Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Philosophy & Humanistic Sciences
ISSN: 2284-5976 | e-ISSN: 2501-0409
Covered in: ERIH PLUS, CEEOL, Index Copernicus, CrossRef, CrossCheck, J-Gate, Google Scholar, Ideas RePeC, Econpapers, Socionet, KVK, WorldCat.

2022, Volume 10, Issue 1, pages: 32-44 | doi: https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs/10.1/62

Towards an Understanding of Ethics as a Legitimizing Structure in the Context of Transhumanism

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Abstract: In every historical period man has been guided by ethical and/or moral imperatives. According to them, his behavior must not harm other individuals. If the man of Modernity was under the empire of the Kantian categorical imperative, the postmodern individual is looking for an ethics of our times. Along with postmodernity, the technique and technology that change in the state of being of the individual is developing more and more. All this has contributed to the emergence of new problems that ethics tries to offer solutions to.

Keywords: *ethics, legitimizing structures, transhumanism.*

How to cite: Terec-Vlad, L. (2022). Towards an Understanding of Ethics as a Legitimizing Structure in the Context of Transhumanism. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Philosophy & Humanistic Sciences, 10*(1), 32-44. doi: https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs/10.1/62

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1. Introduction

In the first part of the paper, Kuhn's ideas regarding the meaning of the concept „paradigm" and what determines a possible paradigm shift will be analyzed. In the second part of the paper, the emphasis will be placed on the evolution of paradigms over time and we will highlight the need to adapt ethics in the context of the creation of a possible improved superhuman.

It will also be highlighted how ethics has undergone transformations and new directions of analysis, given the fact that science should prepare the future task of philosophers, that is to solve the problem of values and to determine the hierarchical order of all values (Nietzsche, 1993, p. 38). If Nietzsche (1993) advocates the need to question all values and the need to renew them, then we can consider that his scheme of thought remains topical in the context of value deconstruction/reconstruction.

2. Paradigms of modern ethics: Kantian ethics and consequentialist ethics – utilitarianism

The concept of paradigm has been used since Antiquity, being associated with the terms example, sample, model, copy, in order to highlight the existence of something that seems to be more valid than something else (Rodriguez, 2007). It has several dimensions: epistemological, axiological, sociological, teleological, ontological and methodological, these being predominant both in the discursive universe within the natural sciences and in the sphere of social sciences (Gonzales, 2005). A paradigm implies a set of values and knowledge shared (tacitly or thematically) collectively, used explicitly or implicitly by a (scientific) community (Ardilla, 2007).

The philosopher who was concerned with the change of paradigms was Thomas Kuhn (1996) - the one who noticed that there is a discordance between science and the philosophy of science, since new scientific theories are not born due to the verification of their validity or falsity, but on the contrary, from because of the substitution of old paradigms with new ones. Since substitution is complex and often laborious, he considered that the substitution of an explanatory model could be called a paradigm (there are therefore twenty-one different forms for which Kuhn uses the concept of paradigm).

A paradigm is a universally (or dogmatically) recognized as a scientific achievement that provides models of problems and solutions for a particular scientific community, but it can also consist of unprecedented

scientific achievements that are aimed at attracting a group of partisans; the concept of paradigm also has the meaning of a model or pattern accepted in a judicial decision within common law (Contreras, 2004).

Ultimately, due to the difficulties derived from the multiple connotations given to this term, a paradigm is what is shared by members of the scientific community in general and which has a disciplinary matrix and a sociological component (Contreras, 2004): a set of shared beliefs and values and of common techniques recognized by members of a certain group (of researchers) (Contreras, 2004).

Kuhn (1996) introduces the concept of a group's adherence to a certain worldview, since within the second definition it is assumed that there is a collective representation of a worldview or ideology (Contreras, 2004). The idea of a paradigm – as a model of thinking – is rather considered a mental construction used in order to create self-identity (Apostu, 2013; Apostu & Petrescu, 2017). The knowledge contained in a paradigm is usually tacit, and this aspect indicates that the problems to be researched have some correspondence (Drăgan, 2009).

3. Kantian ethics

Since there are several ethical theories, a reflection on the concepts and meanings used is necessary to avoid possible misinterpretations. Our interest is to analyze their evolution to allow a better interpretation of the theories in this paper. On the other hand, the semantic sphere determined greater comprehensibility, as definitions containing a greater degree of complexity are highlighted, especially from a philosophical point of view (Zuniga et al., 2013).

The modern era is a period marked by multiple social, economic, religious and other changes. (Sandu & Damian, 2018). When Immanuel Kant asks *What must I do?*, he seeks an explanation in terms of the individual's actions. The answer to this question can be sought through a philosophical research on morals (Bellu, 1974). He seeks a source of practical principles for an unperverted way to reach an ethics of the people and the world, approaching the hypothesis of an objective law of human subjectivity, since the transition from the chaotic form of the world to a form of rational understanding can be achieved through the moral law which people possess and which is the highest product of their own development (Bellu, 1974).

Kant sought morality in the common consciousness and focused on the elucidation of transcendental principles. The philosopher believes that,

in order to be moral, the conscience must be free and the moral law must not intervene with the aim of forcing the will (Grenier, 1995). Kantian philosophy was founded on the categorical imperative, which can be seen as a way of determining moral duties.

The Kantian categorical imperative was formulated in three ways:

- „act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1989);

- „act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1989);

- „so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (Kant, 1989).

The goal is something that people pursue for themselves, so the goals of others must be treated as their own goals (Stavilă, 2011); on the other hand, there is a relationship between will and purpose, since "purpose is an object of the power of choice of a rational being, by the thought of which choice is joined to an action, to produce this object" (Hare, 1997). In describing his view of metaphysical knowledge (transcendental idealism), Kant refers to how the world appears to us, as an object of aknowledge, as well as a thing in itself (Sandu, 2021b). The Kantian theory of knowledge is characterized by transcendentality, and the transcendent being for Kant synonymous is a priori; therefore knowledge is transcendental, as it has an a priori character (Gracia, 2008).

For the Konigsberg philosopher, the old metaphysics is no longer possible, as there has been an increase in skepticism about the human ability to know the object through the autonomy of metaphysical knowledge, that is, of the thing itself. The objective of Kantian criticism is pure reason, i.e. the rationalism of ancient metaphysics from Aristotle to Leibniz, while Kant is proposing criticism as an alternative to the dogmatism of old metaphysics, the place of ancient metaphysics being taken over by mathematics and physics (Gracia, 2008). Kant aims to analyze what the conditions of the possibility of scientific knowledge in general are, with the aim of addressing the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics.

The transcendental perspective allows the philosopher to base an epistemology on a priori synthetic judgments (Gracia, 2008). Kant begins his work by stating that all our knowledge originates in experience. Therefore, we can speak of knowledge only when sensible intuition encounters a concept of the intellect as a form of knowledge. It is necessary, therefore, to make our sensible concepts and intuitions intelligible, as they unite to spring knowledge (Leoca, 2005).

Kantian moral philosophy has moral law and duty as its elements. Duty represents the individual's "obligation" to perform the moral law; the moral law - to which all subjective aspects must be directed - is accepted as necessary by the will in which it exists, being motivated by the feeling of duty (Barbu, 2016). Duty presupposes good will. The good will is based on the existence of the good thing, that is, of the thing itself; for the Konigsberg philosopher, the thing is good in itself, so it is not bad or good for some or others, since good is a universal value, a value that is independent of any context. Kant believes that the orientation to morality it can be achieved by the training of practical reason, that is, by the will. Will is practical reason (Flonta & Keul, 2000).

For Kant, duty begins with the development of good will; the movement from good will to duty comes to ground the answer to the question: what must I do? Kant distinguishes between actions done out of duty and those done according to duty. To act from duty is to observe a duty for duty's sake and not from impulse or inclination; on the other hand, acting according to duty (Barbu et al., 2019) means only formally respecting a duty, but the real motive of that action remains only an inclination: "to be charitable, when you can, is a duty but, besides this, there are some souls so merciful, that for no other reason than vanity or selfishness, they find an internal pleasure in spreading joy around them, and who can delight in the contentment of others because it is their work. I affirm, however, that in such a case, the action, however consistent with duty, however pleasant it may be, still has no true moral value, but can be placed alongside other inclinations, for example the inclination to honors, which, when it happens to coincide with what is in reality a common interest and according to duty, therefore honorable, deserves praise and encouragement, but does not bring esteem: for the maximum lacks the moral content, namely, to perform such actions not from inclination but from duty" (Kant, 1989). In Kant's view, only actions done out of duty have moral content.

Analyzing Kant's ideas, Rodica Croitoru considered that: "reason has, in the moral intention, the task of shaping a will that becomes good in itself, and not good as a means to some end. This is the good will, the shaping of which reason must make its chief concern. And it is so important, because we cannot formulate the concepts of law and duty, that concentrate the maximum of rationality, without assuming the existence of a compatible concept, such as that of good will, which is not found in a common will, not expressly oriented towards the object of morality" (Croitoru, 2006, p. 12).

Kant establishes, thus, which are the actions that man performs out of interest or duty, and considers that only one of the forms brings along the assurance of the individual's happiness; although certain circumstances may cause the individual to act in a breach of duty, yet his actions are directed towards happiness. The concept of autonomy is at the center of the Kantian moral philosophy, also being considered a reference point or a model of the moral individual.

The key concept for explaining the autonomy of the will is freedom. Freedom must be "a causality according to immutable laws", a freedom of the will, of autonomy, that is: the property of the will to be its own law (Huidu, 2018). But if the will presupposes not to act "according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law " and this is the formulation of the categorical imperative and the principle of morality, then the free will and the one subject to the moral law are one and the same thing (Flonta & Keul, 2000, p. 39).

Good will is an operational concept because it carries the weight of what is real:

1. first of all, the philosopher takes it from the language of common rational knowledge, as a "fact of reason" able to introduce a first distinction between the good, as a simple utility, and the good, as being detached from any pragmatic content;

2. starting from this index of common language, he detaches himself from it along the way, distilling and retaining the intrinsic moral meaning it contains;

3. it thus achieves, in the plane of knowledge, the transition from the empirical meaning (heteronomous) to the moral meaning (autonomous), from analytical judgment to the possibility of a synthetic judgment, which establishes - in turn - the possibility of moral judgment, as a particularity of that first judgement (Bellu, 1974, p. 133).

Kant finds the good will at the level of language and consciousness, and this is, in his opinion, an objective process in which human action, determined by the will and directed towards its goals, is inscribed. The autonomy of the will is the supreme principle of morality (Massini-Correas, 2004) and "the sole principle of all moral laws and the duties that conform to them. [...] The sole principle of morality consists in independence from any matter of law and in determining the free will of the simple universal legislative form. […]. The moral law expresses, therefore, nothing but the autonomy of a purely practical reason, that is, of freedom, and this autonomy is the very formal condition of all maxims, the only one by which they can agree with the supreme practical law" (Kant, 2010).

So, for Immanuel Kant, the principle of autonomy can be characterized by:

- the foundation of moral duty (Croitoru, 2006): resides in the practical action of the subject, expressed by what we might call its own laws. Rodica Croitoru (2006) believes that the most important element of morality is the law that governs it, towards which all the subjective principles underlying individual actions must be directed. "From the relationship that the particular action maintains with the universality of the law, it can be said that the law constitutes the basis of the moral obligation of practical actions and that it manifests itself through an absolute necessity for all active rational beings" (Croitoru, 2006, p. 9) ;

- this practical reason must become the foundation of duty, if it is to have universal value (Croitoru, 2006).

Autonomy is the manifest expression of human freedom, transcendental and universal, of an a priori type, since being autonomous implies integrity or a permanent agreement with one's own moral maxim and implicitly with the universal moral law (Sandu, 2021a). From the Kantian point of view, "ideal autonomy presupposes the perfect rationality of the human being" (Sandu, 2021a), but "it is possible that the results of an action do not depend exclusively on our intention" (Sandu, 2021a); in this case, "Kantian autonomy is the autonomy of the will subject to the control of reason" (Sandu, 2021a).

Kant believed that man, as a rational being endowed with intelligence, thinks rationally and acts rationally. As an intelligent being, he belongs to an intelligible world, which is governed by rational laws given by the rational will; thus, as a rational being, man wields his will through positive or negative freedom (Matei, 2010). The Kantian categorical imperative marked the entire modern period, imposing a certain type of behavior on the rational individual. Man - in the opinion of the philosopher from Königsberg - is not free, because his action is completely determined. The moral law imposes itself on our conscience and we are free in our will to fulfill it (Bogdasar et al., 1995, pp. 384-424).

The concept of duty is also linked to the concept of justice, since "the rights of a person are embodied in the fact that they create debts of others towards that person" (Iliescu, 2007, p. 11). Justice, in the Kantian view, considers the intrinsic aspect of action, independent of the results of an action. For Kant, justice is impartiality, and the foundation of a moral principle is found in a perspective of impartiality, one that any rational person could adopt (Miroiu, 2009, p. 94). Analyzing the theory of justice as

impartiality, we emphasize that this is not a simple critique of theories about mutual advantage; a just state of affairs is one in which people cannot claim more (Miroiu, 2009, pp. 94-97).

4. The utilitarianism

In the context of modernity, in a changing society that leaves behind old values to discover new ones, it is the individual who must act according to a set of moral norms. If Kant's imperative has universal value, and man should be considered an end and not a means, the utilitarianism proposes another form of evaluation of the individual's actions in terms of how he relates to others, taking into account the fact that the good of a the greatest possible number of people is placed above the individual good.

Utilitarianism is an extension of modern British empiricism, both epistemologically and ethically, and is based on the idea of doing good to the greatest number of people, bearing in mind that above the individual values, society's values are situated. The decisions of the individuals must take into account the utility, but also the cost-benefit ratio of decisions and their outcomes. Utilitarianism signifies a sum of ethical theories that establish utility as the foundation of morality, emphasizing that actions are good to the extent that their consequences cause the maximum possible utility for the greatest possible number of people (Perez & Sordo, 2010).

According to the theory of utilitarianism, an action or thing must fulfill a number of functions, the concept of utility referring to matters related to use: the good consists in the greatest amount of utility, i.e. the total sum of the happiness of those involved (Kelly, 2008) . Utilitarianism is an exercise in which "possible ethical conclusions" (Goodin, 2006) emerge from potential psychological postulates. Our actions must aim at the creation of good, which results in happiness; the individual calculates his actions according to the presence of pleasure or pain, pleasure determining happiness.

Jeremy Bentham proposes the utilitarian theory from the perspective of psychological hedonism, since "the only efficient cause of an action is the experience of pleasure and the absence of pain; [...] like pain, pleasure is a psychological sensation associated with different kinds of experiences" (Kelly, 2008, p. 286). Given that the idea of good is prone to subjectivism, the basic conception is the same: good is unique, like pleasure, happiness, or utility, or moral duty (Kelly, 2008). Pain and pleasure are closely related to each other, but the individual wants to avoid pain, the concept of pain being

quite flexible: for some people a thing can cause pain, while for others pain can be considered pleasant (Kelly, 2008) .

Utility applies directly to "individual human actions" or "social arrangements" and is determined, on the one hand, in relation to a person or community, and on the other hand, "in relation to an action or series of actions" (Iliescu, 2007, p. 51). The initial idea regarding utilitarianism was to develop an universally valid ethical model to evaluate the positive or negative impact produced by laws. In this context, Bentham's theory proposes two principles: the first considers freedom in society, and the second is distributive justice.

Starting, however, from classical utilitarianism, a new theory was developed, which is based on the principle of the equal consideration of interests ("the principle of the equal consideration of interests") and which emphasizes equality between individuals. In the case of the principle of the equality of interests, an attitude of equality is not claimed for all individuals, in all cases. Peter Singer (1999) explains that when making a moral judgment we are obliged to go beyond our own interests, as we must take into account the interests of all those affected; the principle of the equality of interests requires us to give the same moral value to the interests of all those affected by our decisions (Ferrer & Alvarez, 2003), but it does not assume that all individuals are equal in all circumstances.

The principle prohibits the willingness of individuals "to consider that the interests of others depend on their abilities or other characteristics, other than the characteristic of having interests" (Singer, 1999, p. 22). The connection between the two types of utilitarian ethics is made by Peter Singer, who sees, even in today's society, the need for a new utilitarian ethics, adapted to the problems of our society.

5. Conclusions

The types of ethics previously analyzed (Kantian ethics and classical utilitarianism) are constructed in the context of the change and transformation of society and values. Leaving faith and religiosity behind, modern man constructs his own "code of conduct", which is rather a substitute for Christian morality. The social and economic changes of modernity come to claim an ethics of the man of those times.

Postmodern ethics will come to provide moral models for the various problems that the individual might face. In the context in which technology has penetrated almost all spheres of the activity of the individual, technologies of persuasion, medical technologies, bioimprovement,

communication etc. have appeared, ethics comes to regulate the behavior of both technology designers and their users. Postmodern ethics will also provide a starting point for transhumanism, given that new bioenhancement technologies, how they are designed and how they are implemented, raise a series of dilemmas to which only ethics could provide answers.

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