Valued and Devalued Landmarks of Postmodern Ethics

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ABSTRACT: In this study we try to capture the phenomenon of redefining ethics at a proposal level. Human society in general and European and American society in particular have detached themselves from the ethical classicism that has lasted for millennia. The authority over the historical taboos at this beginning of the millennium is unique in the history of mankind and unique in its actions. Supported by scientific discoveries, contemporary society manages to value the unethical classic and devalue intrinsic ethics in ways that propose a completely different ethics. We intend to debate this reality from a perspective with slight biblical accents and yet equidistant in discourse and conclusions. The three parts of the paper—*Devalued Biblical Ethical Landmarks*, *Valued Humanist Unethical Landmarks* and *Valorisation and Devaluation of the Ethical Being*—are also the paradigms through which we evaluate this redefinition of ethics.

KEY WORDS: ethics, ethical valorisation, ethical devaluation, ethical being, humanism, unethical, stability-in-change, the being of obedience

Introduction

The ethics of biblical Christianity has fallen! Beginning with the 13th century, with the onset of Renaissance humanism in Italy, were established the bases for the change in accents in all social and ethical fields. Nothing was to be the same. The only stable reality would be the change. *Stability-*

in-change would clump with every century, reaching at the beginning of the third millennium a kind of socio-philosophical psychosis or an ecstasy of the *different*. The taboos are removed, anything ethical can be unethical and ethical can be done differently. It's a *different* that recognizes its ethics and recognizes the ethics of all the other *differents*. The so-called mutual respect or unconditional acceptance of the mentality of the other makes almost any attitude and behavior ethical. This reality has origins in landmarks whose valorization is changed. "Ethics, notes Norman Geisler, deals with what is morally right or wrong. Christian ethics deals with what is morally right or wrong for a Christian" (Geisler 2008, 3). Intentional or not, Geisler puts a fixed emphasis on the term with the most subjective semantic load, a term that is claimed by Philosophy, Theology, Christianity, Atheism, and so on, a term that has nothing to say in a *fixed* way. This is the term *morally*.

Resorting to dictionaries, the situation does not change too much. The American Heritage Dictionary notes the following next to the word *morally*: "*Of* or *concerned* with the discernment or instruction of what is good and evil" (Berube 1983, 444). The Romanian Explanatory Dictionary also notes that *morally* refers to the reality "which belongs to morality, conduct admitted and practiced in a society…" (DEX 1996, 652). *Morally* in Antony Flew's dictionary is "the opposite of *immorally*" (Flew 1996, 233), and Julia Didier (1996, 217) states that morality is "the science of good and the rules of human action." These definitions compel us to observe that *morality* is the reality that people acquire in relation to an emphasis they consider to be fixed. This fixed point for some is God, for others it is their own reason, for others it is a certain type of society, a certain code of laws, etc. In other words, ethics derive *from* a choice and it is not the object of choice at all.

This reality validates and demands the way we address the topic announced above. Valorisation and devaluation of postmodern ethics as a scientific research will constitute an attempt to highlight the intercomplementarity between the choice of life landmarks and the determination by them of a certain ethics in our lives.

1. Devalued Biblical Ethical Landmarks

Biblical ethics or biblical morality are the object of the preoccupations of all religious or philosophical orientations of contemporary society. This is

due both to the polemics about the existence of God and to the fact that the foundation of human behavior originates in the Bible, origins that nobody can challenge. From the ethics of a card game to the ethics of royal house behavior, each person is sooner or later confronted by the way he respects morality, even if it does not explicitly be subject to judicial sanctions.

At the beginning of the book on Christian morality, Mantzaridis (2006, 9) notes the following: "God is good and the source of all good. Evil is the denial of good. Good unifies and holds together those separated, while evil divides them and breaks the united ones." With this statement, the author preconditionally accredits any opinion that the landmark of ethics is God, and the landmark of its violation is Satan. Moving the emphasis from God's existence on human existence and from biblical absolutism to secular relativism reduces the radicality between God and Satan as to what can be good and what can be bad. This phenomenon has begun in the Garden of Heaven, but the maximum odds are reached only in contemporary society when humanism declares that "the moral ideas are not certain but provisional; no fixed rule of life can be said to be universally valid for all people in all places and times" (Henry 2004, 93). This new perspective on the lack of universality of ethics will lay the foundation for the devaluation of traditionally inherited education and the devaluation of biblical ethics. Man is no longer willing to behave in relation to a supposed future judgment of what is right or wrong, but any action that assures him or her immediate good or pleasure is considered to be ethical.

Against this background of sociological behavior, the Bible is reinterpreted or abandoned. At a severe analysis of the biblical text we will notice that the whole of its writings contains only one ethical dimension, the ethic of righteousness that is antithetic to sin. Falling from biblical ethical behavior is actually a falling from righteous behavior. "Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament sin is conceived as a negative thing, that is, opposed to the divine will and order" (Mladin et al. 2003, 385). In other words, righteousness is the ethics of God, and sin is its non-compliance. Postmodernist ethics values and devalues behaviors and beliefs in relation to a seemingly and immediate good, but this reality does not solve in any way the crisis of human existence. Although, to unleash biblical teachings, we appeal to logic and reason, to culture and context, sin and/ or passion do

not in any way require the idea of reason, logic. "Sin is something irrational. Everything in the world is rational, based on a divine reason, but sin is irrational" (Stăniloae 1981, 58). The issue of ethics has always been a problem of sin. Sin was an unethical attitude, an attitude that you can only evaluate in its context, but one cannot explain it there either. When we talk about a devaluation of biblical ethics, we talk about a post-modern attitude by which we call for the right to a freedom that will mutilate us. At the same time, we call for the right to control this reality in order to protect our lives against suicide. This is the attitude of the contemporary morality that leads to the war against the being as Image of the Being. Ignoring the existence of God or incriminating Him about all that is happening do not solve the unethical character of the contemporary perspective of living. "The origin of sin must be sought only in the free will of man, so in the moral freedom with which he was endowed by God through the act of creation" (Zăgrean 2002, 133). The devaluation of biblical ethics is a behavioral repetition by which we use the moral freedom God has endowed us with, against our own existence.

As we have recalled above, the biblical ethical reference, which constitutes the superlative of the fulfillment of the being, is righteousness. Through the breaking of any deformed, sometimes prosaic action, we uncontrollably overshadow the righteousness that is identical to the ethics and the same to God. The devaluation of the Bible does not facilitate the promotion of the new morality or the new ethics, but promotes an ethical liberty within which the destruction of the being is build. "God is *beyond being* in the act of the creative freedom of a just humanity. This revelation of God disturbs the human order of life and thought and appeals to a new thinking and social order" (Cattin 2006, 67). The renewed thinking and social order is not about the use of human fantasy, nor its ability to make other things, but this renewal is about restoring an ethics that allows the uninterrupted presence of God.

In conclusion, the devaluation of biblical ethical landmarks will not remain a pride of human achievement, but rather will build up a behavior foreign to ethic and familiar to undermining common sense. The willingness to valorize and devaluate, whichever is at hand, does not create other hierarchies, as we would like to believe, but reduces the ethical value to

nonvalue, creating confusion and irreversible slippages. When a man, on the basis of the offered possibility, turns into a woman through surgery, the road back is closed.

So, the postmodern ethics becomes increasingly powerless with the help of its power to create the new morality.

2. Valued Humanist Unethical Landmarks

Good and evil or this antagonism that makes hard-to-define happiness have always claimed the absolute origin and identity. When we talk about the valued unethical, we talk about a deliberate and intentional relativization which we use to dismantle the above antagonism and to give new identities to good and evil, according to preference, interest or convention. This approach can be understood as a process of society development or as a process of replacing traditional values. Regardless of what it is, the phenomenon of valorisation of the unethical is one very advocated by contemporary society. Hume (1987, 124) noted: "Nothing is freer than human imagination; and although it can not overcome that original background of ideas provided by internal and external senses, it has unlimited power to mix, combine, separate and share these ideas, giving rise to a wide variety of fictions and visions." In this line, modern man suppresses his dependence on God in favor of self-dependency or uncertainty, this human endowment that we use to self-determine in any matter that gives us the freedom to deny God's existence in favor of understanding between us and obstructs us, at the same time, the pleasure of having a Master. "The 18th century has greatly contributed to the weakening of human-divine relationships, between man and absolute. Theoretical speculation has begun to be limited, little by little, to the knowledge of things in this world. The absolute goes beyond understanding, and the divine is either ignored or the object of a belief, but in any case never the object of knowledge" (Graf 1997, 52). This manner of intellectual-spiritual manifestation is in fundamental opposition to God's view of the need to know Him. Evangelist John, concerned about this issue, notes the following: "And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the Only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You hast sent" (John 17:3). This

withdrawal from God's knowledge combined with the impossibility of understanding the Absolute gives the courage and tenacity to the human beings to reposition themselves, replacing resignation with time.

Valuation of the unethical has to do with the permissiveness of the human being to re-discuss on grounds of reason and judgment, unethical behaviors which, until yesterday, refused their own questioning through their nature. Euthanasia, transplant, homosexuality, gender change, incest, etc. were taboos that could not be discussed. No one has posed the problem that being a male can be a disease that one can try to treat. The questioning of these taboos implied in the past a gross act of immorality.

From the moment society has consented to valorizing the unethical, all these towers of classical humankind began to collapse irreversibly. This phenomenon forced the devaluation of old self-esteem and the valorization of old selflessness, proposing the neo-man, or neo-being. Avoiding falling into ridiculous by some scientists has blocked the possibility of questioning whether the valorisation of unethical humanist landmarks is progress or mutilation. We are thus witnessing an incredibly strong phenomenon that has only one scientific and moral argument: *we want*.

Valorising the unethical humanist landmarks has to do with existential dualism: the being and the fearlessness of the mind or thought. The being endures the courage of the mind and sustains it, and may lack all its components that would not necessarily affect the existence. This reality bears the emblem of ethics. Therefore, the being supports the mind's courage to amputate the feet, hands, etc. if this still assures the life of the being. In this covenant, neither the being nor the courage of the mind poses the question of ethics or unethical. It all goes naturally and on its own. When, however, it is a heart transplant, the ethic of the being becomes identical to its existence. In this case, man has to get into a state of unconsciousness, or even more, so that others can make a decision for transplant. Why? Because if the one in question were aware, he would not do it. Heidegger (1998, 297), in his letter on "Humanism" overcomes the thought with the existence of being and subordinates the thought to the being. He says that "what, however, *is* before anything, is the being. The thought accomplishes the relationship of being with the essence of man. It does not make this report and it is not the

origin of it." Under these circumstances, the postmodern perspectives on morality undermine the ontological relationship between being and thinking and puts them in conflict. Valorisation of unethical humanist landmarks constitutes in this case the creation of an open conflict between being and thinking. This means opening a war theater aimed at suppressing the being by the bravery of the mind. This should call into question the valorisation of the mind's courage; up to where its decisions are virtues and beginning from where can we talk about dementia?

In conclusion, the valorisation of unethical humanities landmarks will not only respond to fantasy or love for the new, but at the time of their full realization, they will suppress the being and create the premises for its irrevocable destruction.

3. Valorisation and Devaluation of the *Ethical Being*

In this chapter we want to bring to attention the interchangeability as a way of solving the existential crisis, or as a way of solving the tension between the old and the new, between the good and the evil, the willing and the imposed, etc. This solution is achieved by creating an infrastructure of existence whereby all contradictions can be interchangeable not only through positioning but also through content.

The ethical being was once the only reality that claimed and confirmed the existence of actions or attitudes that were ethical in themselves. They could not be different no matter the cultural location or religious, sociological or philosophical orientation. An example of an ethical being is the metaphysical reality of the encounter between children and parents. We will call it *the being of obedience* in our study. For millennia it was ethical that any child should be subjected to his parents and the reverse behaviour was unethical. This had as landmark either the Holy Scriptures or the oral inheritance left by God through the verbal revelation or the determinism of the human physiological existence similar to the animal kingdom. We will not provide an argument to confirm which of the three theses above is authentic, but we will not neglect that no matter which one is, for many centuries or millennia, as noted above, *the being of obedience* was considered

ethical in itself. Devalorizing the ethical being based on the valorisation of the rights of the child, or on the basis of the valorisation of sporadic and isolated abuses, which later were generalized intuitively, without evidence, determined the possibility that *the being of obedience* to be evaluated and dismantled. In this new perspective, the attitude of obedience and subjection of a child towards his/her parents can be considered unethical. "We live in a time when the traditional role of parents has been seriously questioned. Virtues such as altruism, religious belief, obedience, honor, spirit of justice, and simple courtesies have been replaced or substituted by selfish attitudes such as self-valorisation, licentiousness, the spirit of competition constantly duplicated by the concern to think and act *politically correct*" (Breck 2006, 82). Under these circumstances, there was a re-placing of *the being of obedience*, and in a relatively short time the old attitude would be stigmatized by the new educational guidelines. Nobody has questioned the price of all these. In fact, *the being of obedience* was violently killed. This will give a fundamentally different and unpredictable course to human existence.

When we talk about the valorisation and devaluation of the ethical being, we talk about a path from the past to a future that intersects the present. Redefining ecstasy as agony, and redefining agony as ecstasy or blending them to create a new state, refuses to take into account one of the few realities that make us superior to the animal kingdom and superior to our own existence, that is **love.**

Valorisation and devaluation of the ethical being is done out of love. "In love and through love, the person discovers that his way of being is an existence *for* and *with*" (Mărtincă 1999, 13). Thus, the child no longer reports to himself or to the "hallucination of free existence", but relates to his parents, to his superior reality, a reality that by mere presence constrains his attitudes and redefines them in subjection and obedience, that is in *the being of obedience*. This is because I exist *for* and I exist *with*, for my parents and with my parents, an existence identical to love. This phenomenon contradicts the valorisation and devaluation of the ethical being and dismantles the existence of the self for that self. "Not the infinity in itself gives the joy of love, but its representation by another person than our own" (Stăniloae 1993, 64). Re-valuing the ethical being on criteria other than love of divine mode and

manner is in fact a deliberate attack on the subconscious of human existence. We have to deal with the intention of reprogramming the human patterns, not knowing what can produce such a psychosomatic movement. We do not know whether the Creator of the human being will be permissive to this reprogramming of the way of existance of the human being, but we know that the mirage of novelty is a phenomenon that can no longer be controlled by anyone.

With the ethical being disappearing, we can talk about situational or conventional ethics. By reducing to absurd, this assumes that there is nothing unethical. There are situations in which we can have different opinions, there are situations that can be the subject of controversy or complementarity, there are situations that can mutually reject themselves, but there are no longer unethical situations. Suddenly I drew a term out from the lexicon of existence itself! It's about talking about absolute and absolutizing the convention or the situation. In this case fixed landmarks are replaced by moving landmarks and their movement remains under the responsibility of the imperfect substituting the Perfect.

Speaking of justice, Aristotle notes the following: "Everyone agrees that in the matter of distribution, justice is in relation to merit, but not all of them understand the same thing by merit; the democrats see in it the free condition, the oligarchs, wealth or noble origin, the aristocrats, virtue" (Aristotel 1998, 110). If we replace justice with morality, from this Aristotelian equation, it will necessarily result that situational or conventional ethics is a reality that depends on perspective or guild, in no way on something absolute. In fact, this is the prospect of ethics in postmodern society. In other words, any ethical reality can be devalued. Everything is just a matter of time.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of valorization and devaluation of the ethical being should impose scholars some other considerations than those mentioned by us and the rest of those present. The ethical thing can not be reprogrammed without the arithmetic evidence that we have today. The assumption that it will be good or otherwise does not guarantee in any way the discarding of our own existence.

Conclusions

Finally, we can say that the foundation of the concept of ethics is no longer conceived in the classical or even modern way. By redefining God within the human conscience or by renouncing His existence, the contemporary society has discovered that no one but itself has the authority to interrogate it about what it does. This freedom, unique throughout the history of the world, has accredited the current political power and its infrastructures to embrace the valorisation of segments of human existence that were incriminated. Divorce, child abandonment, gay adoption, full independence within the family, changing gender, etc. are just a few examples on which operates an ethic dimension different than the familiar one of the past century.

If we subjectivize the divine absolute in which the classical ethical had a landmark, then it is quite difficult to reproach the new dimension of ethics. It is very probable that future decades will provide us with evidence of this type of thought, which will accredit or discredit what is happening today at this level.

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