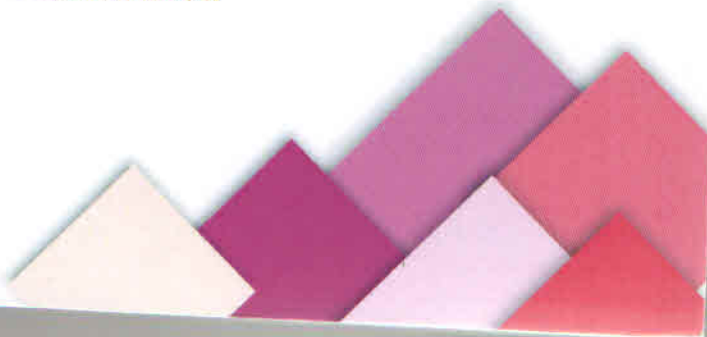


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PUTEREA DE A FI ALTFEL

Happiness Through Education


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THE POSTMODERN RELATIONSHIP ME—OTHER AND THE BUILDING OF THE ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY

ECATERINA CROITOR

Introduction

Every type of society has an ethical system to the extent to which it also has a mental pattern of values, expressed through principles that are alleged and interpreted in what the orientation of social behaviour (a behaviour that is significant for the others) and its evaluation as proper or improper are concerned. If assessed according to this criterion, every known society has ethical systems, if it were to evaluate them under this criterion. It is not necessary for the principles to be always successfully alleged, nor is it necessary for all members to allege the same principles in order to state an opinion; also, it is not necessary that all the opinions should always be the same. What is indeed mandatory is that all those involved should know the values and their meaning. As Stelian Stere mentioned in "The Durkheim Ethics" quoting Paul Fauconnet, the incipient forms of moral responsibility also existed in ancient communities, but they were induced from the outside to their members and were entirely collective, as "the individual conscience and experiences were the same as the social ones" and "the social aggregate would evolve along with the impulse given by social representation." (Stoica, 1969, 159)

Organizing Social Factors and Individualising Moral Responsibility

As time went by, due to changes that occurred during the organisation of social factors (differentiating and subdividing social life, the change of position between the patriarchal family and the community, the beginning of the state, etc.), moral responsibility seemed to take specific forms. The individual's possibility of choice is limited; he chooses what society offers him: a position, a

precise place inside its structure, but he begins to discover his personality. We are able to highlight three main approaches which explain the rapport between the collective and the individual (Grigoraş, 1982, 22): 1. The category of approaches focusing merely on the human being: Aristippus of Cyrene (Hedonism (435-360 BC), by stating the well-known phrase "carpe diem" brings to people's attention the experience of (sensitive) pleasure. Utilitarianism: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) pleads in favour of individual economic personal freedom and contrasts personal pleasure with collective pleasure. 2. The second category of approaches states that "assuming moral value, in broad terms, implies the sacrifice of individuality" (Idem): a moral derived from the very laws of nature, the supreme good is achieved through "sustine et abstinere": endure (all that is evil and wrong) and abstain (from life pleasures). 3. The third category of approaches supports moral good as the supreme good, but does not undermine other values or dimensions of it, the way coming closer to human individuality; on the basis of this approach the moral traits of personality, due to the background rapport between the collective and the individual in the moral act. "Moral virtue does not imply sacrificing individuality any longer; it only requires placing it under the control and guidance of the moral conscience." (Idem) In modern philosophy, this problem could be examined under the unity of three terms: conscience, freedom and responsibility (not considered altogether!) in the following way: a) free awareness and responsibility; b) responsible awareness and freedom; c) free and responsible awareness. In this case, for instance, freedom does not mean "doing what I do not want to do" but doing what I want to do "knowing" why I want it and choosing "responsibly", in other words, being aware that I am responsible for my deeds (Bastianel, 2011 5, 6). Moral freedom represents a way of achieving human freedom in the context of social cohabitation, and moral freedom is also a freedom of creativity, a freedom of bettering peoples' moral condition, that is why this freedom is also the freedom of personality.

Care for the Other—an Essential Element of Post-modern Ethics of Responsibility

In a very explicit manner, Roger-Pol Droit (2009, 32) states that "Freedom implies, above all, care for the other. That is due to the fact that the existence of the others, the multiple bounds between me and them is the universal starting point of all Ethics." Emmanuel Levinas considers that the presence of the other is essential in order for us to exist. The other allows us to find harmony and inner balance by an escape from selfishness, as long as we are aware that the Other is not just an object of mutual understanding (if that were the case, we could not speak about an ethical relationship anymore). The fund-

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in the relationship with the Other is the responsibility which establishes the necessary "synapses" in order for both us and the others to communicate and understand each other. Being responsible of the other is something above our choice and it occurs before we are able to choose it. However, this responsibility requires neither reciprocity nor equality; on the contrary, it is only possible through an absolutely necessary self-care, which leads to inner otherness. This inner otherness is situated between resemblance and differences in such a way that we identify the other as a fellow creature through resemblance and through differences we identify him as an autonomous, capable but also vulnerable human who needs my responsibility in order to be or do to something. This kind of responsibility, created through empathy, is immediate and infinite, and comes in contrast with the responsibility which implies reciprocity and which is not entirely based on altruism. Our responsibility must focus on everyone, known or unknown, and it must imply care towards the other, this leading to our own transcendence. In his works, Zigmunt Bauman (2000, 93) states that post-modern ethics "reinstates the Other as a fellow found, both physically and psychologically, at the core of the moral ego, brought back from the emptiness of calculated interests in which he was exiled." In contrast with this viewpoint, Lipovetsky states that contemporary individualism is not opposed to the desire to do good, but to the ideal of devoting ourselves to the other above all. Obviously, the desire to help the other exists, but it should not involve too much commitment from our part. We are generous as long as it does not imply major problems, difficulties or sacrifices. In a society based on knowledge "total and permanent relinquishment" is not an ideal anymore, post-moralist individualism allows only limited devotion, particularly in critical situations, under exceptional life and death circumstances. Lipovetsky once said: "We no longer praise a permanent exigency of always devoting ourselves to the other (Jankelevitch, 2011): the moment of an imperious absolute has been replaced by a minimal, intermittent ethics of solidarity compatible to the prevalence of the ego." (Lipovetsky, 1996, 152) In this post-modern society, charity is not extinct; on the contrary, it exists and is highly publicized, but this time it appears as an element of the same hedonistic culture. The severity of moral obligation is no longer accepted, conscience is not blamed any longer by a rigid moral, the charitable deeds we do bring about "small joys" without "too much effort." Values have become television shows in which "the new charity takes away our blame through entertainment. Our ethical conscience becomes light, limited, temporary and painless." We no longer deal with "that imperious MUST, but with the theatricality of the supreme Good; the hyperrealist emotion of the television show has replaced the idealism of the imperious obligation." (Lipovetsky, 1996, 156) We give from our excess by sharing what we have too much and what we no longer need, we allow the other only in our extra space for fear that our

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regular personal space might offer them too much information about ourselves. Returning to Bauman and "The Other found at the core of the moral ego" respectively, we bring to the attention and the ethics of care one of the moral theories developed in post-modernity, focusing on care- and implicitly on responsibility- as ethical value. Carol Gilligan (1993) defines the ethics of care as a specifically feminine field of ethics, in contrast with the masculine version of ethics based on the idea of justice. The author highlights the difference between masculine and feminine morality, starting from the particularities of socializing that the representatives of the two genders experience. The masculine side is usually taken out of context, mainly oriented towards principles and values, whereas the feminine side tends to place itself in context, in a web action activity, with the purpose of taking care of the others. The different voice of the feminine and masculine subjects is identified by Gilligan in the preoccupation towards relationships and connections, a preoccupation based on both worrying and taking care of the others, in the case of women, and detachment, individualism and the need for abstract and general principles in the case of men. Gilligan criticises the Freudian theories exclusively oriented towards analyzing the development of the masculine ego, described in terms of success (getting over the Oedipal phase, solving the conflict) and the feminine ego seen as failure (not managing to overcome the Oedipal phase), respectively. The masculine ideal of moral is described in terms of a search for perfection, whereas the feminine ideal is to simply care (http://sacri.ro/_/files/texte/eticagrijii.htm).

Conclusion

"If the moral problems of the human used to refer to his immediate effects upon the relationships with his fellows" (Maxim, 2010, 176), the idea of ecological and technological responsibility is more and more noticeable, especially in postmodern ethics. Thus, our responsibility is not only for the present, but also for the future. The decisions taken today, at a time of heavy industrial development, can destroy future generations. Today, we are talking about a risk society, where carefulness and trust are called forth to manage sociability. Social or individual responsibilities are not meant to regulate and minimize the risk, forasmuch we should grant an exclusively consequential ethic, but to operate the individual and collective risks. Responsibility comes from an individual's/ community's/ organization's ability to be trustworthy. The responsibility of corporations with regard to the challenges of globalization comes from the particularities of the new risks society is part of precisely because of massive technological production and of consumerism. Alvin Toffler speaks about the mask of technology (Toffler and Toffler, 2006, 357) referring to social processes such as destructuring social solidarity, alienation etc. We are

talking about environmental dangers, not only pollution – already existent in today's industrialized society – but also about transforming the environment through technology and disposing almost entirely of the natural factor from certain urban habitats, for example. Postmodern community ethos replaces mechanic solidarity – the precedence of the individual over the community, with an associative solidarity, where the community is also prevalent, as well as in the organic, pre-modern, where it does not have an ethos of its own and is, instead, an association of autonomous individuals, dependent on one another. Modern culture, one of the exacerbated self and of individualism, suggested an ethic based on autonomy and liability. Individualism, as a cultural manifestation of modernism, marks the decay of the community and social spirit. Postmodern responsibility is one of the individual towards the others and towards the self. Emphasized interdependency implies the extinction of individual actions, which acquire all kinds of social significance, even on a global scale. Contemporary society suggests a series of themes for ethical reflection, unknown to humanity until today: wars, in vitro life development, euthanasia, eugenics, genetic mutations etc. Postmodern ethics is going back, through Levinas, to the Other. The Other matters more than myself, as I am, with regard to him, in an "unlimited" state of responsibility, which grows as awareness grows. Not being based on "mutual care", my intervention is a gratuitous assumption. (Goldstein, 2003) The ethics of care leads, in the field of applied ethics, to what Levinas establishes in the field of theoretical ethics: the focus on the care for the other, not in a sense of anguish experienced when meeting the other, but real care. The ethics of responsibility is one of community, as one can only be responsible in the entirety of one's being, which is only accomplished by experiencing otherness. Starting from Levinas, Bauman demonstrates that society is always established on the Third, which intervenes in the dyadic You – Me relationship. The social order is in the area of justice and outruns the morality of the dyadic Me – The Other relationship. Responsibility is customized in the context of a consistent ethics, derived from social principles based on knowledge as social corporatist responsibility. Responsibility is not individual, but collective, being a synthesis between the deontological and the pragmatic – utilitarian. Responsibility regarding future generations is a heavy subject and its promotion is necessary in every circumstance, all the more so in postmodern ethics.

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