



Edited by Vasil Gluchman

Morality

*Reasoning on
Different Approaches*

VALUE INQUIRY BOOK SERIES

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Review: *Morality: Reasoning on Different Approaches*, ed. Vasil Gluchman, Value Inquiry Book Series, Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York 2013, pp. 182, ISBN: 978-9042037274

This book, through its essays, captures this interdisciplinary nature of research into morality, treated both as a social fact, as well as man's individual disposition. The Slovak philosopher and ethicist Vasil Gluchman, as the book's scientific editor, divided the book into two parts, the first, entitled *Different Concepts of Morality* presents, in accordance with its title, various and sometimes even controversial stances related to the understanding of key issues of morality. The second part of the book titled *New Trends in Understanding Morality* consists primarily of the author's attempts to explain the sources of morality formulated not only by ethics, but also by the biological sciences. In this short presentation it is clear that both the scientific editor as well as the individual authors, did not set themselves the objective of writing another book on moral philosophy, but instead focused themselves on the key issues which determine the status and direction of contemporary research into morality.

In the introduction, Vasil Gluchman stressed, that no ethical theories can be formulated which can be applied eternally. Each age is characterized by its particular morality, and hence ethics must constantly adapt to existing realities.

The first chapter of the book is Jeremy Bendik-Keymer's essay titled *The Moral and the Ethical: What Conscience Teaches us about Morality*. The problem of conscience, by reference to individually molded sensitivity, is placed within the psychology of morality. The author tries to prove that only molded conscience allows us to establish and maintain social relationships. The author carries out his reasoning using human rights as an example. History has shaped human conscience and thus, after the Holocaust, following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, human conscience has been completely reshaped. Thus conscience becomes a fundamental category of humanism, because it was shaped in interpersonal relations, and therefore morality must also be relational (p. 17). Therefore, a person functioning in society becomes a moral being, and consequently the author answers the question of whether morality is innate, or is the result of the influence of society. Such a solution adopted by the author is heralded by the motto "Even though you are far from my eyes, you are in my heart" which constitutes an introduction to his article.

Howard M. Ducharme from the University of Akron in his article *A Critical Evaluation of a Classic Moral Scientist: Are there any Moral Facts to Discover?* compares ethical tradition with current realities. It is difficult to agree with the author's premise that we are living in an age of moral relativism, which is a consequence of the dominance of ethical

naturalism. It is in my opinion too simplistic a view of the history of ethics. The distinction between Ethical Realism (ethical non-naturalism) and Ethical Anti-realism (ethical naturalism) introduced by the author is interesting. According to Howard Ducharme the watershed between these two stances in ethics is Thomas Hobbes' philosophical system. The author carries out a critical assessment of ethical tradition which Hobbes' philosophy embodies, and ultimately advocates for a certain form of personalism, which should restore the cognition of ethical values to its rightful place, and hence protect the whole doctrine from the pernicious influence of ethical antirealism "And not to forget, objective ethical truth telling saves science from the doom of ethical antirealism." (p. 44).

Mark Piper from the James Madison University devotes his essay to the issues of acceptance and respect for human rights. On this occasion the author analyses how respect for human dignity and autonomy is justified in the ethical tradition. His reasoning is carried out on the basis of Immanuel Kant's commonly accepted philosophy. He also considers the alternatives, but ultimately shows that the Kantian understanding of autonomy has not yet lost its relevance.

The Polish priest and philosopher Janusz Marianski from the Catholic University of Lublin in his article *Models of Change in Modernity in Contemporary Societies* attempted to clarify the change mechanisms in hierarchy and value in modern societies. Although he claims that one cannot develop a coherent and consistent theory which explains such changes, he believes that in contemporary European societies, there are four such models, or rather scenarios, according to which such changes take place. Janusz Marianski, himself however treats his segregating only as a proposal for discussion.

Kumar Neeraj Sachdev from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science in Pilani, in his essay *Morality, Good Life and Selflessness* has attempted to demonstrate that in order to lead a "good life" it is necessary to fill it with moral content. A moral component of human life is necessary, if only, in order to maintain its internal integrity and give it a historical identity. Such filling of human life with morality, is made possible by nurturing selflessness. In his article, the author presents parts of Eastern philosophy, and tries to demonstrate that within it, it is easier to find the way to a "good life". Summarizing his discussion he notes that in order for life to become unity nothing more is needed than to follow the wisdom perpetuated in the tradition.

The second part of the publication *New Trends in Understanding Morality* is devoted to contemporary research into morality and tries to identify the trends that are revealed in modern science. These texts are a challenge for the reader, who should have some knowledge

of the natural sciences in order to understand them. Francesco Belfiore in his article *Searching for an 'Objective' Human Good: An Overview* begins with a somewhat exaggerated formulated promise to present his own concept of ethics. For this, the author used observation (external and internal observation) and an analysis of the theoretical works by Descartes, and Locke, as well as more contemporary researchers of the human mind. This type of research led the author to formulate his own "ontological conception of human mind (or spirit)" (p. 89). He also presented his idea in graphical form. The triadic concept of the human "Mind" or "Spirit" as presented by the author assumes unity of all elements and their mutual influence which allows evolution of the whole. It also assumes that evolution of the mind has a positive effect on the development of morality and simultaneously this moral component obliges the individual to improve his intellect. This concept also explains from where a decline in moral sensitivity and a sense of obligation to help others originates.

Frederic Gilbert from the University of Tasmania eloquently titled his article *Does Neuropathology Dictate Morality? Acquired Pedophilia as a Neuroethics Case*. Referring to recent discoveries in neuroscience the author tries to show that some evil tendencies in individuals, unequivocally condemned morally, such as some forms of pedophilia are illnesses, and therefore should be treated rather than be morally condemned or punished in court. In this case the author's suggestions appear to be controversial in that perhaps we should change our conception of morality and the extent of human responsibility.

Vasil Gluchman devotes his essay *Humanity: Biological and Moral Issues* to reflecting on the subject of how is humanity expressed. In his opinion this issue should be considered on two levels, with the basic level related to biological existence and ensuring one's security. The concept of humanity requires calling upon such dispositions, which other creatures do not exhibit. In the author's opinion, this tendency to selflessly help others is a specifically human trait.

Dieter Brinbacher's essay *Are Ethical Experts Experts in Morality?* considers the problem of the condition of contemporary ethics. According to the author the separation is getting more distinct between practical philosophy cultivated at the academic level, and applied ethics which is guided by current needs. This dichotomy is evidenced particularly by the "ethics expert" role which is being filled by an increasing number of people. But is it possible to be an expert in ethics, i.e. someone directed only by pragmatic reasoning, someone devoid of moral sensibility?

The publication closes with an article by Marty Gluchman from the Slovakian University in Prešov. The author discusses the transformation of ethics in teaching taking

place today. She basis her discussion on the concept of social consequence ethics developed by Vasil Gluchman.

In summary, it is necessary to emphasize that reading the publication is not always easy because it requires the reader to have a certain competence in the issues of the history of ethics and philosophy. Some texts also require basic knowledge of linguistics, medicine and natural sciences. However, it is worth reaching for *Morality: Reasoning on Different Approaches*, above all, in order to get an idea of what changes contemporary moral philosophy has been subjected to, and what uses it has found in social practice.

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