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INNOVATIVE ROLE OF (APPLIED) ETHICS AND CREATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

Abstract. Our reasoning is based on the belief that contemporary applied ethics are closely related to innovation and the creation of good life. At present, it is increasingly connected with technical sciences or art. An increased risk has shown that applied ethics are not only a fashion trend, but also an important part of human protection, control of dubious practices of companies and public institutions, quality of life, environment as well as assessments of the impact of modern technologies. Its current theoretical potential and implementation experience suggest that it can be an important part of positive change and humanity's vitality. Its underperformance can lead to serious consequences and an increase in social collisions. Applied ethics is not only a tool for solving problems, but also by setting up preventive mechanisms and project creation and vision for the future.

Keywords: Applied ethics, innovative, good life

INNOWACYJNA ROLA ETYKI (STOSOWANEJ) I TWORZENIE DOBRYCH PRAKTYK

Streszczenie. Nasze rozumowanie opiera się na przekonaniu, że współczesne etyki stosowane są ściśle związane z innowacją i tworzeniem dobrego życia. Obecnie coraz częściej łączy się je z naukami technicznymi i sztuką. Zwiększone ryzyko wykazało, że etyki stosowane są nie tylko modnym trendem, ale również ważnym elementem ochrony człowieka, kontroli wątpliwych praktyk firm i instytucji publicznych, jakości życia, ochrony środowiska, a także oceny wpływu nowoczesnych technologii. Ich obecny potencjał teoretyczny i doświadczenie wdrożeniowe sugerują, że mogą być ważną częścią pozytywnej zmiany i żywotności ludzkości. Niewydolność może prowadzić do poważnych konsekwencji i narastania społecznych zderzeń. Etyka stosowana jest nie tylko narzędziem do rozwiązywania problemów, ale także tworzy mechanizmy zapobiegawcze oraz projekt i wizję przyszłości

Słowa kluczowe: etyka stosowana, innowacyjność, dobre samopoczucie

1. Innovative role of (Applied) ethics and creation of good practice

The issue of the innovative mission of humanities has been discussed for several years. Both international initiatives and national challenges have been accepted with an appeal to shift towards this in practice. These initiatives include e. g. the *European Forum of Law and Education*, *Forum Humanistyki Polskiej (Forum of Polish Humanistics)* or *Učiace sa Slovensko (Learning Slovakia)* – the national program for upbringing and education. Expert communities, discussions and supported programmes emphasize the new role of the humanities in encouraging innovations, developing soft skills, their practical use, and the work opportunities for experts in humanities in the labour market. Slowing down the decline of certain regions or alleviating suffering is undoubtedly a praiseworthy mission for intellectuals, however, it is not in line with the discourse of excellent science. The happiness and well-being of citizens seem to be losing their value and the real-life parameters that could be studied. R. Rorty emphasizes the role of (American) universities in fighting human suffering which should not be seen as inevitable. He claims that in the 20th century, they proved a unique source of movements calling for the alleviation of human suffering. (Chotaš, J. – Prázný, A. – Hejduk, T. et al, 2015)

Research and application of knowledge in the humanities cannot be measured in terms of their impact, because they represent a series of gradual transformative activities. We are not speaking of a one-time act with a proven impact or innovative effect – in fact, it is “*gradual development of the epistemic capacity.*” (Stöckelová, T., 2012, p. 29)

We also perceive the mission of applied ethics in this context. We believe that its emergence was triggered by new practical problems that appeared at the end of the 20th Century which could not be solved using traditional methods. Implementation of ethics became perceived as an innovative procedure not only in the area of entrepreneurship or medicine, but also in new technologies and science. It was related to the effort to provide well-being in times of dynamic changes and globalisation processes.

The increase in the incidence of major risk events showed that applied ethics are not a fashionable trend – they are an important element of protecting people, keeping questionable company and institutional practice in check and protecting the quality of life and environment as well as evaluating the consequences brought on by modern technologies. Last but not least, they address the moral responsibility of organisations in the context of our future. Therefore, the aforementioned topics are the subject of interdisciplinary discourse in which experts in ethics are understandably involved. Our proposals should not be taken into consideration as some sort of less significant recommendations, they are a legitimate part of innovative social changes. Today, it is no longer enough to point out and describe current issues or arrange them didactically – it is necessary to initiate solutions and offer balanced arguments and specific practical proposals. They must be appropriate in terms of theory and implementable

in practice. In relation to innovative thinking, it is necessary to focus on the practical intention of ethics and its importance in the creation of good practice and a better life. Ethical appeals are typical for an era of enlightenment instead of the contemporary bureaucratic individualism. As for the enlightenment and current liberal projects, MacIntyre (1984) believes, that not only moral theory failed in society, but also in practice, since they are inseparable. People in this type of society are unable to fill moral rules with meaning or to understand the moral impact of their actions. This may be the major reason why change initiators tend to refuse to cooperate with experts in ethics in recent projects. Whilst this attitude is not acceptable, however, our efforts are often theoretical or academic, lacking constructive power which renders them difficult to translate into practice. Due to this feature, traditional scholarly disciplines and initiative are often alienated from reality.

The actual innovative role of applied ethics is represented by the following procedure: after expert analyses, the implementation stage should follow, justified by the proper arguments for a morally acceptable change. It means that a simple prompt to alleviate the situation is not enough, a solution proposal, active dialogue with practitioners and representatives of science and research needs to follow. Not even the best material provided by theoretical or applied ethics can fulfil its role unless it results in practical solutions and finds ways to be integrated into the newest knowledge (interdisciplinary openness). In other words, ethical application lacks constructive power unless it is confronted with current knowledge and practice (verification of its practical acceptability) and unless it wins recognition in the scientific dialogue (verification of theoretical and argumentative acceptability), and unless convincing ways of implementation are proposed. Therefore we believe that contemporary applied ethics is closely related to innovations, if not an innovation itself. Its innovative mission is to answer questions related to limiting the risks threatening the project of improving the overall quality of life and the concept of sustainable development. Innovations and changes can only be understood using broader contexts and deeper relationships. Therefore, these changes require not only contextual, but also historical-ethical evaluation. If the motive of improving the quality of life is to be the basic precondition for the innovative changes, it has to be evaluated in the current value context. Therefore we believe it is important to understand not only the preceding theoretical-ethical experience and moral practice, but also correctly apply it in the evaluation and implementation of the changes. Conceptual theoretical frameworks are an important precondition for ethical evaluation and the design of further steps. On one hand, it is necessary to return to what our civilisation has already created and fought for: How it imagined life and its future and how it evaluated moral practice. The most suitable tradition on which to base the idea of our future life needs to be identified. We have to believe that this good practice and line of moral development serves to provide us with a basic orientation in our complicated contemporary era. It is also important to identify how legitimate these approaches are nowadays and how to correct them. Sadly, the historical memory and intellectual property of the theory of ethics and moral practice is often

underestimated. On the other hand, pointing to the overview of ethical theories and principles or simply referring to the power of the classics without proposing any possibility of creative application is a feature of the traditional approach in ethics. As for the innovative role of applied ethics and its creative power, it is urgently necessary to evaluate the ethical risks in designing the future in the context of the moral risks to quality of life. Besides this knowledge, it is also necessary to support projects focusing on sustainable living which is closely related to the specific idea of well-being. We are speaking of the ability to identify non-traditional procedures and ways of expressing our beliefs. In practice, this approach already has specific forms, such as active participation in the projects related to sustainability on the global but also local levels, application of ISO quality standards, models of social responsibility (ISO 26 000), functioning of epistemic communities in biomedicine, etc. Ethics is therefore often perceived as added value and an innovative element in companies, as a competitive advantage, as a way of building trustworthiness and providing social prestige in companies, public and state institutions.

We care about the development of society, not only technological, but also moral. It needs to be aware of the moral risks and of possible failures having unpredictable consequences. It can be illustrated by both business and modern technologies. Even the highest performing business can experience a failure which can lead to loss of reputation, threaten life or nature. Ethics has become the healer of bad practice in the contemporary business – but also its prevention. The simple truth applies also in the context of changes – we are all citizens and we all wish to be useful and happy.

New technologies and their development triggers ambivalent moral attitudes and often even moral dilemmas. On one hand, they are infinitely beneficial in protecting our health, eliminating hard work and increasing our comfort, but on the other hand, they can be very dangerous to the natural environment or, for example, increase unemployment. Social issues and ambitions are mutually interconnected and cannot be perceived separately from morals, our day-to-day behaviour or the values we are pursuing. They must be identified and addressed. Otherwise, our scenarios are unconvincing and disputable, they increase social tension and contribute to the creation of a high risk society.

Ethics should become a part of all innovations and flexibly react to emerging situations. This is not a romantic ambition of dreamers pursuing their careers in the humanities, it is a serious appeal to those who implement changes – responsible behaviour and pursuing the vision of a better life, as formulated by classical thought and contemporary intellectuals, are of vital importance.

Why are the humanities often underestimated and considered as an outsider? Often due to commercialisation of rationality, economic pragmatism and scientific or political particularism. Therefore it is necessary that we actively enter these areas and critically evaluate the situation. Proactive initiatives are also needed, we must develop critical thinking and creative-moral abilities (e. g. using the method of solving moral dilemmas), form soft

skills, stimulate ethical sensitivity and self-reflection, moral imagination, empathy, etc. The task of humanities including applied ethics is very clear in this area.

The historical mission of the king of philosophers – Aristotle, who dedicated his creative life to searching for the path to a good life and understanding why the pursuit of virtuousness and practical wisdom, known as *Phronesis*, was important – is reflected here. Many other philosophers awakened our interest in revealing ethical relations and identifying moral codes as well as the mechanisms of how morals work. Their ambition was noble – to answer the ethical scepticism of their era and persuade us that our life can be better.

We would like to follow the legacy of our predecessors and support the ethical revitalisation of life in society. This path represents a permanent challenge, retaining its moral importance up to this day, because moral risks are ever-present and no one else is going to address them, not politicians and not the best businessmen or lawyers, artists, or media.

We respect the factual existence of civilisation, historical and cultural differences between societies, and consider them a valuable source of inspiration for the future. Current social changes are characterised by intense globalisation. Therefore, it is important to use the wisdom of different civilisations, critically understand the so called Eastern cultures – Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism or Hinduism. In many cases we will reveal also their potential for inventions and new possibilities. For example, Zen Buddhism allowed Japan to achieve world leadership in several areas. Thanks to the Eastern traditions, we can identify the risks of rationality, understand the limits of anthropocentrism, and explore the possibilities provided by non-anthropocentric ethical concepts. It taught us that the EuroAmerican tradition which created our archetypes, specific value profiles and rationality types, need to be critically revisited. We must learn from our own moral tradition and make efforts to adapt its moral legacy in the new environment. Not all projects have been successful, however, experimenting provided us with experience, foundations for change and for tackling the new moral challenges. Today, we realize that we underestimated the role of emotionality in the contemporary moral revitalisation (loss of moral sensitivity, shamelessness, etc.). The role of traditions as a manifestation of our moral identity and reasonable pride for our authenticity has also been underestimated. On the other hand, it is encouraging, that new methodological approaches in ethics are being integrated into political strategies and practical procedures (ethical coherentism, discourse ethics, ethics of responsibility, sustainable development). Today, we also understand that universal values and ethical principles are limited; happiness does not lie solely with economic success (e. g. the emergence of ministries of happiness, using of happiness indicators). Visions based on convincing values are more important than economic pragmatism; the ethical reputation is a more important element of a company's value, than just its economic success.

However, the integration of ethics into real-life practice and thinking is still relatively far from ideal. New approaches of companies and institutions often lack projects with ethical aspects; if they are present, they are often of a merely formal nature. The discussion has not

yet become a part of the broad public discourse, since it is marked by pragmatism and particular interests. This topic is not attractive enough for media and social demand is very low. Companies and state institutions often declare their interest in improving their moral climate and ethical culture, however, they do not act on it. They usually even doubt the actual service that ethics can provide. Ethical feedback from central state and public institutions remains relatively low, it is generally not supported, or even understood (e. g. adoption of ethical audits, ethics of investments...). There is a lot of work to be done in the different areas of social interactions and their mechanisms of functioning. Searching for ethical responsibility then takes place on the level of Plato's mythological shepherd and his magic ring which represent a hidden player able to anonymously change their identity and manipulate life. This myth represents the model situation of how modern media and social networks work; the moral role is taken on by invisible persons and powers, i.e. societies without delegated responsibility which is consequently never used. Therefore, a shift in the discourse towards the possibilities of the application of ethics as an innovative power would be welcome.

The emergence and development of applied ethics has been culminating in the last decade; it achieved an autonomous theoretical position and its mission has been accepted in terms of ethical expertise, practical constructivism and social change. It has acquired a profile of flexible (not strictly closed) interdisciplinary discourses. Applied ethics is open to expert dialogues in different fields and able to address urgent moral issues.

We need to realize that each ethical issue has several dimensions and a partial solution may not be enough to result in success or meet our expectations. Each minor ethical success remains at risk due to its position in a complex system. Moral rehabilitation and success require general support and complex solutions. A moral change can be difficult to implement unless cooperation is provided in a broader context – unless ethical consulting becomes equivalent to other types of consulting, and interdisciplinary cooperation, narrative and methodological unification takes place.

The moral deficit and lack of ethical culture are obvious and perceived sensitively. Reasons may include lack of deeper analyses of moral acceptance. Therefore we critically perceive social initiatives that underestimate the ethical aspect or address it only marginally. Again, it signals a lack of trust towards ethics and its practical usefulness. Citizens, clients, and patients therefore cannot find a moral support tool they could refer to in situations where conflicts or dilemmas occur. How is the citizen supposed to imagine a better life if there is nothing they can lean on since we are unable to translate it into basic social strategies? It is not surprising, that many abandon traditional values and opt to follow societies (groups) with more powerful and convincing ones.

We possess a certain experience in this field in both theory and practice. There are sources of inspiration at home and abroad. We believe, that this experience can be exchanged to supporting the goal of a better life.

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