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GREAT CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL DEBATES

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Abstract

Ethics or morality, regardless of the form in which they appear, are an important part of the composition of the ideas inherent in human societies. They actually allow us to justify the legal rules and to determine what is allowed or prohibited in the society. At the same time, it involves areas that do not fall directly under attack by the laws, but also explore the meaning of different legal and social norms exposing the values that such norms do not only make them mandatory, but also attractive and motivating for any subject. Ethics and morality are successfully imposed on human societies exactly because of their joint ability to express the meaning and values of a certain normative order of social life.

Some authors give the term 'morality' an interpretation for solid point which constitutes norms and sense of responsibilities, while ethics, according to them, precedes morality or creates its occurrence (Riceur, 2001:58-89). In actual use morality often refers to pre-established normative order, while ethics is more about questions and uncertainties of the subject that is faced with practical choice. For example, one talks about 'ethical goal' in order to describe the state of consciousness of the subject who is trying to make the best moral choice. But there is also a deontological use of the term 'ethics' which, on the contrary, is more about rules than the subjective orientation. It can be stated that in a society, there are realistic conditions, trends concerning these moral challenges and the question is how the media, i.e. daily press reflect such situation in the society, and on the other side, how such media image influences the society, or in such areas.

Key words: ethics, moral challenges, normative order

Introduction

In modern societies, ethics or morality, which occupy a separate position, because of the apparent deviation between the principles of freedom and respect for the person, it seems to be universally accepted, whereas special moral beliefs are not subject to any consensus. That situation is an evidence, at least, of the unfinished nature of the secularization of morality, much of which remains a work of private or confessional consciousness. In the early 19th century, it became customary, the progress arising from the spontaneous flow of history to be considered the main source of human meaning and values (Burley, 1999:35-41). The first evolutionary thinkers insisted on introducing morality into the laws of natural evolution, believing that ethics and civilization are a kind of higher form of biological adaptation. As we know, the 20th century, characterized by a series of scientific discoveries and political terror, represents a strong temptation for the truthfulness of all these visions of meaning and values. It was more and more difficult to count on the fate that divinity, history or nature set in advance, and thus to determine the meaning and values of human life order. Multiple uncertainty about contemporary ethical debates hasn't resulted in a lack of commonly accepted foundations, which would make such foundations in the future look acceptable along with the principles of human rights and equality, but it resulted in the difficulty that from such foundations could be drawn rules of action that will be universal accepted as righteous (Burley, 1999:63-86). In fact such ambiguity of practical thinking of each individual can best justify sociology of morality, which is capable of objectifying moral actors, and at the same time not to bring it down to any social reasons that are supposedly independent of any normative judgment, nor to the philosophical issues. The problem actually is not just adding or reformulating existing sociology based on new data on ethics, nor nourishing the discussions on moral philosophy, but understanding the way in which social entities can occupy some moral standpoint in terms of their own actions, taking into account natural and social conditions which their daily lives are subjected to. Such problem is both philosophical and sociological, which implies objectification of the

conceptual sense of morality (which is a philosophical problem) and its registration as a social fact (which is a sociological problem). In any case, it is necessary to bear in mind when we approach the major issues of world politics, the use of scientific, technical or evolutionary problems that contemporary ethical debate is focused on. When it comes to these issues, urgency and uncertainty in decision-making leads to the fact that greater importance is given to the responsibility and freedom of morality of every person. Despite the multitude of natural and social factors of moral subjects, we do not entirely know to what extent such autonomy is possible.

Various aspects of the current debates on globalization are connected with ethical and political responsibility. When conflict with traditional and religious ideologies or those who preach a return to tradition is no longer vivid, we may have the impression that ethics, free from any transcendent or particularistic fixation actually becomes grounded in modern political ideology. General progress of knowledge has increased the means of activity of a deeper nature, changing the material environment of human society, at the same time causing a series of environmental barriers to their future. In fact, the current considerations on the 'precautionary principle' are trying to respond to such obstacles, which primarily represent only a way of insisting on the importance of human responsibility (Jonas, 1979:56-59).

Evolution of human kind

Biological and neurophysiological discoveries of the late 20th century place the man in front of a new review of its own specificity in the animal kingdom and the possible right to use technical tools. Today there is a possibility to predict the certain biological characteristics of the unborn child and the action of the mechanisms of procreation using certain techniques, such as abortion, in vitro fertilization, genetic manipulation or in closer or distant future, cloning of human beings. The advancement of medicine, on the other hand, opens up new perspectives such as treatment of predictable diseases in the long term, gene therapy or spreading of sources of organs for transplantation from human or non-human materials (Bateman-Novaes, 1991:24-29).

While the natural selection of animal species comes down to individual mutation and it is under the impact of the environment, in which the specie in principle has a very limited power to influence, human beings, on the other hand, are becoming more capable in modeling their own biological evolution. They can also affect their own physiological structure, which they would comply with their wishes or to adapt it to the environmental conditions that have created (Habermas, 2001). It seems that using the new medical techniques we can bypass even the boundaries that we thought were untouchable, such as borders, which relate to the differences between the sexes. It is no accident that contemporary ethical debates first emerged in the field of biomedicine, and then expanded to other areas such as politics and economics. Biomedical techniques actually offer human thinking series of unexpected situations for which traditional morality currently has no answers. But they also have controversial past, since they were used by the Nazis, as well as due to certain considerations of social Darwinism and political eugenizam which should encourage prudence (Harris, 2001:53). It may also be noted that technical progress in biomedical areas goes hand in hand with the permanent progress of knowledge on biological and cognitive adaptation of man with natural environmental conditions. But this knowledge also constitute moral reflection on the evolution of the human kind. When it comes to the direction of evolution, on which people today are able to give themselves their own specific features, suddenly there is a reason for concern. We have a case when we could believe that it is legit everything that is in accordance with the laws of natural evolution. In other words, every form of life is legit if managed to ride out the economic, political or biomedical area.

Freedom and choice against tradition and nature

Contemporary ethical debates relating to abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, cloning and other issues, try to integrate these moral challenges in the multitude of forms of civic morality, adding that such multitude structures in fact the principle of free choice of individuals. Such notions are opposed by arguments of religious tradition or naturalistic understanding of life. Call for free choice of the

individual in many cases actually represents progress on rights in respect of arbitrary decisions, which, when it comes to marriage, sexual orientation or using one's own body, there is imposing of family or religious authority.

We have reason to believe that the call of nature is not enough to root the morality, among other things, also because the natural evolution is a random phenomenon whose implementation can be very rigid, but also very cruel. Even if we assume that there is possible some moral naturalism, as some philosophers think, the question of its practical consequences would continue to be wide open, but in any case it is unlikely that the proponents of the traditional model are his most faithful interpreters. On the other hand, consideration (deliberation) of morality must always readily react to any sign of panic given by human situations. People as biological creatures are weak, prone to suffering, and submission to various kinds of physical and moral pressure by the environment, and at the same time they are not offered means of 'free' choice (Rawls, 1993).

Objectivity of morality and sociology

It is necessary to ask ourselves - what could be considered objectively within the civil morality or taking of a position in ethical debate, taking into account the diversity of expression, meaning and values. Is it really about real objectivity which will lead to dependence on moral views on a certain number of independent natural or social conditions, or is about legal objectivity that will allow comparative assessment of different moral views or is it about a form of special objectivity, which will be able to save two previous forms?

Morality has always been an important part of sociological research, beginning with the British representatives, such as, David Hume, Adam Smith, or the French founders, especially the works of Auguste Comte, until the modern period. As a special area of sociological research, sociology of morality faces a number of transformations since its appearance in 1896, in the magazine *L'Année sociologique*, Emile Durkheim, where sociology of morality, along with the law, constituted the third part "Analysis and bibliographic notebooks". Durkheim himself, whose work begins and ends with the considerations of "scientificity" of morality, always attaches importance to the study of moral facts. However, he never fully managed to resolve the dilemma between the descriptive study of the customs and social pressures, on one hand, i.e. taking into account the subjective autonomy, which appeared to him like an integral part of the moral facts, to which he implies a certain normative assessment and method of knowledge of moral subjectivity on the other hand (Isambert-Andre, 1986:83-103). In the late 70s we can observe recurrence of sociology of morality with the emergence of "sociology of ethics", resulting from the sociology of religion, which was meant again to deal with the moral dimension of social facts. The emergence of 'ethical' theme in public debates, especially in biomedical ethics, played a significant role in the re-emergence of the sociology of morality in France and worldwide (Genard, 1992:110-118).

When we try to objectify moral attitudes or moral life, we can actually imagine several directions of research, depending on whether we are interested only in the objective fact of the appearance or the pronounced moral attitude. According to the first direction of research, which in sociology is the most conventional one, it is exclusively about comparison of differences of meaning and values, a distinction which different individuals or social groups attach to analog phenomena or practice, trying to explain identified deviations by differences in sociocultural environment. According to the other direction, studies of socio-cultural differences should again be placed within a more general study which contains practically taking positions and thus we would explain the internal rationality, or eventually certain natural psychological mechanisms, whose cause of action will ultimately be interdependent. Objectivity of moral attitudes thus would be inherent in certain rational or psychological structures of thinking and acting, not just in their cultural distribution. For example, the fact that one is for or against abortion, cannot be understood, regardless of the reasons one takes such position. But, such reasons cannot be traced to a particular socio-cultural situation or, on the contrary, be understood only if we take into account the logical and organic relationships that people have with their bodies and their way of

pregnancy. It would be futile to study the division of the reasons for or against abortion, without trying to get into their internal logic, which for a sociologist also implies acceptance of a dilemma inherent in that type of discussion, for example, about the status of the fetus and a woman's right to own her body. Sociocultural theories are also sometimes considered as holistic theories, since approach to social factors give privilege to the analysis of large social events and organized actions, not to individual acts. When it comes to moral issues, they first deal with social division, meaning and values, not with their particular conceptual report. Sociocultural theories specifically deal with the way the institutions and social groups can establish and shape the meaning and individual values in order to ensure certain social stability. Although the principles are sensitive to the relative character of uniqueness or moral structure inherent in any society, socio-cultural theories do not deprive any a priori normative evaluation of social situations they review. It is especially valuable for critical sociology, which stemmed from the Marxist tradition, but also for Durkheim's sociology since Durkheim himself suggested moral reform of the whole society, for example in the form of strengthening the associative structures and moral development. Sociology of morality, or rather, the project of positive knowledge about morality, occupy a central place in every Durkheim's work. Durkheim had ambition, to replace the traditional philosophy of morality with a real knowledge of morality, which would be based not on a metaphysics, but on consideration, observation of society. As for Durkheim, the moral facts create a subclass of social facts that society imposes on individual subjects forcefully, manifesting them into customs. According to Durkheim, morality comes from society as a whole and firstly it externally affects social subjects, before it internalizes, and ultimately to become desirable by those same subjects. Thus there is a striking parallelism between the causal action of stakeholders being made forcibly and moral compulsion which also starts to be performed externally on the individual through rules and obligations, ie under compulsory threatening (Goldhagen, 1996:113-127).

Actionistic approaches

Actionistic approaches are often associated with what is called 'rational choice theory', which focuses on the maximization of individual benefit, especially on the impact of the economy. However, if the subject of action necessarily involves the theme of rationality, it could lead to perceptions that are quite different from the previous model, inspired by Kant's philosophy. Actionistic approaches, concentrating on the multiple relationships, meaning and values maintain human action. In sociological tradition the work of Max Weber is considered the nucleus of actionistic current, but the works of Georg Simmel and symbolic interactionism are also considered representative. During the second half of the 20th century, the sociology of action was in great deal based on the works that originated from analytic philosophy, which caused with some sociologists a recollection of the philosophical sources in their disciplines (Blumer, 1969). In certain aspects, the Weber model can be considered as completely opposite to Durkheim's programme. Weber actually had no illusions about the possibility of objectifying the meaning and values only by means of empirical observation of customs and forms of social life, nor believed that statistical tools might reveal motives of action. He only observed the impossibility of engaging with the logical and moral properties as sensitive data.

However, the fact remains that Weber, as well as Durkheim, emphasizes the center place of morality in society, ie both in the organized society or culture saw a decisive factor of normative orientation towards action. What Weber calls "attitude towards values" and always places it in a certain historical and cultural context, in fact, is not far from the "social streams" located in the heart of Durkheim's sociology. On the other hand, although Webber believes that only by internal understanding we can understand the external meaning of the action of the other, he still doesn't deviate from the integration of meaning and values in social and historical explanations. When Weber analyzes the historical emergence of practical rationality, which is at the heart of all his thinking, he does not consider it as functional or spontaneous emancipation of historical evolution, but rather as a result of a moral process (Ladriere, 2001:68-74). It is known that Weber, among the determinants of social action, in addition to those depending on customs or feelings, also distinguishes two basic forms of rationality that are based either on seeking means that are mostly in line with the objectives (target or instrumental rationality), or in accordance with certain values, regardless of the consequences (value or moral rationality). In both

cases practical rationality implies certain thinking and selection by the social subjects that goes beyond common functional mechanism for adjusting the requirements of the environment.

Fundamental question that arises in the case of the Protestant ethic is understanding the internal articulations of the various aspects of rational action. According to Weber, moral rationality historically corresponds with the development of instrumental rationality, but his victory in modern societies ultimately weakened the moral rationality. The ratio of these two types will not be hard to find in modern operations, between principled pacifism and advocates for decisive action against groups or countries that support terrorism. There is a Weber's exit out of the polytheism of values which is the scientific work, highlighting the universal values and strengthening logical methods that can "force individuals to become aware of the ultimate goal of her own acting".

Conclusion

These topics are still quite closed ones in many parts of the world, but more often than not, we do hear about a more liberal country that has legalized homosexual marriages or euthanasia, or we occasionally read a text or come across a research paper about the economic justification of legalizing any of the above mentioned notions. It is evident that all of these are controversial and very mature for a debate and finding modules in order for them to be integrated in the contemporary society. In the great ideological chaos of the modern world that fails to impose any particular morality, ethics of human rights and democracy - which in essence is the main lesson from the barbarity of the last century we extracted - still appears as the last refuge of human awareness.

However, if it is easier to agree on some universal principles, and a consensus here has already been reached, it is much more difficult to agree upon their application in certain situations. Various aspects of the current debates on globalization are connected with ethical and political responsibility. When conflict with traditional and religious ideologies or those who preach a return to tradition is no longer vivid, we may have the impression that ethics, free from any transcendent or particularistic fixation actually becomes grounded in modern political ideology. The practical goal of this research was to get insights which would serve as a motif or basis for even further research about these topics.

I do hope that the young Macedonian sociological science would get a small but significant help in the overall explanation and understanding of the role of the media in our social reality, especially in their approach towards the contemporary moral debates.

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