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Abstract: Professor Sorin Tudor Maxim aims to tackle this immense challenge by rethinking ethics in at least three major fields: its ontological foundation – in the moral responsibility towards the Other in the Levinasian manner – of the epistemic function – proposing a prospective ethics, simultaneously being situated in the horizon of both philosophy and science – and in the pragmatic dimension – by establishing tolerance as *modus operandi* for any approach that will be claimed as *practical philosophy*.

Keywords: Sorin-Tudor Maxim, prospective ethics, moral responsibility, tolerance.

Introduction

The 21st century comes with a challenge that only the recourse to philosophy – the moral philosophy, more precisely, can handle: the need for redefining the position of the human being towards the *different Alterities*, either of divine, human and/or non-human nature, including here a possible future artificial alterity, but even nature itself, necessary partner for humanity in the reconstruction of a world almost completely anthropologized. Professor Sorin Tudor Maxim aims to tackle this immense challenge by rethinking ethics in at least three major fields: its ontological foundation – in the moral responsibility towards the Other in the Levinasian manner – of the epistemic function – proposing a prospective ethics, simultaneously being situated in the horizon of both philosophy and science – and in the pragmatic dimension – by establishing tolerance as *modus operandi* for any approach that will be claimed as *practical philosophy*.

Between the ontological foundation of ethics and the primate of the ethos on the ontos

Sorin-Tudor Maxim identifies two models of *responsibility* towards the Alterity: the first one is of ontological nature, and the second one of discursive nature (Maxim, 2010, pp. 152-158). The ontological refoundation of ethics is grounded on Levinas’ work (1999; 2006; 1986, pp. 345-359; 2001, pp. 75-87), as a form of *ethics of the encounter*, with *awakening the Identical towards an Other*. The dignity of the human generated by the value of
responsibility as an overcoming of the in-Self in its free beyond-Self-for-the-Other, with the vocation of the action for the Other, which involves responsibility (Sandu, 2017, pp. 26-50). Valuing the Levinasian suggestions, Sorin-Tudor Maxim considers that responsibility is the very original and native structure of the moral consciousness (Maxim, 2000, pp. 7-8). Assuming responsibility towards the Alterity is nothing more than awakening the Consciousness as responsibility. The moral responsibility therefore constitutes an essential structure of subjectivity, which is always positioned towards the Other. Responsibility erupts simultaneously with placing the Ego in the world where the Other already exists. The responsibility for the Other is the very structure of subjectivity. Constituting the Ego as subjectivity is done in the horizon of burdening the Self with the responsibility towards the Other (Maxim, 2000, pp. 35-36).

“A non-interchangeable I, I am I only if I am responsible. I can substitute with everyone, but no-one can substitute with me. This is my inalienable identity of subject (Levinas, 1982, p. 7).

The Levinasian responsibility is an essential moral structure, fundamental and underlying subjectivity, in Sorin-Tudor Maxim’s opinion the fact that precisely the responsibility is what pushes the Ego towards the Other, even despite the Ego, is a real paradox.

Levinas gives so much importance, for example to responsibility in understanding the moral consciousness, that it defined the very original and native structure, because the awakening of consciousness to morality starts with assuming responsibility towards the Other (which essentially modifies the human existence); original, because this type of responsibility fundamentally distinguishes the moral consciousness from other conscious manifestations of the human spirit (Maxim, 2010, p. 149).

In Sorin-Tudor Maxim’s opinion, moral responsibility is a high level of responsibility in which the Other becomes more comprehensive and significant than the Self (Maxim, 2010, pp. 157-158). There is a structural obligation of the Subjectivity as subjectivity, beyond the possibility of any liberty or non-liberty:

„towards his neighbour: the identity of the subject lies in the impossibility of evading responsibility, assignment with another” (Maxim, 2000, pp. 35-36).

To Levinas (2006), the experience of the Alterity doesn’t impose in the radical difference such as the one of meeting Good, understood as an
enlarged Ego, but rather through the simple experience of the encounter with the Other. The encounter with the Other is not a pursuit of the Other. Instead of pursuing it as exit over self, the responsibility as ontological act is preferred, of being together with the Other, regardless of his answer. That is why responsibility cannot be bilateral, but is always the responsibility of Self for the Other. Responsibility is a response of the Self to the call of the Other regarded as Face, and this subtle movement inside the transcendence places ethics before ontology (Sandu, 2017, pp. 26-50). Sorin-Tudor Maxim considers that for Levinas, the presence of the Other dominates the Ego until placing the essence of the Being outside it, in the relationship of the Ego with the Other. The existence of the Other is what brings the Ego into Being, freeing him from his own selfishness, and at the same time generating its uniqueness. Responsibility is non-reciprocal and unconditional (Maxim, 2000, pp. 19-22). The external nature of the being that Levinas (2006) talks about has a moral nature, since the intersubjective relationships gain the meaning of a horizon of the ethical interaction (Sandu, 2017, pp. 26-50).

The absolute, Sartrean responsibility of the individual towards his actions, is considered by Sorin-Tudor Maxim the origin of a passivity “of the Subject facing the intervention of responsibility” (Maxim, 2000, pp. 36-37). However, the Levinasian responsibility is generating the beingness action, being the one that institutes the Ego, in front of the Other, freeing him from the passivity of the Self.

Subjectivity, beyond any liberty or non-liberty, is structurally bound to his neighbor: the identity of the subject lies in the impossibility of withdrawing oneself from the responsibility, assigning it to another. Here, there is a passivity of the subject in front of the intervention of responsibility that reminds us of the manner in which Sartre talked about the absolute responsibility of the subject towards his acts, but also towards what he is allowed to do (Maxim, 2010, pp. 168-173).

Condemning the human being to responsibility is the Levinasian answer to the Sartrean conception on the human being condemned to liberty. For Sorin-Tudor Maxim, the emergence of the Ego as the turn of consciousness towards the Other is preceded by the Ego, and as such, outside its liberty.

The moral responsibility is individual, being situated at the interference between the transcendence of the Self and the immanentization of the Ego, being constitutive to the Being. The ontological position of responsibility makes any action other than the movement of the Ego towards the Other, to be inoperable. Levinas establishes an un-symmetry
between persons. The other being always in a privileged position in the non-reciprocal and un-symmetrical establishment of responsibility. Levinas therefore declines ethics, indirectly, the normative function of ethics. The levinasian responsibility is not established as Kantian moral duty of practical reason, but by the very coming of the Ego into Being. Being preceded by the Ego, responsibility cannot be prescribed to him. Although the ethos is prior to the ontos, the moral reasoning must be grounded on solidarity (Maxim, 2010, pp. 168-173) as an universalization of responsibility. In the absence of reciprocity, the constitutive dimension of universalist ethics, of deontic nature, responsibility becomes prospective, being oriented towards a generic Other, and not specifically in space and time, but at the same time in the ontological immediate of the Ego in order to be capable of attracting him into the Being.

Prospective ethics

The prospective ethics targets the analysis of long-term risks of human actions, especially collective, who seem not to have major moral significance in the plan of the immediate specific. As such, the prospective ethics firstly considers the analysis of the possible impact of cutting-edge technologies, especially by generalizing the access to them and the possible abuse. Jonas (1984, pp. 4-8) draws the attention on inverting the report between the human and the nature, due to generalizing the access to technology, and of its destructive capacity. Until the contemporary times, the human individuals had the capacity to make a significant harm only to the beings from their close space. Despite terrible historical events that involved large human communities – for example, we refer to the invasion of migrating people, which generated the destruction of the Romanian Empire and the entering of Europe into the Dark Ages, the almost full destruction of the pre-Colombian culture and of the majority of indigenous population in the two Americas, in crusades, inquisitions, etc. – the humanity, until the XXth century didn’t have the necessary capacity to completely annihilate the entire humanity, animal species or even the entire life on Earth.

Entering the atomic age requires a new ethics, detached from the complex of neighbor, in general of the immediate or imminent. Jonas’ suggestion was followed by Karl Otto Appel (1998, p. 9) who brings into debate the effects of the ecological crisis, of secularization and the possibility of radical alteration of certain species, etc. The failure of the modern ethical paradigm, of the duty based on the systemic construction of Kantian type, leads to efforts of reconstruction of ethics under the sign of responsibility.
Jonas and Apel build the responsibility in front of the future, that Sorin-Tudor Maxim places at the basis of the prospective ethics.

The concept of prospective ethics therefore refers to a new dimension of the moral theoretical discourse of not settling only with the reflection on reality, but also focusing on the understanding and description of a world that is not yet, but could be, since it doesn’t contradict the tendencies and legitimacies of the current social development (Maxim, 2010, pp. 21-23).

The traditional ethics remains in the space of the discourse on what is, prefiguring what should be, starting from the moral experience of the humanity. In the prospective ethics, the ethical discourse transposes in the area of possible worlds (Maxim, 2010, pp. 21-23), that although don’t have ontological topicality, have a probability different from zero, to come into being. The prospective ethics is asked to answer questions regarding the impact of new technologies on the human and the humanity, the consequences of globalization (Maxim, 2010, pp. 21-23), bringing into discussion the actuality of certain ethical values, such as moral duty, solidarity, responsibility. The prospective ethics overcomes the simple preoccupation for establishing moral norms, and the judgment of the moral agent’s actions in accordance with the prescriptions of their own moral consciousness, or formalized into codes. The ethical reflection is taken into the area of the discussion on moral values of the different components of reality, such as: nature, the human, the society, the technology. The prescriptive ethics becomes an epistemic component, engraving knowledge – especially the scientific one – and technology. Ethics is called to rule on the risks of knowledge and impact on different natural or human systems. The prospective ethics has the duty to overthrow the myth of axiological neutrality of knowledge and impose an extra-epistemic limit: knowledge doesn’t only have to be possible, adequate and generator of new, but also morally obtained and especially acceptable from the perspective of the consequences of the generated technologies.

The prospective dimension of ethics is, despite their absolute necessity, almost unknown (Voo Teck, 2009; Lee, 1999) in the world ethical literature, that resumes to the debate between techno-optimists and technopessimist. The ethical evaluation of technologies, component of prospective ethics, is a field of maximum topicality, and in full ascendancy in the area of applied ethics. Other sides of prospective ethics target the foresight practices – studies of futurology that focus on the critical thinking on sustainable development, debates on the desirable normative construction, and practices of influencing the social development and the shaping of the future through
means of establishing certain public policies that would favor a certain desirable evolution of the society. Sorin-Tudor Maxim has the merit of bringing this new dimension, prospective of ethics in the horizon of the Romanian philosophical debate, in a moment when this discussion is present worldwide.

For the prospective ethics to be invoked in the evaluation of the possible impact of different technologies on humanities, ethics must undertake methodology, in general an epistemic perspective that would place it in science, since it should be an obvious knowledge, at least as obvious and clear as the knowledge in the social field. Ethics should not lose contact with the theoretical and the philosophical, since the lack of the hermeneutic side should be voided of its prescriptive fundamental nature, either retrospective or prospective. The scientific certainty cannot entirely detach from the empiric, and the prescriptive ethics should be able to overcome the immediate in favour of the possible, without, however, drifting so far away immediately, so it wouldn’t be of any help anymore. In this regard, Sorin-Tudor Maxim promotes the idea of a double nature of prospective ethics, both of science and philosophy, being the point of convergence of the two forms, apparently completely distinct, of human knowledge. The prospective responsibility towards the future generations imposes the self-limitation of individual and/or collective liberties to act, so that the predictable consequences of the actions, even the conjugated actions with many others likewise, not to endanger the capacity of the future generations to lead a life as closer to the ideal of happiness that they will adopt at that point, the members, individuals that belong to future generations and are currently not born yet.

The decline of individual responsibility, seen as the twilight of duty (Lipovetsky, 1996), is seen as risky for the society, through the consequences that may arise in case of a false collective responsibility, that only dissipate responsibility through their transfer to collective entities, in fact incapable of answering. The collective responsibility, oriented towards the future, can be placed in a series of particular interests, but common to all individuals that form that community, such as sustainable development, and last but not least, preserving the human species.
Tolerance as responsibility in act

Sorin-Tudor Maxim appreciates that the advent to their own humanity makes sense only in the encounter with the Other. Sorin-Tudor Maxim, the author from Suceava, defines responsibility as “a person’s dignified assumption of acts and consequences of these acts committed intentionally, as well as the fact of giving account to own consciousness of the personal attitude towards the other’s acts” (Maxim, 2010, pp. 152-155). For this assumption of facts and consequences to the authentic, the existence and manifestation of moral consciousness (Maxim, 1999) and of the capacity of the individual’s autonomous agent.

The relationship with the Alterity, when it is not regarded in the ontological side, that of social action, involves the respect towards the liberty of the Other, towards its autonomy. The fulfillment of this responsibility is translated through a disposition towards tolerance, and the accept of differences (Maxim, 2004) between the individuals, as being not only normal, but also a source of fulfillment of the own through communicating with the Other. Tolerance is the correct answer that any ethics on the encounter can be based on. The Other allows for dividing and strengthening of the own, being at the same time an invitation to self-disclosure. Accepting the difference becomes a precondition for any dialogue. As such, tolerance can be considered a horizon of responsibility in the encounter with the Other.

Instead of conclusions

The unambiguous positioning in favour of tolerance and dialogue is a reasonable option in the spirit of the modern, European values. The new accents of intolerance that manifest more and more in the public life, especially once the intensification of the terrorist threats makes the debates over tolerance as a constitutive value of the European Project be very current, the opinion of the philosopher from Suceava being able to be, at any given time, the starting point in an attempt to theoretically reconsider the constitutive values of the United Europe, and in general of the post-secular contemporary world.

References


