

ETHICS AND POLITICS. ANTINOMY, INTERDEPENDENCE OR IMPOSED CO- EXISTENCE?

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Abstract

This article is centered on the idea of "concentricity" regarding two fundamental concepts that seemed to have become indirect priorities both on the political and the philosophical stages, throughout the centuries: ethics and policy. The main dilemma is represented by an obvious discontinuity between moral principles, which were adopted and implied in the political area, and the way they are understood and respected by the individuals. Is "ethics" an empirical construction, a real term that should be reported to the real existence, not just to the "noumena" universe or is it an utopia, a construct without any appliance in the reality? It cannot be denied that modern societies have tried to adopt these principles, but just from the theoretical point of view; unfortunately, the political field always comes into contradiction with the moral items, although justice and law are founded on ethics. Consequently, a simple, superficial selection of the XXth century's main violent events proves that no matter how we analyze these theoretical constructions, from a negative or a positive point of view, we develop different theories on major principles, that make the essence of both the political and the philosophical field: liberty, freedom, justice and equality. There also exists a striking discrepancy between the technological progress, which lately has reached incredible standards and levels, and the spontaneous evolution that should have been also requested in the individual's inward structure, regarding consciousness and responsibility. The modern society confronts itself with another rhetorical question: what has happened to the authentic communication or has it ever existed in real terms? Rawl's theory of justice and the ethics of communication, in the manner J. Habermas analyzed it, sustains the vital necessity of a minimal consensus among the members of any society. The article presents the hypotheses of this conceptual and empirical conflict.

How to behave towards oneself and towards other individuals is a matter of making choices: whether to be friendly or unfriendly, whether to be generous or greedy. These and all other questions about how people act towards themselves and one another are dealt within a field of study called *ethics*. The major question is if this concept has

ever been “alive” not only from the theoretical point of view, but also reporting it to the very pragmatic dimension of reality. In modern developed societies the systems of law and public justice are closely related to ethics in that they determine and enforce definite rights and duties. They also attempt to regress and punish deviations from these standards. Most societies have set standards, whether by custom or by law, to enable those in a society to live together without undue disruption.

It is possible for law to be neutral in moral issues or it can be used to enforce morality. The brought prologue to the United States Constitution says that insuring domestic tranquility is an object of government. This statement is morally neutral. Such laws as those passed to enforce civil rights, however, promote a moral as well as legal commitment.

It is obvious that ethics should be primarily concerned with attempting to define what is good for the individual and for society, but it also tries to establish the nature of obligations or duties, that people owe themselves and each other. The first dilemma appears when the relativist doctrine imposes itself as being the most appropriate one in order to define the essence of what we call *ethics*. Therefore, the relativists do not believe that there are self-evident moral principles that are true for everyone. They say that people’s moral judgements are determined by the customs and traditions of the society in which they live. These may have been handed down for centuries, but their age does not mean they are true standards. They are simply norms that a certain society has developed for itself.

The end of the XXth century is incredibly favorable to a deep analysis and discussion upon the inward relation between ethics and politics. The events and the theories developed on this subject can be interpreted both from a negative⁶ and a positive point of view, which had as a major effect a new attitude towards concepts like liberty, justice, equality. Consequently, the western political philosophy has the tendency to perceive the truth of the Being in the experience of war, the last one destroying the moral imperatives and justifying sacrifice. Hence, Emmanuel Levinas proposes the eschatology of messianic peace, somehow related to the Kantian model. If Hegel points out the conflicts among liberties which establish the structure of those undeclared fights for the individuals and people’s legitimacy, Levinas focuses on the priority and the anteriority of the ethic relation towards any sparkle of violence. Thus, a new principle has appeared on the political and philosophical scene- the principle of Alterity, which concentrates both on the Other’s vulnerability and our responsibility for the relation we have with this Alter, who is, actually, a metaphor for any other individual in this world we could possibly come into contact with.

Taking into account Dostoievski’s statement: “We all are or we should be very responsible for every action, and I must be more responsible than all the others”, I dare say that it is essential that we should try to understand tolerance, freedom, peace and

* The totalitarian experience brought its contribution to the disparagement of the politic-alienation-critics, which would pretend that they established a limit between science and metaphysics while refusing the possibility of analyzing the rules of any action by reporting them to the essence of ethic values.

morality through our own methods of reporting to the others. Therefore, tolerance and diplomacy cannot be reckoned as solutions to the social, political conflicts, unless we do not try to apply these “formulas” starting with every individual. In this case, isn’t it true that man should be given the chance to judge in the name of moral consciousness, the real and authentic history he belongs to, instead of choosing the anonymous history as the main criteria and dimension of his judgements?

While concentrating on the problem of Alterity, the modern individual denounces “the ethical void” of the traditional morality, which seems to be totally innocuous towards the unsolved problems put into discussion on account of the technical level and the individual’s capacity to manipulate his natural framework. The paradox is that this technological progress is not necessarily followed by a spontaneous evolution or eruption in the individual’s inward structure, especially regarding his consciousness, the sense of responsibility. Since the idea that democracy has turned into “a moral adventure” is considered to be characteristic to the modern society, this means that evil has entered into all social and political levels through a very simple, “childish”, still complex structure of relations - the Game. What is really frightening is that people have experienced the effect of the totalitarian systems, that proposed serious assurances as for them being guided by the laws of science: the historical materialism and the racist theories, and this has happened under the sight of the democratic systems. The Other is no longer seen as a subject, but as an isolated entity, while the lack of authentic communication becomes the only characteristic of the relations among individuals; all these generate conflicts - at the beginning, only among certain members of a community, followed by contradictions appearing at a higher level, which involves all the members of the society. With the conflict reaching high proportions, it is possible that more societies could get involved.

The major problem democracy must deal with is that it cannot put an end to the manipulation of violence (which is, actually, inherent to any policy) just by making use of the fragile resources the human ethics could represent. This is why Kant’s and John Rawls’ universal theories are reckoned to be so important, as they try to found the bases of all moral laws and principles, deriving from reason. The positive aspect of this fact is that every member of the social system could recognize, accept and respect these universal rules. In this way, democracy is not seen as a non-conflictual political regime, but as one structure with open, still negotiable conflicts, depending on the accepted rules.

Rawls’ theory of justice together with the theory regarding the ethics of communication, evoked by J. Habermas, also sustain the vital necessity of a minimal consensus among the members of any society. But if these theories are not susceptible of being put into practice, what would happen to the political field? Is politics, in this case, just a business of pure decision, a “struggle among powerful political forces”, after Carl Schmitt’s formula? Therefore, the program Paul Ricoeur proposes in order to make politics and morality be co-existent is focused on the Other’s understanding. One should totally assume the symbols of his autonomy and he also should let the others know that these symbols cannot be conceived and disenchanted beyond this dimension which belongs to the Alter; thus, the transcendence from the community to the political level is fulfilled.

Political correctness has become an ideology showing sensitivity, tolerance and respect for every individual, especially if certain situations differ from one's own, while rejecting prejudicial or stereotypical remarks directed against other people's views. Oponents fear that such conforming ideology threatens freedom of expression and anoints to political censorship. This inability to comprehend the world is compounded by individual's incapacity to gain a thorough understanding of other people or even of themselves. And since politics has been partially and sometimes almost totally deprived of any moral principles, of any diplomatic strategies, there is a possibility for a terrorist association or movement to appear. Every conflict and every violent form of expressing human potentials and interests has as a matrix the lack of respect and communication between one individual and another. For instance, in the late 1960's, European cities were often the scene of terrorist attacks. Among the most notorious events of the 1970's and 1980's were the attack in 1972 on Israeli athletes in the Olympic village in Munich, West Germany, by the Palestinian organization, known as Black September; the assassination in Madrid in 1973 of Spain's Premier - Luis Carrero Blanco - by Basque militants, who demanded Basque independence from Spain and France; the kidnapping in Rome and later the murder (in 1978) of Italy's five time's reelected Premier Aldo Maro, by the Red Brigades, the attempted assassination in 1981 of Pope John II in the Vatican, by a member of the Turkish nationalist, etc. Terrorism, understood as the use of violence to achieve political goals, without taking into account moral concepts and believes, has long been an instrument of repression by governments as well as a tool of revolutionaries trying to overthrow government.

Political murder is as old as politics, but to understand modern terrorism, it is necessary to understand the political and social climate of the 1960's. A generation had grown up with no memory of World War II and in the United States, Western Europe and Japan, with the majority of this generation still in college. In the US, social protest was a common result of the civil rights movement. College age young people became aware of many social and economic wrongs. After 1965, with the heavy American involvement in the Vietnam War, they found a new reason for protest. What the younger generation wanted was to change everything all at once, and this yearning led eventually to the formation of small bonds of people devoted to change *by violence*. Therefore, several organizations in many countries emerged almost simultaneously. The violent protest and the political inability helped spawn the international terrorist network in the democratic countries.

Subsequently, I do believe in the fact that its essential that people nowadays should reconsider Kant's political analysis, just to understand that, despite the historical flux, which is always involved in a complex process of changing, and although the social and political conditions are different, the conclusions Kant drew in order to define the relation between policy and morality are still valid and full of authenticity. "Any form of politics must submit itself to moral principles and values!" The main political believe that should be "somehow refreshed" in the contemporary politicians' and all people's mentality is that morality and politics must co-exist, as the real policy cannot impose and improve itself unless moral values are taken into account. Morality and public justice

must also be correlated, so to enable morality to shape politics. As the tension between morality and the public justice cannot be denied, they must remain connected but they're also distinct. The use of teleology as a linking structure between the moral realm and the political, and juridical one is not something new as Kant himself uses the ends for his work unification. The ends establish a strong relation among nature, human freedom and art, and the last three ones make the connection between the moral and the juridical one be stronger.

As a conclusion, I dare say that in order to recognize and analyze an object, people should be able to prove its possibility as attested by experience, or a priori, by means of reason. This is the same process the individual should follow in order to determine any realistic relation or interdependence between morality and the political realm. This problem remains and this vicious circle is concealed by too much subjectivity. One zenith people should strive to attain in order to establish an order in their existence is to adopt a diplomatic attitude towards the others, to understand or, at least to pretend understanding them, to act in the name of the supreme Principle of morality, because political rules can never guarantee a moral infrastructure, while the moral laws succeed in combining both the political and those priorities related to ethics.

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