

THE NEED FOR ETHICS

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Abstract. *The present crisis can be recognised as one of extreme relativity and disappearance of values.*

Truth, beauty, goodness and faith have been transformed into their contradictions.

Culture is essentially history which moves under the laws of double pendulum - it is a battle between two opposite tendencies, both actual and latent ones - (faith - reason, individuality – collectivity).

The time we live in has lost its foundation; it is anarchic and chaotic, without its direction.

So, it is necessary – besides existing laws of double pendulum - and moreover essential (which means predictable) to establish the integrity of culture and to establish a new, truly valuable hierarchy. That is the task of ethics at the beginning of the third millennium.

Key words: *Culture, crisis, values, double pendulum, ethics*

Hegel used the phrase "the need for philosophy" - at the very beginning of the 19th century. Hegel shows us that in a time of crisis, in a time of "birth and transition to a new age", in a time of "the beginning of a new world" (*Phenomenology of spirit*, Preface) a task is set before philosophy to fundamentally examine whether the dominant "education" of that time has any "need" for philosophy and what is philosophy supposed to be like in order to be able to respond to that "need".

Hegel determined that "schism", dissention, altercation, feud - is truly the source of that need: "When the power of unification perishes from people's lives and the opposites lose their living relation and interaction, thus obtaining independence, it is then that a need for philosophy arises."

That wholly applies - today - to ETHICS!

"In every time certain ethical problems become up to date - today, the very ethics has become a problem...", says Karel Woytila.¹

The time which we live in has lost its focus, it is anarchic and chaotic, without clear signposts and clues. The crisis of modern times is reflected in extreme relativisation and disappearance of values.

Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Faith - have turned into their own opposites.

Today's cultural situation is determined by the significance of knowledge and seeking for knowledge as power:

"A man's life has in the 20th century become a withdrawal into an imaginary world, his culture consisted of crossword puzzles and superficial articles and lectures... His music - the clearest expression of a culture's soul - has become demonic, chaotic, fragmentary, dissonant, unclear. The people of that century have become cynical, anti-intellectual, pessimistic; they have thrown themselves into a dance of death, or withdrew into a silent desperation. The economy was crushed; politicians and generals ruled; social chaos and wars emerged to clear the garbage of a dead society. Throughout that period of destruction, the intellectual has betrayed the mind even more; he has sold himself to the highest bidder, the politician or the general who demanded from him to serve the country or its war effort. Though it may have seemed that the intellectual served the society, serving the material interests, he compromised the intellectual honesty by submitting theory to praxis and truth to practicality. In accordance with that, the intellectual made the final, ultimate violation of his society; after previously depriving it of Faith, he has now deprived it of Truth, as well." ²

One may say that the need for values, and thus for axiology, is evidently necessary, therefore is not a matter of choice, but a necessity (and a question of survival), conditioned by cultural-historical laws and tendencies.

Culture is mankind's essential history which moves, evolves, occurs by the laws of the twofold pendulum - it is a struggle of current and latent, mutually confronted, tendencies (faith-reason; individual-collective).

By assumption of a motion according to the model of a twofold pendulum, it is possible to understand and to explain the cultural-historical events. Thus it can be foreseen with a high probability that it is necessary for our time to establish the wholeness of culture by writing new plates of values and by making an adequate hierarchy of values. That is the task of ethics at the beginning of the third millennium.

According to Webster's encyclopedia - culture is a complex of specific views and beliefs, heritage and traditions which make the background or the basis of a society.

Marcuse's concretization is worded like this: "Culture is a complex of moral, intellectual and esthetic values (goals) which a society considers... a good that needs to be achieved."

Culture - understood as a *sensible system of values* - is a true, genuine, essential history of mankind. It is an organized dynamic aspiration, the aiming, striving of a community for a system of values = meaning.

History (and culture understood as an essential history) is a labile process, always between contrary and opposite tendencies and powers and can be explained and interpreted (well, perhaps, in that way - even **foretold!**) by the motion of the **twofold pendu-**

¹ Karel Wojtyła, *The Foundations of Ethics*, Verbum, Split, 1998. p.19

² E.F.Casebeer, Herman Hese, New York, Thomas Y.Cromwell Company,1972, p.148-9

lum (or to connected pendulums). This model is used to emphasize the inner dialectical tension of cultural-historical events.³

The tension always occurs between current and latent tendencies because the background, underground tensions never rest.

One of the basic tensions in history is - the tension between faith and knowledge. Faith and knowledge change places on the scene but aspirations for them never fully cease and perish - neither do they fully win nor can they be fully defeated. Neither does everything change, nor does everything pass. Thus religion (even when it loses power of persuasion) is never fully overcome, but even when it is powerful, still it is not deprived of the opposite correlative tendencies.

The motion of the twofold pendulum and the changes that arise from that motion are followed by bigger or smaller oppression, bigger or smaller, and often deep and bloody - conflicts and wars.

Still, according to the model of the twofold pendulum of events - time brings new, opposite - spiritual aspirations. The growing of the tendency of individualization brings freedom without coasts and limitations, freedom imprisons itself.

Order and Disorder are threatening mankind equally - in their extreme forms.

Thus, in the prime of the reign of individualism and atomization, and therefore the utmost relativity of values (individualism and collectivism are also two of the essential relations and tendencies in the culture-history. Also, the idea of freedom and the idea of equality are mutually exclusive: freedom goes together with individualization, and equality goes with collectivization), the cultural relationship is at a turning point, so in the common Disorder, chaos and anarchy, aspirations for Order and (as much as it is possible) - completeness of culture appear.

The crisis, understood as a conflict, schism, decay, but temptation as well, is in its zenith, and the inner dialectics will cause the beginning of its end - the twofold pendulum moves towards faith and completeness.

From all this follows the assertion (which may seem bold or too optimistic) - that there comes a time of value establishing, a time of axiology. Therefore, even as a **well understood benefit** opposite to suicidal dangerous tendencies of the entire mankind, axiology is not only a **need**, but also a **necessity** of cultural-historical tendencies.

Freedom and necessity are the two sides of a medal, two axes of the same statement and freedom must manifest itself as limited, in order not to turn to its opposite. Unlimited freedom would deny itself, says E. Sioran: "In order to manifest itself, freedom seeks an empty space and dies in it. The condition that determines it is the same condition that cancels it."

The achieving of values isn't possible without creativity and every authentic creativity is directed towards values. A standard that is believed in acts in the life of a creator, which means that every creativity is built upon faith (or its substitutes!).

Tolerance is based upon the respect of differences, yet does not originate from those differences, but from the principle that is above them - and that is the area of values and the attitude to it.

³ The idea belongs to Croat philosopher Pavao Vuk-Pavlovic (1894-1976)

Can this world in any way be made (at least a little) better?⁴

The presented statements are opposite to Hanna Arendt's well known view that ideas aren't the ones that change the world, but it's events that do so (but what are these events caused and conditioned by?) and another even more famous statement of that thinker who claimed in her Theses, especially in the 11th one, that all that philosophers do is explain the world over and over again, but the point is to change it (as if something could be essentially changed without being understood and explained!).⁵

Namely, many a conflict and war has been led because of values and for values - therefore, because of faith in those values.

"We won't find intellectuals on the barricades of the most important historical battles. Still, aren't most of these battles fought out of ideological reasons, because of someone's ideas?"⁶

For this reason, the bearers of ideas - intellectuals, and especially the most fertile bearers of ideas - philosophers - are especially responsible.⁷

"Philosophy will not be able to lead to a direct change of the present state of the world. That goes not only for philosophy, but for the entire human reflection and all man's efforts. Only a God can save us", as Heidegger puts it.

In this gloomy "operated world" and in the contemporary "cultural industry", as Adorno puts it, "the only philosophy we can responsibly engage in in the face of despair is an attempt at contemplating all things the way they would present themselves from the viewpoint of salvation. Knowledge isn't that which enlightens, but the light falls onto the world thanks to salvation: everything else is reconstruction, a mere technique. The perspective must be shaped to remove and alienate the world, to reveal it, with all its cracks, as a poor and deformed one, as it will one day appear in the meson light." (Theodor Adorno, *Minima moralia*)

Can philosophy revive that *snake's bite* (of which Plato speaks through Alkibiades in *The Symposium*), A snake's bite which deepens our striving to know ourselves!?⁸

But in this epoch of deforming - even humanism deforms...⁹

In his **Letter on humanism**, commenting on one of Herakleitos' fragments, *ἔθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων*, Heidegger writes: "Ethos means residence, a place of dwelling. The word names an open area which a man lives in. The open area of this residence allows that which belongs to the man's essence and which is in his proximity to appear."

It can be said that the way of apprehending (*Andenken*) that reflects its own residence - "the essence of being-in-the-world"- is an "original image". Actually, every reflection on the

⁴ Stirred up by the participation in a symposium that took place in Niksic (24-27.5. 2002.), not long before this meeting in Varna, which was cold LANGUAGE AND REALITY, under impression of the unspeakable depth of LOGOS, the answer is - YES!

⁵ I've already written about that (e.g. BURNING BOOKS, Svitak, no.21/2000. p.31-34. - burning and persecution of books and writers is the recognition of the influence of the books and their writers!)

⁶ Predrag Cicovacki, *The World we Live in Together*, Jasen, Niksic, 2002. p.7-8

⁷ look in R. Berstein, *The Philosopher's Responsibility* (Beokrug, Beograd, 2000)

⁸ P. Cicovacki, *The World we Live in Together*, Jasen, Niksic, 2002. p.10

⁹ Charles Taylor, *Calling Civil Society*, Beokrug, Beograd, 2000

ethos - directly or indirectly - refers also to the question of our residence, our being-in-the-world.

Kiril Temkov says that ethics is man's home, it is his birthplace: "In ethics I am at home. Home is the most important place for a normal man and in a normal life, a point where the man's life is just his own, where he himself is his own and where all his passions and strengths bloom. Everyone who thinks that it is more beautiful outside the home is not only wrong, but he will never find such a thing. I cannot find myself if I do not have a fulcrum."¹⁰

We can find that even in Homer's works. In Iliad he used the word *εθος* in the meaning of "usual place of sunrise". Homer says that freedom is - character, and we are at home there.

Herakleitos says for the Sun that it will not leave its path, and even if that would happen, the herinies, assistants of the goddess Dike (the goddess of justice) would help him return. Gods never sleep, they are always awake, their essence is a tireless wake. Thus the word ethos means presence, an at-homeness.

The collapse of morality is the collapse of man, a destruction of home.

It is interesting that Jacques Derrida, from his ethical-political horizon (R. Bernstein not only shows that such a horizon exists, but that a motive of "responsibility" in Derrida's thought is recognizable in his text and that Derrida's texts can be read in a manner that enables us to see how his ethical-political horizon influences and penetrates almost everything he has written, that carries his signature) succeeds in showing us how in the core of what we consider to be close, domestic, at-home - where we think that we can find our center - there is something foreign, strange and not-homelandish.

That's why Ivan Kroppek says that it is hard to write about values in a time of "vagabond thinking" and "nomad spirit", in an epoch in which a thought of freedom for everyone to create his own world is attractive (Herakleitos: the world is one in reality, and numerous in dreams).¹¹

But, every monological and egocentric thought must come to its end today.

Man has lost every inner security concerning his own position, task and meaning. He loses himself in fear and insecurity.

Today's society is characterized by overemphasized pluralism of values and a lack of cultural identity, which is obvious in a living liberal individualism in which a man chooses his own plans for life instead of discovering them.

Today's man lives in a dialectics of fear and indifference, distrustful towards everything. Cultural pessimism is mixed with apocalyptic fears in face of a technological culture - thus it is clear that progress cannot be achieved by rationalization of life.

Postmodernism proclaims reason to be the spiritual terrorist. Anarchism is propagated with the excuse that it is better than law and order.

Values are in a crisis.

Derrida says that ETHICS is a paleonym, an old name which is strategically rusty and which demands a new interpretation.

¹⁰ Kiril Temkov, Ethics, Epoha, Skopje, 1998. p.17

¹¹ Ivan Kroppek, As a Part of Me (ethics - friendship - virtue), HFD, Zagreb, 1995.

Many philosophers point that Ethics in old Greek literature referred to what is nowadays called "Way of life". Ethics answers the question: how to live; how to be good?

How do we talk about ethics?! Discussions don't bring us together, but pull us apart. We feel alone in a world of isolated principles and provisory or labile values.

Talks about ethics are complex, but they often pull us apart and divide us, because what we don't want to admit confirms a loss of faith in the meaning and purpose of morality. Ethics can not be something we have chosen freely, but something that we found and discovered and that we should live by. We need a model of morality that underlies consistence more than freedom - transformation more than choice.

If there is no other moral order than the one we have established on our own free will, morality is merely a thing of our own liking:

"If personality is defined according to individual likings, then every individual composes his own moral world, and therefore has no possibility of straightening the differences between different opinions on what is good." ¹²

In today's postliberalistic societies freedom is considered to be more important than goodness, and so it is independent of it.

Today, freedom is on an exam in goodness.

Edmund Pincopffs speaks of "the ethics of unpleasant situations" - according to which we only need ethics in a time of crisis. It solves problems in such times.

In the ethics of crisis, the focus of morality isn't on our life as a whole, but on a difficult situation we are currently in and don't know how to solve it. Morality is questioned only when we are in a crisis, in dire straits.

The ethics of crisis does not realize the interconnection of what we are and what we do.

But instead of the ethics of crisis we need the ethics of values.

The ethics of crisis asks: what should I do, and the ethics of values: what should I be? What is of VALUE to me?

Ethics isn't something outside us, it **isn't a something** at all, but our **own life** that depends on what kind of person we want to be.

Therefore, **ethics/morality isn't a part of life. It is human life** observed as a whole and in a special way by which we, using our own beliefs and values, change ourselves into something else/better than we used to be.

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¹² ibidem p.20

POTREBA ZA ETIKOM

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Kriza današnjeg vremena ogleda se u ekstremnoj relativiziranosti i iščezavanju vrednosti. Istina, lepota, dobrota i vera pretvorene su u svoje suprotnosti. Kultura je suštinska istorija koja se kreće prema zakonu dvostrukog klatna – to je borba aktuelnih i latentnih međusobno suprotstavljenih tendencija (vera-razum; individualizam-kolektivizam). Vreme u kom živimo je izgubilo svoje središte, anarhično je i haotično, bez usmerenja. Zato mu je potrebno i – prema zakonu kretanja dvostrukog klatna – nužno (što predstavlja predviđanje) da uspostavi celinu kulture i novu, pravu vrednosnu hijerarhiju. To je zadatak etike na početku trećeg milenijuma.