ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

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“We are never allowed to accept the order of an authority, be it even sublime, as the foundation of ethics”

(Karl Popper)

Abstract. The concept of “ethics” has always found itself trapped within the limitations of communication and the communication techniques related. Thus, we need to overcome the communication barriers in order to have a clear understanding of ethics and its implications. There for this paper represents an attempt to shed some light in the effort to clarify what ethics really is.

Keywords: ethics as science, codes of ethics, power relations.

Ethics as a science

The concept of “ethics” has an impressive history, being wrought in the ancient Greece, as subject to various philosophical writings; at list this is the commonly accepted version. But once with the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics, it has been unraveled that mankind considered ethical imperatives as guideline in live, even two thousand years before the Greek writings. In the Middle Ages, ethics is making its way into the conscience of the medieval western man in a very specific form. It is fair to say that in those times the approach on ethics is powerfully influenced (contaminated) by Aristotle's view on the topic; meaning that ethics is regarded as the “science of the ethos”, or the “science of virtue”. Now it is a specific reason because of which we have reminded here this ancient conception of ethics; for the assumption that ethics presents itself as a “science” is highly problematic and questionable. In the following paragraphs an attempt will be made in order to clarify the fact that ethics cannot be a science. This attempt is not to be seen as a critic towards Aristotle or the thinking of the ancients, but instead as an objection to modern approaches on ethics that are powerfully contaminated by the reminiscent echoes of the ancient thinking, whether the modern people that promote the idea of ethics as a science are aware of this or not.

In early modern Western culture one can trace and notice the intellectual effort of some of the greatest thinkers such as: Baruch Spinoza (in the XVII century), or Immanuel Kant (in the XVIII century) who tried to base ethics as a science, but (unfortunately or not) they have failed. In the work entitled “Critique of Practical Reason”, Immanuel Kant touches upon the subject of ethics and thus concludes by recommending the following: “act so that your maximum will can ever be worth as a principle of universal legislation”(Kant Immanuel, 1972). What the German philosopher tells us here is that any action, any imperative needs to be universally in order to be ethical. But it is this very claim of universality that makes it impossible to embody any ethical imperative into an ethical action. Let us take for example the ethical imperative “do not kill”, we can find it both in the Bible and as low. Now we were saying that for any imperative to be ethical it must be universally, so there is no room for excuses in acting otherwise. Well, there are several situations where breaking the ethical imperative “do not kill” is perfectly acceptable. For instance, in the case of self-defense or when you are ordered to defend
your country, even attack another country; in the latter cases is even considered to be highly ethical to kill under the pretext that you do it for your country. Similarly, one can disprove the putting into practice of all ethical imperatives, because one can always find a situation where any particular ethical imperative is suspended. Thus, the actions of mankind are governed by the force of circumstances and not by ethical imperatives that function as a smoke screen for naive people.

With the nineteenth century it becomes clear for the Western thinking the fact that ethics cannot present itself as a science, mainly because its subject: “the universal good” is an utopia (Nietzsche Friedrich, 2006). The subject of any science (or any possible science) is (or has to be) the study of a real phenomenon, thus a science never coagulates around a utopian subject. Of course, ethics can be the subject of art or theology, areas where the supernatural and the utopia are at home. (Wittgenstein Ludwig, 2001)

**Ethics and power relations**

By experience one can easily establish the fact that people who are in positions of power and influence (such as: presidents, ministers, directors, teachers, priests, parents, etc.), often impose their own moral convictions on the persons that they lead or influence (thru education and so on), by establishing the so called: codes of ethics; and many consider this to be the manifestation (the presence) of ethics in our society. But one mustn’t be blind to the fact that the imposing of these codes of ethics is simply another method of handling the subordinates, based on the power relations that have always existed between people.

The social and national unity that used to characterize and embody the aspirations of countries in the 19th century and the 20th century, doesn’t present the same consistency nowadays; thus, one can easily notice the substantial shift regarding the motivations, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes behind the thinking and the behavior of people in the 21st century. We face what can be called as the presence of unity in diversity, meaning that (paradoxically) the differences between the people of a nation act as a binder. Furthermore, the dynamics that characterize people’s behavior and the human relations, find themselves transposed as power relations.

Given the fact that businesses have a great deal of influence on various social problems such as: unemployment, environment protection, human rights, improving education, public health etc.; it became a necessity to make the “institutionalization” of ethics a reality (Avram Eugen, Cary Cooper, 2008). Thus, the world of business overseas the implementation of: ethical codes, ethical committees and training groups with ethical agenda; all within the structure of organizations. But the key element here is to understand that ethics in business is not an attribute of the organization, but instead the ethical norms that (should) govern the decisions and actions in business are established and promoted by the people involved in the business. (Avram Eugen, Cary Cooper, 2008)

**REFERENCES**