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SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCHING THE MORAL CHOICE OF MODERN YOUTH

Absattorova Madinabonu Rustamovna
Assistant Lecturer, Department of Social and Political Sciences
Renaissance University of Education (Renessans ta'lim universiteti),
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract

This article examines the socio-philosophical methodology for investigating the moral choice of modern youth amid rapid globalization, digital transformation, and shifting axiological paradigms. The study substantiates the necessity of an integrative methodological framework that synthesizes systemic, axiological, synergetic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological approaches to capture the complex interplay between social determinism and individual moral autonomy. Special attention is devoted to the dialectical correlation between free will, moral responsibility, and value internalization in the spiritual and ethical consciousness of young people in New Uzbekistan. By contrasting classical linear models of moral socialization with non-linear, rhizomatic, and digitalized environments of value formation, the research identifies core methodological principles for diagnosing youth moral agency, overcoming normative relativism, and harmonizing national spiritual heritage with universal ethical standards.

Keywords: Moral choice, modern youth, socio-philosophical methodology, free will, axiological approach, synergetics, hermeneutics, moral autonomy, value orientations, spiritual development.

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Introduction

In the contemporary era of profound civilizational transformations, accelerated digitalization, and global normative pluralism, the philosophical inquiry into how young people make moral choices has acquired unprecedented theoretical and practical urgency. Youth represent not merely a demographic cohort transitioning into adulthood, but the primary socio-cultural subject through which society reproduces, reinterprets, and innovates its spiritual and ethical foundations. Unlike previous historical epochs in which moral norms were transmitted through relatively stable, hierarchical, and localized institutions –such as the extended family, neighborhood community, and traditional educational structures–modern youth navigate a hyper-complex informational and axiological landscape characterized by competing value systems, algorithmic mediation, and rapid socio-economic shifts.

In the context of New Uzbekistan, state youth policy and strategic development programs place the spiritual, intellectual, and moral maturation of the younger generation at the center of national renewal. As emphasized in foundational philosophical and strategic discourse on civil society development in Uzbekistan, cultivating a generation capable of independent critical thinking, moral resilience, and conscious civic responsibility requires harmonizing enduring national spiritual values with progressive universal achievements[1]. However, achieving this synthesis demands more than declarative pedagogical measures; it presupposes a rigorous socio-philosophical methodology capable of uncovering the internal mechanisms, latent contradictions, and objective-subjective determinants of youth moral decision-making.

Traditional disciplinary approaches – such as purely psychological behavioral models, descriptive sociology, or classical normative ethics–often examine isolated facets of youth behavior without capturing its holistic socio-philosophical essence. While psychology focuses predominantly on cognitive-emotional development and individual temperament, and empirical sociology

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measures statistical distributions of attitudes, social philosophy investigates the ontological, epistemological, and axiological grounds of moral agency itself. Specifically, it addresses how external social necessity is refracted through internal free will (ixtiyor erkinligi), how objective social structures enable or constrain subjective moral autonomy, and what methodological criteria allow researchers to evaluate the authenticity of moral choice in a mediatized society.

The objective of this study is to substantiate an integrative socio-philosophical methodology for researching the moral choice of modern youth. To fulfill this objective, the paper addresses four interrelated tasks: (1) elucidating the philosophical essence and categorical structure of moral choice in relation to free will and responsibility; (2) evaluating the explanatory power and limitations of classical and post-non-classical philosophical paradigms in youth studies; (3) constructing a multi-level methodological matrix integrating systemic, axiological, synergetic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological principles; and (4) formulating practical methodological guidelines for empirical and theoretical research on youth spiritual-moral culture in contemporary Uzbekistan.

1. Categorical Foundations of Moral Choice in Social Philosophy. A sound methodological framework begins with conceptual precision. Within social philosophy, “moral choice” cannot be reduced to a mere situational preference among utilitarian alternatives or an impulsive psychological reaction to external stimuli. Rather, moral choice represents a conscious, value-laden act of self-determination in which a social subject resolves a contradiction between competing motives, duties, interests, and ideals. As a philosophical category, moral choice stands at the intersection of ontology (the mode of human existence as a self-creating being), anthropology (the structure of human will, reason, and

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conscience), and social epistemology (the cognition and evaluation of social norms).

The internal core of moral choice is constituted by the dialectical unity of three categories: will (iroda), freedom of choice (ixtiyor erkinligi), and moral responsibility (axloqiy mas'uliyat). In the history of Eastern philosophical thought, particularly in the works of Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Alisher Navoi, human perfection (komillik) is intrinsically tied to rational discernment and voluntary adherence to virtue. Al-Farabi argued that true happiness (saodat) is attained not through blind conformity or fatalistic submission, but through deliberate, reasoned choice (ikhtiyar) guided by intellect and habituated moral virtue[3]. Similarly, Alisher Navoi emphasized that genuine nobility lies in mastering one's lower impulses through conscious willpower and dedicating one's freedom to the service of human dignity and social harmony[4].

In Western philosophical traditions, the problem of moral choice evolved through sustained debates between strict determinism, radical indeterminism, and dialectical compatibilism. Immanuel Kant grounded moral choice in the autonomy of practical reason, asserting that an action possesses genuine moral worth only when the will legislates universalizable maxims independently of empirical inclinations. Conversely, G.W.F.Hegel demonstrated that abstract subjective freedom achieves concrete reality only within ethical life (Sittlichkeit)–the historical institutions of family, civil society, and the state. Later, existentialist thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre radicalized the category of choice, portraying human existence as a continuous project in which individuals are “condemned to be free” and bear absolute responsibility for defining their essence through concrete decisions.

For contemporary social philosophy, neither absolute sociological determinism–which treats young people as passive products of their environment–nor abstract existential voluntarism–which ignores structural inequalities and cultural conditioning–is methodologically adequate. Modern youth make moral choices

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within a structured field of possibilities. Social conditions define the spectrum of available alternatives and the symbolic costs attached to each option, whereas the young person's internal value system, critical reflexivity, and willpower determine which possibility is actualized. Consequently, socio-philosophical methodology must treat youth moral choice as a dynamic subject-object and subject-subject relation.

2. Methodological Paradigm Shifts: From Classical Determinism to Post-Non-Classical Complexity. The rapid transformation of youth subcultures and digital communication necessitates a critical reassessment of traditional research paradigms. Historically, social studies of youth morality relied heavily on classical structural-functionalist and linear-deterministic models. Within those frameworks, moral development was conceptualized as a unidirectional trajectory of socialization: society established fixed normative standards, educational and family institutions transmitted them, and youth internalized them with varying degrees of success. Deviations from established norms were interpreted primarily as “socialization deficits”or external ideological interference.

While linear models remain useful for analyzing stable institutional continuity, they prove insufficient for explaining the non-linear, fragmented, and paradoxical nature of contemporary youth moral consciousness. Today, young individuals simultaneously inhabit multiple overlapping worlds: physical local communities (such as the mahalla and university), globalized consumer markets, and decentralized digital networks. In this environment, value transmission is no longer vertical and monolithic; it is horizontal, interactive, and multi-vectored. Drawing on post-non-classical philosophy of science, particularly the concepts of complexity, non-linearity, and rhizomatic connectivity, researchers must recognize that minor informational triggers or peer-network shifts can catalyze profound transformations in a young person's moral orientation.

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Furthermore, digital culture introduces a critical methodological challenge: the phenomenon of "imulated" or "algorithmic" freedom. Social media platforms, recommendation engines, and digital subcultures create an illusion of boundless personal autonomy while subtly channeling attention, emotional outrage, and moral approval toward standardized behavioral patterns. Erich Fromm's classic philosophical distinction between "freedom from" (negative liberty) and "freedom to" (positive, self-realizing agency) acquires renewed methodological significance here[7]. Without distinguishing between superficial consumerist or digital choice and authentic, self-legislated moral choice, empirical research risks misinterpreting conformity to algorithmic trends as genuine youth independence.

3. Integrative Socio-Philosophical Approaches to Investigating Youth Moral Choice. To overcome methodological reductionism, the socio-philosophical study of modern youth requires a synthesis of five complementary methodological approaches, each illuminating a distinct dimension of moral choice:

First, the systemic-structural approach examines moral choice not as an isolated episode, but as an emergent property of an interconnected socio-cultural system. It maps the macro-level determinants (state youth policy, legal frameworks, socio-economic mobility), meso-level institutions (family, educational establishments, mahalla, youth unions), and micro-level personal structures (worldview, emotional intelligence, volitional self-regulation). Through systemic analysis, the researcher identifies where institutional synergies reinforce moral agency and where institutional contradictions generate anomie or value disorientation.

Second, the axiological approach places values at the center of methodological inquiry. Since every moral choice presupposes a criterion of preference–distinguishing good from evil, justice from injustice, duty from expediency–the axiological method investigates the hierarchy of terminal and instrumental values

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held by young people. In the context of Uzbekistan, this involves examining how traditional national values (such as respect for elders, collective solidarity, hospitality, conscience, and patriotism) interact with modern individualistic values (career self-actualization, personal autonomy, innovation, and global mobility). Rather than positing a rigid binary opposition between "tradition" and "modernity", the axiological approach tracks processes of creative synthesis, hybridization, and value re-evaluation.

Third, the synergetic approach provides the conceptual tools to analyze instability, moral crises, and transformative turning points in youth consciousness. Synergetics views youth moral consciousness as a complex, open, self-organizing system far from equilibrium. During transitional periods–such as entering higher education, entering the labor market, or encountering acute ethical dilemmas online–young people experience "bifurcation points" where established habits no longer suffice. At these critical junctures, even subtle spiritual, educational, or cultural influences can act as 'attractors' that reorganize the entire personality structure toward either constructive moral maturity or destructive nihilism.

Fourth, the hermeneutic approach addresses the problem of meaning and interpretation. Young people do not react to objective social facts in raw form; they act upon the meanings they ascribe to symbols, historical narratives, religious texts, and digital content. Hermeneutics enables the researcher to decode the language, metaphors, slang, and symbolic rituals of contemporary youth subcultures, uncovering the implicit moral logic behind behaviors that external observers might prematurely dismiss as apathy or rebellion. Understanding the horizon of meaning within which youth interpret concepts like "honor", "success", "freedom", and "fairness" is indispensable for valid philosophical diagnosis.

Fifth, the phenomenological and activity-based approaches focus on the lived subjective experience of moral agency and its objectification in social practice.

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Phenomenology brackets preconceived moralizing judgments to examine how a moral dilemma is actually experienced in the consciousness of a young person–the tension between fear and courage, peer pressure and conscience, immediate gratification and long-term duty. Complementing this, the activity-based approach verifies the authenticity of moral consciousness through real social praxis, emphasizing that true moral choice is consummated not in abstract verbal declarations, but in concrete deeds, civic engagement, and responsible interpersonal conduct.

Table 1. Integrative Socio-Philosophical Methodological Matrix for Researching Youth Moral Choice

Methodological Approach	Core Philosophical Focus	Key Analytical Categories	Empirical & Diagnostic Indicators
Systemic-Structural	Interrelation of macro-, meso-, and micro-level determinants of moral behavior	Social structure, socialization institutions, normative regulation, agency	Institutional trust, family-school-mahalla synergy, socio-economic mobility
Axiological	Hierarchy of value orientations and criteria of moral evaluation	Ideal, moral norm, duty, conscience, national & universal values	Value ranking, attitude toward national heritage, civic & ethical priorities
Synergetic	Non-linear dynamics, moral crises, and self-organization of consciousness	Bifurcation point, attractor, instability, dissipative structures, emergence	Resilience to ideological shocks, shifts during life transitions, adaptability
Hermeneutic	Interpretation of cultural texts, symbols, and digital narratives	Meaning, horizon of understanding, dialogue, symbolic code, text	Decoding of media messages, critical media literacy, subcultural semantics
Phenomenological & Activity-Based	Lived experience of free will and its realization in social praxis	Intentionality, free will (ixtiyor), volition (iroda), responsibility, deed	Consistency between stated values and actual volunteering, civic & peer actions

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4. Methodological Principles for Empirical and Applied Diagnosis in Modern Uzbekistan

Bridging abstract philosophical methodology with concrete empirical research is one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary social sciences. When designing sociological surveys, focus-group interviews, or pedagogical diagnostics among university and secondary-school youth in Uzbekistan, researchers must operationalize philosophical categories without stripping them of their normative depth. Relying solely on direct self-report questions (e.g., asking respondents whether they consider themselves patriotic or honest) inevitably produces high rates of 'socially desirable' answers that mask underlying value conflicts.

To achieve methodological validity, socio-philosophical research should adhere to four operational principles. First, the principle of situational dilemma modeling: instead of abstract declarative statements, research instruments should present realistic moral dilemmas involving competing loyalties–such as personal career advancement versus family obligation, peer approval versus academic integrity, or digital anonymity versus civic accountability. Analyzing how young people justify their choices in ambiguous scenarios reveals the authentic structure of their volitional and ethical reasoning.

Second, the principle of dialectical historicism and cultural contextualization: youth moral choices must be interpreted within the concrete historical trajectory of Uzbekistan's Third Renaissance strategy and socio-economic modernization. Comparing generational cohorts–such as youth raised in urban digitalized hubs versus rural traditional communities–enables scholars to distinguish universal age-related psychological traits from historically specific socio-cultural transformations.

Third, the principle of digital-ecological validity: because a substantial portion of youth moral interaction occurs within online platforms (Telegram communities, Instagram, YouTube, gaming ecosystems), socio-philosophical methodology

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must incorporate digital ethnography and discourse analysis of online youth debates. Evaluating how young people react to cyberbullying, misinformation, consumerist ostentation, and charitable crowdfunding provides direct evidence of how their willpower and moral autonomy operate in real time.

Fourth, the principle of constructive-transformative orientation: socio-philosophical methodology is not confined to passive contemplation; it aims to generate actionable recommendations for educational and spiritual-enlightenment institutions. By identifying the specific cognitive and volitional vulnerabilities of modern youth–such as fragmented attention, susceptibility to emotional manipulation, or weak critical reflection–scholars can design targeted pedagogical technologies, ethical debate clubs, and mentorship models that strengthen conscious self-determination.

Conclusion

The socio-philosophical investigation of modern youth's moral choice requires a decisive departure from one-dimensional, purely descriptive, or rigidly deterministic research models. In an era characterized by global informational openness and rapid value transformations, moral choice emerges as a complex dialectical process in which objective social structures, cultural traditions, and digital environments are mediated by the young person's internal willpower, critical reason, and free will.

Synthesizing systemic-structural, axiological, synergetic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological-activity approaches provides a comprehensive methodological foundation capable of capturing both the macro-social conditions and the micro-subjective mechanisms of youth moral agency. Applying this integrative matrix to empirical and theoretical studies in New Uzbekistan allows researchers to move beyond superficial statistical indicators, uncover the deep motivational drivers behind youth behavior, and develop effective educational

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and socio-cultural mechanisms for nurturing a spiritually mature, strong-willed, and morally autonomous generation.

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