

## ETHICS AND DAILY LIFE IN THE PRESENT TIME

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Ethics is an invention of the West and emerged in the Athenian Polis between 500 and 400 BC, during a lucid moment of human existence, despite the machismo and slavery. The Athenian polis of the time of Socrates elaborates four western references: philosophy, ethics, education, and politics. Ethics is the ideal foundation for a community guided by reason, as alternative communities are founded on tradition, customs, or religion. An ethical community would be a community anchored in reason and freedom, focused on the common good, justice, and individual happiness<sup>(1)</sup>.

The word ethics is of Greek origin. However, there are controversies regarding two possible etymological origins. Ethics comes from *ethos*, which can mean custom or property of character. The first meaning served as the basis for the moral Latin translation. In Latin, the Greek term *ethicos* was translated to *moralis*. Thus the confusion between ethics and morals in the common use of the word.

Despite this apparent similarity, there are ontological differences between ethics and morals. Searching for this difference is essential due to the surge of defense of morality, honor, and patriarchal customs in the present time. This difference is an alibi to contain the surge that began in 1968 and regress the affirmation of human diversity and individual freedoms. Morality is the enemy of freedom and diversity.

The idea of an ethical community is associated with the existence of the individual subject and his/her self-awareness: autonomy, self-control, self-government. In the ethical community, even laws and the State would be expendable. With ethics, there is no need for governments over the *homo*: each individual governs oneself, with reason and freedom, aiming at individual happiness and the common good.

That was the ideal that was lost in industrial modernity. Industrial society is totalitarian. It is the requirement of the industrial reason that everything is industrialized: culture, education, life. In the present time, life has become an appendage to gigantic industrial machinery aimed at producing lethal uselessness. The silent synthesis was made in 1936 by Chaplin in "Modern Times".

The first hit by the society governed by the logic of production and consumption with a view to profit was on morals, which declined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the first and second surges of industrial and urban expansion. Moralists don't know this. The decay of morals and its ability to curb human impulses was the despair of the positivist thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who founded sociology. For the neurotics of the order, the decay of morals brought the likelihood of disorder, or of what has recently been denominated as shambles.

If the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the decline of morals, the late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the corrosion of character. This is the thesis of the American Richard Sennett. What corrodes the character is the prevalence of the short term in the ephemeral society<sup>(2)</sup>. Character is based on values, and values depend on the long term. Furthermore, individual character is often an obstacle to adaptation and far from being valued by companies. The more character, the less the individual's propensity to cancel him/herself due to the interests of others.

Certain imperatives invade daily life and deteriorate ethics in the present time, making shared life stressful, hostile, and commonly unbearable or only bearable with the increasing and widespread use of legal and illegal drugs: drugs on an industrial scale.

An imperative of the industry that governs daily life is utilitarianism, invented by the Englishman Jeremy Bentham, who also created the panoptic model in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>(3)</sup>. The basic rule of utilitarianism to separate the useful from the useless is the relationship between cost and benefit. Hence the distinction of business days. As utilitarianism, many benefits were excluded: aesthetics became useless. Furthermore, many costs are never properly accounted for as a strategy to make consumerism viable, among which are nature and work.

Another imperative of the industry that invades daily life is instrumentalism, identified by the German Max Weber at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In instrumental reason, ends prevail over means. In the era of instrumental planning and calculability, the logic of ends sacrifices affection, and values<sup>(4)</sup>.

Mercantile logic is another industry imperative that coerces daily life, placing the market at the center of social life. A market is a place of competition and profit. Life is likewise. In terms of the commercial imperative, profit is the principle of validation of the useful: useful is what yields a profit. For that reason, the environment only has value if it yields a profit. The mercantilization of life was summarized in Benjamin Franklin's famous phrase: time is money<sup>(4)</sup>.

Finally, the most recent imperative of the industrial era, which assaults daily life, is the state norm. The State, which emerges as a means, becomes an end in itself. It is the myth of balance: it seems that if the budget is balanced, life will be balanced, and the world will be happy. It is the most recent of fetishes: that of the State. Now, it is the society that must sacrifice itself for the good of the State: sacrifice the retirement of elderly workers, school, health, science, and public research.

The prevalence of utilitarianism, instrumentalism, mercantilism, and the fetish of the State in daily life, makes life more and more heteronomous. Life becomes a means of life, and everyone knows: life as an end is qualitatively different from life as a means. When life is reduced to a means, and when happiness becomes disposable, it is because ethics has been sacrificed and reduced to codes and protocols for controlling operational details. A life without ethics is a life damaged, impaired, adrift, and without human ideals.

We must recover ethics and its ideal from a community of common good. It is necessary to re-educate the *homo* before it is too late. To recover ethics, it is essential to recognize that it has been lost. There is no greater urgency than education in the present time, and, in education, nothing is more relevant than recovering the idea of an ethical community.

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