

## RELIGION OR SCIENTIFIC RATIONALITY: SEARCH FOR ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MEDICAL ETHICS

Kozlova OV ✉

Yaroslavl State Medical University, Yaroslavl, Russia

The article examines the relationship between religious values and rational principles of science. The purpose of the study is to identify common grounds of religion and scientific rationality to determine the foundations of medical ethics. The article examines the concept by Kavelin KD in relation to opinions of modern philosophers. Religion educates a moral person and provides guidelines for medical ethics, medicine and scientific knowledge, while science, rational knowledge, clarifies the general conditions of actual existence and provides a tool for arranging a human life. It is concluded that both religion and science display interest in the same task but in a different way. Thus, religion looks at the mental, subjective, and moral side, whereas science is interested in something external and objective.

**Key words:** medical ethics, religion, scientific rationality, society, personality, consciousness, nature, values

✉ **Correspondence should be addressed:** Olga V Kozlova  
Kedrova St., 8, sq. 10, 150000, Yaroslavl, Russia; olgakozlova.1997@mail.ru

**Received:** 16.05.2025 **Accepted:** 03.06.2025 **Published online:** 30.06.2025

**DOI:** 10.24075/medet.2025.009

## РЕЛИГИЯ ИЛИ НАУЧНАЯ РАЦИОНАЛЬНОСТЬ: ПОИСК ОНТОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ОСНОВАНИЙ МЕДИЦИНСКОЙ ЭТИКИ

О. В. Козлова ✉

Ярославский государственный медицинский университет, Ярославль, Россия

В статье рассматривается соотношение религиозных ценностей с рациональными принципами науки. Цель исследования: выявить общие основания религии и научной рациональности для определения оснований медицинской этики. Исследуется концепция К. Д. Кавелина в соотношении с мнениями современных философов. Религия воспитывает нравственную личность и дает ориентиры медицинской этике, медицине и научному знанию, а наука, рациональное знание, выясняет общие условия действительного бытия и дает орудие для обустройства человеческой жизни. Делается вывод о том, что и религия, и наука подходят к одной и той же задаче с двух различных сторон: религия — с психической, субъективной, нравственной; наука — с внешней, объективной.

**Ключевые слова:** медицинская этика, религия, научная рациональность, общество, личность, сознание, природа, ценности

✉ **Для корреспонденции:** Ольга Валерьевна Козлова  
ул. Кедрова, д. 8, кв. 10, 150000, г. Ярославль, Россия; olgakozlova.1997@mail.ru

**Статья поступила:** 16.05.2025 **Статья принята к печати:** 03.06.2025 **Опубликована онлайн:** 30.06.2025

**DOI:** 10.24075/medet.2025.009

Today, when rational thinking prevails, it is especially important to comprehend the true values of medical ethics. Thinkers of the past and present were interested how religious values and achievements of scientific rationality were related. Every person faces the problem of finding the true foundations for his being and for making the right decisions. "We all want to enjoy our lives, try to control it... Everyone is trying to make their small world most reliable and interesting. As a doctor, I have to confront a parallel reality such as pain, suffering and death on a daily basis", writes Ariel Noltze, a German plastic surgeon [1].

It seems relevant to turn to works of Kavelin KD, an outstanding thinker of the 19th century, and review his position in discussion with modern philosophers. Traditionally opposed religious values and principles of scientific rationality are newly interpreted both in the philosophy of Kavelin KD and in the concepts of modern philosophers.

According to Kavelin's concept, moral character and moral development of a human being can't exist without free will or "without the opportunity, at own discretion and on own volition, to choose one way or another, to incline to one action or another, and to set a direction for an activity" [2]. The thinker believes that external circumstances can promote or prevent

from implementation of certain human decisions. Thus, it can be concluded that struggle is a permanent law of a moralist. According to Kavelin, a person constantly struggles with the natural surroundings and himself to achieve his goals and to create a decent habitat in line with his goals. This is how a moralist grows up.

The thinker is convinced that science can determine the main goals in a human life. It is the positive sciences dealing with phenomena and external facts that have the task, firstly, to establish these phenomena and facts in their actual reality, and secondly, to determine the conditions that made these facts necessary and inevitable. As soon as these two tasks are completed, the work of science is over, since the phenomenon and the fact have been explained, the thinker says. Consequently, real science deals only with relative truths but not eternal ones. Therefore, Kavelin makes a conclusion that free will cannot be adopted by real science since freedom of choice rejects the necessity of phenomena. "If, at the discretion of the one who acts, a fact can happen one way or another, or even never happen at all, then there is no way to determine its law; real sciences, as we said, have the task to determine the laws of phenomena" [2].

Gerhard Medicus notes that with the lack of trust in empirical methods and “erroneous feelings,” logical consistency and a scientist’s own opinion are the only criteria for assessing credibility. “In this sense, philosophers and mathematicians are experts in evidence-based arguments and uncompromising demands for confidence” [3].

Kavelin KD states that as conclusions about mental life made by real sciences are used erroneously, personality and conditions of its activity have nothing to do with prevailing modern ideas: “real sciences perceive individuals only as parts of the final result to be considered and explained. The final result is a necessary phenomenon that follows certain laws; therefore, it does not depend on a personal activity, and therefore there is no need to take it into account” [2]. Gerhard Medicus notes that there is no use to assume that probabilistic processes are directly responsible for our free will at the level of reality described by quantum physics. “Conclusions about conscious processes based on quantum physics are questionable and can be compared with the equally doubtful act of opening a department of political science at the Institute of Biochemistry” [3].

According to Kavelin KD, personality is currently not perceived as a moral figure. Personalities are gradually turning into impersonal human units, deprived of a point of support in their moral existence and therefore easily replaceable. Meanwhile, dignity and moral character are formed under the influence of external life and activity as a member of the state and society. When evaluating a person, it is not internal motives, but the degree of necessity for society that matters, and it is external habits that will be taken into account to judge about a person. Fanaticism is another obsession, which is much more dangerous, says Caroline Emke. She notes the growing threatening global dynamics when people who believe differently or do not believe at all and who look differently from what is required by the approved standards are fundamentally rejected by the society. “This growing disapproval of any deviation is spreading and becoming more harmful. Because we, who are targeted by this hatred, usually lapse into silence in disgust allowing others to intimidate us because we can’t resist this savagery and terror...” [4].

Kavelin is convinced that as long as the moral elements of personality remain neglected, these views will penetrate deeper into the minds of many educated people. The philosopher points out that it is in his modern era that everything possible is being done to meet human needs, while the human is becoming less and less able to use these benefits.

On the other hand, the thinker believes that the model when a person is separated from the rest of the world and finds his support in mental activity should have been replaced by another model with the central position in the research being occupied not by a single person but by the society. The world of knowledge and science opened up to a human owing to generalizations that could be implemented only through his communication with other people. As a person can develop and improve in society only, he should be viewed not as an independent unit, but as an integral part of the whole. In this regard, Kavelin warns against the misconception when people perceive a person as an integral part of an organism. “Since differentiation in humans is highly developed, a person in society occupies a more independent position and can go through a more intense individual development than the components of another living organism” [5]. The philosopher stresses that the ideal world helps a person leave the narrow circle of his personal existence and contemplate the universal.

Continuing Kavelin’s thought, Costantino Esposito notes that our consciousness is mysterious. Consciousness always laughs at those who try to analyze it. “Since it is already a part of those who want to deconstruct it, deconstruction of consciousness is actually a proof of its existence” [6]. The philosopher wonders which of the realities is responsible for creating consciousness. However, it must be borne in mind that the person asking the question is already inside consciousness at this moment. Consciousness does not depend on our inability to explain its subjective manifestation. Costantino Esposito points out that the mystery of consciousness relates to human sensory and mental activity. We can say that consciousness is embodied in the feelings and thoughts of a person.

This raises an eternal question. How can a person have free will if he is determined by both external reality and consciousness? According to Kavelin, free will is not an illusion, but a real phenomenon. If everything in the world exists and happens under certain conditions and a human is an organic part of nature, it is difficult to imagine that a man has a force inside that creates phenomena beyond all conditions. According to the philosopher, everyone is meanwhile directly convinced that, under certain circumstances, people spontaneously and freely control their inner mood and external actions. Numerous observations have established differences between free actions and actions produced under pressure of passions, worries, and fear. The differentiation would not be possible if mental states were not based on freedom of mental activity.

In this regard, Jean-Baptiste Brenet notes that a person should then be a substance or a completely charged reality that does not need any support and exists independently of the existence or activity of other things in the world. But when a person is born, he is not the substance. “Mind is his entity; initially, the mind is just a preparation and capacity to abstraction of forms within the matter; this makes him subordinate to his body, feelings and imagination. A human being is a substance that only expects to be implemented as a promise that has to be kept and as luck that has to be experienced ...” [7].

Chaadaev PY is convinced that the connection between moral phenomena is similar to one that unites physical phenomena; it is about continuity and succession. It is the effect of the moral phenomenon that promotes a person’s self-development. “In the field of morality, people move forward not only for the pleasure of moving, there must also be a goal; a denied possibility of achieving perfection, which means reaching the goal, would simply make movement impossible” [8]. The thinker is convinced that people come into the world with a vague instinct for moral good. But this instinct can only be fully implemented in a more complete idea of ethics, which develops throughout life.

Therefore, Patricia Churchill notes that cultivating virtues such as compassion and honesty is beneficial. If these virtues turn into habits, they will guide the process of fulfilling limiting conditions towards making decisions that are morally acceptable to a person. Thus, being fixed in consciousness, these habits allow the brain not to calculate and evaluate from scratch all the facts that influence the choice: “... if you are used to showing, say, kindness and responsiveness to everyone around you, you will not have to waste your time and effort thinking about what to do in a standard everyday situation. In case of an extraordinary event, a conditional habit can be useful” [9]. The researcher notes that the utilitarian’s systemic brain that produces a line of decisions has to spend so much extra effort deciding

whether an action was correct that one can only wonder if such a person is capable of making decisions at all and completing at least one task.

Kavelin KD stresses that the undoubted connection between a person and the world around him that forces development of knowledge and science does not solve all the problems that arise in the course of historical development. According to the thinker's concept, a person with his inner world and its secrets is not a continuation, clarification and addition of the surrounding world, but, on the contrary, the person denies it, "escapes from its evils and sufferings, seeks support in himself and in the name of it seeks to recreate the entire real world and conditions of its existence" [5].

Thus, Kavelin asks what this hostile opposition of the inner world to the outer world means and why it is the final act of the epochs of cultures and civilizations and not their very beginning. According to the philosopher, late protests in the name of inner and spiritual peace against the environment is easily explained by the law of differentiation, which is equally noticeable when nature and man develop. The thinker notes that the unity not seen in germ is so much separated during subsequent growth that it is difficult to find and determine the mutual connection between previous parts of the whole.

In this regard, Michael Marder writes that the consequences of metaphysics criticism are not entirely negative, given that the contours of life, such as plants, become visible as a result of hermeneutical multiplication of its meanings, freed from the reductive tendencies of metaphysics. Positive dimension of plant existence as a consequence of metaphysics criticism, leads to inversion of traditional values, putting one above the other. "More importantly, it covers key existential attributes that philosophers, as a rule, saved for humans only" [10]. Michael Marder calls his concept 'vegetative existentialism' and states that it would be wrong to insist on traditional metaphysical separation of a spirit from a body though this is one of many dichotomies of oneself and the other person, depth and surface, life and death, the whole and a great many.

Kavelin KD draws attention to the fact that all real life is a struggle. Everything that exists, from lower to higher organisms, lives at the expense of one another, conquering its existence and constantly being in danger of becoming a victim. The philosopher points out that the general law of life is most clearly applied to a man who is the most developed and complex of all organisms. Man is constantly fighting nature, people similar to him, and society, now defeating them, then being defeated by someone more superior.

In this regard, Jean-Pierre Dupuy states that the current discussion about the changing attitude towards nature caused by new technologies boils down to the fact that "deep ecology" presents nature as an unshakable example of balance and harmony. As a result, man appears to be an irresponsible and dangerous predator. Therefore, the goal of the whole project of modern humanism is to take man out of nature and turn him into the ruler of the world and himself, points out Jean-Pierre Dupuy. "The metaphysics in question definitely insists on its monism: it is no longer claimed today that everything in the world originates from one substance, but that everything — nature, life, consciousness — is subject to general principles of organization" [11]. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that the motto "naturalize consciousness" becomes the

goal of cognitive sciences. These sciences should newly supply consciousness with its rightful place in nature, concludes Jean-Pierre Dupuis.

Based on this, we ask how to eliminate the contradiction between the unity of all that exists and continuous struggle of this existing world with itself. To answer this question, Kavelin compares science and religion. According to the philosopher, the task of science is to know the laws and necessary conditions of phenomena. For religion, it is not the objective truth, but a person's parting words to a spiritual and moral life that matters the most. Religion rejects anything that does not comply with the goal as harmful and evil. "Vigilantly and jealously protecting only personal, individual spiritual and moral existence, it stops attempts of knowledge to penetrate the mysteries of existence where they could shake the foundations of personal spiritual life, stating that these conditions are hidden from human knowledge and incomprehensible to the mind" [5].

According to Kavelin's concept, the religious worldview is based on the sole basic idea — to preserve, guide and educate a person spiritually and morally, to support his soul against temptations on the path of life. Therefore, the philosopher believes that everything is adjusted to this life goal: different branches of art, philosophy, forms of life, and society. The power of religion and a mystery of its enormous influence on people consist in concern for satisfaction of spiritual needs of the individual's existence.

According to Kavelin KD, the tasks of knowledge are completely different and its methods differ from those necessary for spiritual and moral education of an individual. Science studies not the subject as a whole, in living reality, but conditions and laws of its existence and activity, and also transforms these laws into general formulas of being. The thinker notes that science always begins with decomposition of living reality into components and as a result gets something completely different from the reality that underwent scientific analysis. This result consists in discovering and understanding the conditions and laws of real life. That is why conclusions of science represent completely different combinations than those that actually exist. Science gives us knowledge of what exists, but from a special point of view, from a known side which is abstracted from reality and combines in our mind in a completely different way, Kavelin concludes.

According to Costica Bradatan, accepting the definition of science as a self-transforming practice makes people absolutely vulnerable. Costica Bradatan compares the philosopher with a tightrope walker who performs without insurance because he eternally balances between adjustment to the demands of the world and his own ethical principles. "It happens because for such thinkers, philosophy is not just a set of doctrines that can be ignored or discarded if needed. It is a way of life that goes through your entire biography, and this choice is of a significant existential nature" [12].

Another question is why we need the new combinations and transformed reality. In real life, the role of these ones and thus of a science is essential. According to Kavelin, due to new combinations of reality and owing to their help, a human can produce what is useful and necessary and discard what is useless and unnecessary. The philosopher states that until now nobody could ever define the boundaries of knowledge and where it should stop. "Like a large mass of snow rolling down a mountain, knowledge, as it develops, does not only get increased but also expands its tools and turns into a huge power. But we cannot and must not request from

knowledge something that it cannot provide us with due to its nature" [5].

Kavelin KD defines the mind as a special process, a special function of a human being and of human nature. Mind creates nothing, it can only produce new combinations of something that already exists, and it is always generalized. The generalized statements possess no reality outside a human, though philosophy has claimed the opposite for a while. The thinker believes that the only reason for the mistake was that mind as an organic property acts subconsciously, against our will and beyond our comprehension. According to Ian Tattersall and Rob DeSalle, human beings will always be an unsolved mystery. It is ironic that people belong to the only species in the world who can look back and examine themselves. So, they are mysterious to themselves only. "Our unique cognitive style separates us from the rest of nature not only because of our ability to understand and master the world we live in, but also because of our ability to make up reductionist stories about it and believe them" [13].

As Kavelin KD states, we must recognize that knowledge is nothing more than a special way of relating to the world around us and ourselves, which is unique to the human race and serves as a tool to achieve its goals. A human has a goal inside. It is about how to satisfy various human needs. The philosophers says that we refer to knowledge as a tool because the knowledge itself, in a theoretical and pure sense, is the same reality transformed by the mental process and presented to consciousness. Thus, living reality is still a dead and dry abstraction from true foundations of objective reality.

Jean Baudrillard, who continued Kavelin's thought, wrote that the universe is not in equilibrium but rather operates on extremes, it is rather about radical antagonism than about synthesis. Thus, antagonism is present. It has an ecstatic form of a pure object and winning strategy of the object in relation to the subject. "We will not look for a change and oppose something steady and something changeable, we will find something more changeable than changeability itself; it will be metamorphosis."... We will not distinguish the true from the false, we will find something more deceptive than deception itself; it will be illusion and appearance..." [14].

So, Kavelin insists that the only reason for their significance difference can be associated with various purposes, role and tasks of religion and science. Religion educates a moral person and provides guidelines for medical ethics, medicine and scientific knowledge, while science, rational knowledge, clarifies the general conditions of actual existence and provides a tool for arranging a human life.

Thus, both religion and science display interest in the same task but in a different way. Religion looks at the mental, subjective, and moral side, whereas science is interested in something external and objective. According to Kavelin, they are opposed only because of deep misunderstanding and unclear perception of their mutual relations, circle and boundaries of their activity. "The purpose of religion is not knowledge; therefore, it should not be opposed to it and act as its enemy, no matter what results and conclusions it may come to. Knowledge, just like science, should not act against religion, as it is aimed not at moral upbringing of humans, but at discovery of general conditions and laws of existence" [5].

Kavelin KD is convinced that the main goal of the society that unites people with religious and scientific background is to detect average terms of their peaceful and harmless coexistence. The goal can be achieved when the reasons for the opposites will be comprehended by both parties and when they both will voluntarily outline the sphere of their activity. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that knowledge and science do not provide an accurate answer to many questions; in practical application, we can only approach an impossible ideal and try to be satisfied with that.

In this regard, the ideas of Kavelin KD, an outstanding Russian philosopher, can be considered as a spiritual testament to the modern generation. Indeed, as Geert Lovink accurately noted, "we need to extend deconstruction of the Western subject to the non-human agency of the Internet ... Only then can we understand cultural policy in a clearer way" [15]. Geert Lovink states that to avoid distraction, it is necessary to find a new way of thinking, which could be useful for 'post-digital era' and which could admit that the Internet would neither disappear nor become an obstacle; instead, it will promote spiritual growth of a person.

## References

1. Nol'tse Ariel'. Operatsiya «Chelovek». Skal'pel' i krest — dva ostriya dlya novogo nachala. Per. s nem. I. Lobanova. Zaokskiy. Istochnik zhizni. 2020; 7–8. Russian.
2. Kavelin K. D. Sobr. soch. Spb. 1899; 3: 383–385. Russian.
3. Medikus Gerikhard. Byt' chelovekom: Preodoleniye razryva mezhdru naukami o tele i naukami o dushe. Per. A. B. Kutlumuratov. M. Izdatel'skiy Dom YASK. 2020; 50–51. Russian.
4. Emke Karolin. Protiv nenavisti. Per. s nem. Anny Kukes. Spb. Izdatel'stvo Ivana Limbakha. 2024; 17. 5. Kavelin K. D. Nash umstvennyy stroy. St. po filosofii, russkoy istorii i kul'ture. M. Pravda. 1989; 351–521. Russian.
5. Kavelin KD. Nash umstvennyy stroy. St. po filosofii, russkoy istorii i kul'ture. M. Pravda. 1989; 351–521.
6. Espozito Konstantino. Sovremennyy nigilizm. Khronika. Per. s ital. Bogdanovoy YA.A. M. RIPOL klassik 2022; 74. Russian.
7. Brene Zhan-Batist. Chto znachit mysli't'? Arabo-latinskiy otvet. Per. s frants. Dar'ya Shakhova. M. Ad Marginem Press. 2024; 109. Russian.
8. Chaadayev P.YA. Poln. SOBR. soch. i izbrannyye pis'ma. V 2-kh t. M. Nauka. 1991; 1:472. Russian.
9. Cherchland P. Sovest'. Proiskhozhdeniye npravstvennoy intuitsii. Per. s angl. Mariya Desyatova. M. Al'pina non-fikshn. 2021; 213. Russian.
10. Marder Maykl. Rastitel'noye myshleniye. Filosofiya vegetativnoy zhizni. Per. s angl. Denis Shalaginov. M. Ad Marginem Press. 2024; 27. Russian.
11. Dyupyui ZH.-P. Znak svyashchennogo. Per. s frants. A. Zakharevich. Pod red. A. Grinbauma. M. Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye. 2021; 92. Russian.
12. Bradatan K. Umiraya za idei. Ob opasnoy zhizni filosofov. Per. s angl. Ye. V. Muzykina. M. Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye. 2024; 25. Russian.
13. Tattersall I., De Sall' R. Chelovek neozhidanny: genetika, povedeniye i svoboda vybora. Per. s angl. N. Pakhmutova. M. Izdatel'skiy Dom YASK. 2023; 11. Russian.
14. Bodriyyar ZH. Fatal'nyye strategii. Per. s fr. A. Kachalova. M. Gruppya kompaniy «RIPOL klassik». «Pangloss». 2019; 8. Russian.
15. Lovink Gert. Kritecheskaya teoriya Interneta. Per. s angl. Dmitriy Lebedev, Petr Torkanovskiy. M. Ad Marginem Press, 2024; 31. Russian.



## Литература

1. Нольце Ариэль. Операция «Человек». Скальпель и крест — два острия для нового начала. Пер. с нем. И. Лобанова. Заокский. Источник жизни. 2020; 7–8.
2. Кавелин К. Д. Собр. соч. СПб. 1899; 3: 383–385.
3. Медикус Герхард. Быть человеком: Преодоление разрыва между науками о теле и науками о душе. Пер. А. Б. Кутлумуратов. М. Издательский Дом ЯСК. 2020; 50–51.
4. Эмке Каролин. Против ненависти. Пер. с нем. Анны Кулес. СПб. Издательство Ивана Лимбаха. 2024; 17.
5. Кавелин К. Д. Наш умственный строй. Ст. по философии, русской истории и культуре. М. Правда. 1989; 351–521.
6. Эспозито Константино. Современный нигилизм. Хроника. Пер. с итал. Богдановой Я. А. М. РИПОЛ классик 2022; 74.
7. Брене Жан-Батист. Что значит мыслить? Арабо-латинский ответ. Пер. с франц. Дарья Шахова. М. Ад Маргинем Пресс. 2024; 109.
8. Чаадаев П. Я. Полн. СОБР. соч. и избранные письма. В 2-х т. М. Наука. 1991; 1:472.
9. Черчленд П. Совесть. Происхождение нравственной интуиции. Пер. с англ. Мария Десятова. М. Альпина нон-фикшн. 2021; 213.
10. Мардер Майкл. Растительное мышление. Философия вегетативной жизни. Пер. с англ. Денис Шалагинов. М. Ад Маргинем Пресс. 2024; 27.
11. Дюпюи Ж.-П. Знак священного. Пер. с франц. А. Захаревич. Под ред. А. Гринбаума. М. Новое литературное обозрение. 2021; 92.
12. Брадатан К. Умирая за идеи. Об опасной жизни философов. Пер. с англ. Е. В. Музыкина. М. Новое литературное обозрение. 2024; 25.
13. Таттерсон И., Де Салль Р. Человек неожиданный: генетика, поведение и свобода выбора. Пер. с англ. Н. Пахмутова. М. Издательский Дом ЯСК. 2023; 11.
14. Бодрийяр Ж. Фатальные стратегии. Пер. с фр. А. Качалова. М. Группа компаний «РИПОЛ классик». «Панглосс». 2019; 8.
15. Ловинк Герт. Критическая теория Интернета. Пер. с англ. Дмитрий Лебедев, Петр Торкановский. М. Ад Маргинем Пресс. 2024; 31.