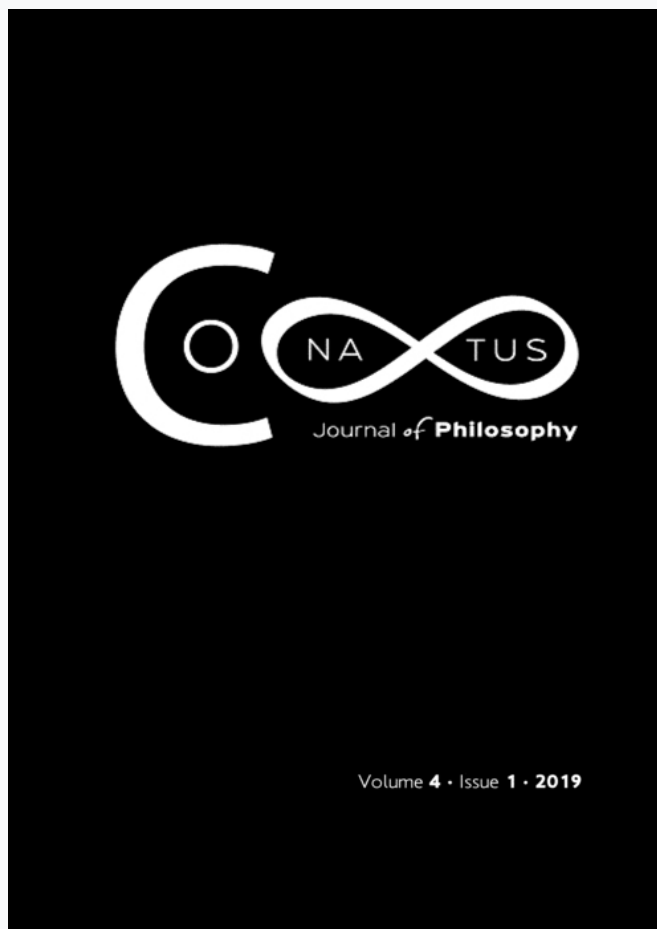


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# Question about the Ethics of Yalta Agreements in 1945. Archaeology of Power in Historiographical Discourses

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## Abstract

*The Crimea (Yalta) Conference is by all means an extremely complex historical event. Any attempt to estimate its role and significance without analyzing its ethical components would unavoidably result in unduly simplifying the historical reality of the time, as well as in forming erroneous assumptions that would necessarily be used in the analysis of the causes of Cold War. A thorough examination will show that as far as the 'ethical' issues are concerned, there are significant developments with regard to general methodology, as well as its application to the sources. Generations of historians who have addressed the issue of Yalta Conference, although they have not been able to form a scientific, distinct 'ethical' tradition so far, have developed all the necessary prerequisites for its establishment. This is evident in the possibility of segmenting the issue in two parts on the one hand, and on the other in the availability of sufficient sources, structured databases, and selected outstanding works. Still, there are no studies about the Yalta Conference so far that address exclusively ethical issues concerning 'good' and 'evil,' 'morality,' 'duty,' and 'honor.' Although historiographical approaches are to a large extent dependent upon ethical viewpoints, in the case of Yalta agreements so far there have been no techniques available, so as to connect historical accounts with ideology, and historical facts with their philosophical background. In a sense, the situation is quite the same as it is with the study of prehistory: although there is an abundance of data and facts that can be primarily processed, there are no methodological guidelines, nor any devices to classify and explain them. This is also typical for any question raised about the ethics of the Yalta agreements in February 1945.*

**Key-words:** *ethics; historical events; etiquette; archaeology of knowledge; the Yalta conference*

## I. Introduction

**T**he relevance: The Yalta Conference, where the heads of the three powers met, is a complex system of events, one that had a huge effect on some among the deepest layers of the human condition

henceforth, at least in several areas: politically, militarily and economically. The overwhelming systemic events of February 1945 that took place in the southern coast of Crimea produced historians,<sup>1</sup> political scientists,<sup>2</sup> and diplomats.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that such a complicated socio-anthropological phenomenon would necessarily carry a powerful charge of ideological impetus. It could be no different than this, and it seems very difficult to clearly identify the various 'charges,' and produce a detailed account of all their parameters. Anyway, professional historians (to a large degree the creators of our knowledge concerning the Yalta Conference related events) often ignore philosophical questions as such, or neglect them as falling under the domain of political science. But how can they be considered as such? Presumably, the philosophical questions historians are often faced with are comfortably hidden under the veil of war ethics, or even etiquette. Nevertheless, the lack of works that address directly the ethical issues that emerge from the Yalta Conference does not mean that these issues have not been studied contextually from various other aspects. It is crucial to identify and highlight these nuances, and this is mainly due to the fact that without any thorough factor analysis that goes deeply into the ethics that underlie historical events, it is absolutely impossible to re-create an objective picture of the development of modern historiography concerning the Crimea (Yalta) Conference in 1945.

*The object of research:* The historiography on the Yalta Conference, especially the way historians have dealt with the ethical issues related to it.

*The purpose:* To suggest a structure for a possible historiography of the ethical issues connected to the Yalta Conference.

*Objectives:* To identify the range of operational issues related to the stated problem; to classify data according to the objectives and the purpose of this article; to identify the main strengths and weaknesses of modern historiography when it comes to ethical issues related with the Yalta Conference in 1945; to suggest measures on purpose of eliminating any shortcomings, as well as to strengthen any virtues.

*The contribution of the predecessors:* So far there have been no essential targeted attempts undertaken by historians to study the ethics (either in terms of morality, or of ethics) of the Yalta agreements. Consequently, historiography has been kept away of this field due to lack of sources. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Felix J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (New York: Publisher Cambridge University Press, 2014); Serhii M. Plokyh, *Yalta: The Price of Peace* (New York: Penguin, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Сергей В.Юрченко, *Ялтинская Конференция 1945 Года: Хроника Создания Нового Мира* (Симферополь: Крым, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Edvard Stettinius, *Roosevelt and the Russians: The Yalta Conference* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1949).

from time to time, several researchers have attempted to determine the scope of the questions related to the ethics of the Yalta agreements. They did it rather in terms of populist approaches, or by means of combining historical and historiographical problems. Some among the studies that belong to this field are those by historians and researchers such as: N. Tolstoy, G. Hajdarova, V. Pechatnov, A. Isakov, S. I. Losev, and Y. Yurchenko.<sup>4</sup> Some general methodological suggestions have also been recommended by the author of this article.

*The main content:* It seems that the issue that regards the examination of the ethics of Yalta agreements has at least two segments. Although these segments are thematically linked, they are still strictly distinct as far as methodology is concerned.

## II. Segments

The first segment concerns etiquette, as well as diplomatic ethics. In other words it deals with the historical reality that is related to the behavior, the conversations, the remarks, the emotions, the letters, etc. of the participants in Yalta summit in 1945. There are questions that regard their relationship to each other (within their delegations), and between the negotiating partners from other countries. This set of issues is related to their behavior during the official negotiations and formal banquets, meetings and informal ‘carousing.’ This segment is complex and by no means unequivocal. It covers issues such as the nature of the protocol and the ethical views of individuals. For example, it examines the order of the signatures that were put on the documents that were signed in Yalta. Which exactly should the order be? A fair suggestion would be that they should appear in alphabetical order. But according to which language, English or Russian? It seems that there are more questions than answers, which is a typical situation in cases as such, when a certain issue de facto exists, its importance has been made manifest, but there is no standard way of dealing with it, while at the same time it doesn’t belong to a single field. In other words, there is a massive amount of facts, but only a scarce amount of terms; an abundance of events, but scarcity of reflection.

The second segment is associated with assessing the Yalta agreements as an aggregate, as a kind of a solid historical co-emergence. How ethically justified was it to decide the fate of Poland, Yugoslavia, France, etc., despite

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<sup>4</sup> Олег К. Шевченко, “Ялтинская Конференция 1945 г.: В Гносеологическом Поле Философии,” *Культура Народов Причерноморья* 259 (2013): 197; Олег К. Шевченко, “Этические Вопросы Крымской Конференции 1945 г. с Точки Зрения Философии Истории,” *Культура Народов Причерноморья* 274 (2014): 95-97.

the fact that no representatives of these countries were invited to the negotiations? Is it that the heads of the three powers, the USSR, the USA, and the UK, had the moral right to determine the future of the world just because their countries were those who made the most decisive contributions to the Great Victory? Even assuming that they did, however, does this also give them the moral right to violate the etiquette? The question is not as simple as it seems. Any answer to this seemingly banal theoretical question may instantaneously result in a hail of stones by the champions of national pride from various directions. For example, if the answer is 'yes,' one should also have to accept that the decision regarding the partition of Poland was equally fair. In case the answer is 'no,' one would be justified in questioning the relevance of the Great Victory, stressing the ethical inconsistency of arrangements as such, and even challenging the justification of the fight against Germany. Such a view, however, would obviously be unappealing to those who are attached or sympathetic to the Soviet era. Another cluster of related questions regard the degree to which the solutions suggested by Roosevelt, who was seriously ill at the time, or by Churchill, who admittedly was in the habit of consuming large quantities of alcohol daily, should be considered legitimate, at least from the point of view of common sense and ethics. If the answer to this is 'no,' then the whole reality of Yalta in 1945 begins to acquire the nightmarish caricature features of a tragicomic farce, and one may even reach the conclusion that the Yalta meeting was just a relapse of universal evil, this time substantiated in the face of Stalin.<sup>5</sup>

These segments cover most of the issues associated with the questions on 'ethical Yalta 1945.' It is obvious that all of them are offspring born to the same mother; historical facts need to remain long in the womb of philosophy until they have reached a state of maturity. When they emerge out of it, however, they immediately become subject to the most tyrannical nurse, ideology. Ideology becomes the source of various ethical and scientific problems by forging powerful weapons to be used in the 'information war,' and is usually connected with scientific populism. And this is typical for both sides of the Atlantic. Let's try to trace the structure of historical knowledge concerning the stated issues by starting with the sources.

### III. The sources

The sources of the first segment are threefold. The first source consists in the extant official conference documents, mostly two well-known collections

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<sup>5</sup> "Ronald Reagan, Statement on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Yalta Conference, February 5, 1985," online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, accessed May 29, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=37947>.

published in the USSR<sup>6</sup> and the USA. Of the greatest interest is the collection that was published in the USA,<sup>7</sup> since the Soviet one mostly includes white papers, technical documents and edited official texts that record the meeting, and therefore from an ethical viewpoint it has little to inform us on. On the contrary, the American collection abounds with alternative recordings of the same meetings, and is much more outspoken in pursuing ‘author profanity:’ it contains more scrupulous notes concerning the emotions of the negotiating parties by mentioning instances of applause, attempts to leave the table, and other physical activities. But the American account is not that consistent, and this is mostly due to the fact that it wasn’t faxed or otherwise duplicated. In that respect, the Soviet texts are much more reliable, since they were precisely duplicated, which resulted in the quality publication consisting of facsimile copies of the five texts of Yalta from ‘Stalin’s folder.’ The comparative analysis of these sources reveals with the highest possible accuracy the emotions expressed around the table of the negotiations, and monitors the cynical vocabulary that was used to refer to the major political leaders of the time in Europe, as well as to address prevailing political problems.

The second significant source consists in the memoirs kept by various participants. At present there are available more than two dozen volumes of recollections compiled by political and senior military officials, as well as about forty memoirs by junior attendants that make extensive mentions to the Yalta Conference. To a large extent these memoirs address various ethical issues related to the way the members of the three delegations communicated with each other: a memoir by Admiral Leahy, the official British Cadogan, another by the Soviet Ambassador in the United States Gromyko, one by a female soldier named Zazvonova, another one by a waitress called Shulgina, and many others.<sup>8</sup> However, it is still difficult to establish any methodological filter, by means of which the actual facts that took place in 1945 in Yalta would be exfoliated from the authors’ personal commitments, especially since some of these were published as late as in 1972. And even if such a filter, one that would eliminate ideological issues owed

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<sup>6</sup> Андрей А. Громыко (ред.), *Советский Союз на Международных Конференциях Периода Великой Отечественной Войны 1941-1945 гг. Крымская Конференция Руководителей Трех Союзных Держав – СССР, США и Великобритании (4-11 февр. 1945 г.): Сборник Документов* (Москва: Политиздат, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, *Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta 1945* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1955).

<sup>8</sup> Елена Н. Дорошенко, Олег А. Шамрин, Сергей В. Юрченко (ред.), *Крымская Конференция 1945 Года в Воспоминаниях и Документах* (Симферополь: Крым, 2006), 27-99; also 154-204.

to the Cold War ideological controversy could be agreed upon, still the perspectives adopted in personal memoirs are far from objective.

The third source consists in photographic and video material, mostly chronicles. There is more than sufficient material of this kind that may serve as an additional source to the material of the first segment. Moreover, in the Russian media have appeared several photographs from Stalin's folder, material that somehow was not censored, although censorship has been typical during the Cold War for USSR and USA media.<sup>9</sup> There is interesting archival footage taken by an amateur from the Roosevelt museum, as well as a selection of documentary photographs from the collection of Sir Winston Churchill.

The sources of the second segment are three, and they are thematically distinct to each other. Of particular significance is especially an array of two-party diplomatic documents, that is, English and French, French and Soviet, American and French. There is also an array associated with the development of the French problem. At present there is no general material that could serve as guidance for historians on Yalta-related sources. Concerning this there have been some individual attempts consisting in a series of articles by Gibianskogo (focusing on South-Eastern Europe),<sup>10</sup> and some monographs produced by Koshkin and Slavinskogo (on the Japanese issue).<sup>11</sup> But this is just the background of the body of these sources. There are no comparative tables (moral values, moral obligations) for the largest diplomatic fora of 30-40s (from Munich to Paris Conference), which would facilitate moral judgements on grounds of 'fairness,' 'honor,' etc. concerning the decisions made in Yalta. Concerning this I stress that the problem is not the lack of methodology, and in the absence of qualitative and structured database.

The ethical and ethical-historiographical nuances of Yalta 1945, as I already claimed, have by and large been neglected so far by scholars. There are only a few vivid mentions that, nonetheless, have not received extensive attention. Some historiographical 'nuggets' can be located in the work of Crimean researchers: as far as the Crimean School is concerned, the Yalta Conference in 1945 has never been merely a historical fact. On the contrary, to Crimean historians the ethical aspects of the issue have always been of great significance, as it is evident in Gurkovich's sketches, in the

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<sup>9</sup> Наталья А. Нарочницкая (ред.), *Ялта-45. Начертания Нового Мира* (Москва: Вече, 2010), 41-210.

<sup>10</sup> Леонид Я. Гибянский, "Вопрос о Болгарии, Румынии и Венгрии на Крымской Конференции," *Советское Славяноведение* 2 (1982): 9-22.

<sup>11</sup> Борис Н. Славинский, *Ялтинская Конференция и Проблема "Северных Территорий"* (Москва: Новина, 1996).

insightful psychological account of the Yalta events provided by Yurchenko,<sup>12</sup> or in the original cultural accounts by Shamrin.<sup>13</sup> In the mainland of Ukraine of major interest – instead of historical events – usually appear to be issues related to personal factors, as well as an ‘eternal’ metaphysical question, as it is evident in utterances such as “Yalta: Triumph of good or evil?,” “Yalta became Ukraine’s funeral home,” that are indicative of the depth of the issues addressed. And if the first segment stands for the most important aspect for Crimean scholars, Ukrainian historians undoubtedly are much more interested in the second one.<sup>14</sup>

The situation becomes even more complicated when it comes to Russian historiography. Scholars from Russia pose no questions about the ethics of Yalta; they only seem to be bringing forward unambiguous and quite positive views. The emphasis is usually put on a set of clear answers, leaving aside any ideological issues and considering unnecessary any research concerning the ethics of the agreements.<sup>15</sup>

The examination of the ethics of the Yalta agreements usually leads to two distinct approaches, the ‘humiliation and insult’ one, and the ‘it was what it was’ respectively. The first approach is more or less endorsed by Polish, Lithuanian and French scholars, who are inclined to discuss Yalta in terms of ‘treason,’ ‘conspiracy,’ etc. American and British scholars, on the other hand, often make extensive use of terms such as ‘surrender interests,’ ‘moral loss,’ ‘strong-willed failure’ of the US-British delegation as a consequence of the loss of Self-Profiting after the war.<sup>16</sup>

The proponents of the ‘it was what it was’ view concerning Yalta just consider it as a typical instance of diplomatic struggle, a ‘pure’ historical event, one that cannot be a proper subject of neither moral nor ethical reflection, the outcome of rational calculation in cold blood, exactly like a game of chess or poker.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Сергей В. Юрченко, *Ялтинская Конференция 1945 Года: Хроника Создания Нового Мира*, 95-154; also 312-315.

<sup>13</sup> Олег А. Шамрин, “Арденнская Операция и ее Влияние на Позиции Союзников на Крымской Конференции,” *Историческое Наследие Крыма* 9 (2005): 9-11.

<sup>14</sup> Oleg K. Shevchenko, “Yalta-45: Ukrainian Science Historiographic Realia in Globalization and Universalism Era,” *Science and Education, a New Dimension. Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 2 (2013): 39-42.

<sup>15</sup> Oleg K. Shevchenko, “Source Study of the Crimean Conference 1945: Scientific Ethics Issue,” *Вісник Львівського Університету Серія Міжнародні Відносини* 35 (2014): 44-50.

<sup>16</sup> Felix Wittmer, *The Yalta Betrayal. Data on the Decline and Fall of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (Caldwell: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1961).

<sup>17</sup> Buhitte D. Russell, *Decisions at Yalta. An Appraisal of Summit Diplomacy* (Wilm-

#### IV. Conclusion

The Crimea (Yalta) Conference is by all means an extremely complex historical event. Any attempt to estimate its role and significance without analyzing its ethical components would unavoidably result in unduly simplifying the historical reality of the time, as well as in forming erroneous assumptions that would necessarily be used in the analysis of the causes of Cold War. A thorough examination will show that as far as the 'ethical' issues are concerned, there are significant developments with regard to general methodology, as well as its application to the sources. Generations of historians who have addressed the issue of Yalta Conference, although they have not been able to form a scientific, distinct 'ethical' tradition so far, have developed all the necessary prerequisites for its establishment. This is evident in the possibility of segmenting the issue in two parts on the one hand, and on the other in the availability of sufficient sources, structured databases, and selected outstanding works.

Still, there are no studies about the Yalta Conference so far that address exclusively ethical issues concerning 'good' and 'evil,' 'morality,' 'duty,' and 'honor.' Although historiographical approaches are to a large extent dependent upon ethical viewpoints, in the case of Yalta agreements so far there have been no techniques available, so as to connect historical accounts with ideology, and historical facts with their philosophical background. In a sense, the situation is quite the same as it is with the study of prehistory: although there is an abundance of data and facts that can be primarily processed, there are no methodological guidelines, nor any devices to classify and explain them. This is also typical for any question raised about the ethics of the Yalta agreements in February 1945.

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