

Fundamental Aspects of Christian Ethics

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ABSTRACT: Humanity and ethics seem to be synonymous. Wherever human existence is discussed, wherever the relations developed between different social categories are explored, ethics become imperative. The source of ethical standards is also important, leading sociology to confirm the existence of countless ethical systems, each claiming to meet human needs. These include Christian ethics, which considers man to be more valuable than other ethical systems portray, and his value is ontologically given through creation. As a result, occupying such a significant place in the universe, man needs moral rules that respect his fundamental rights and provide support during crises and needs. The present article is a brief foray into the perimeter of Christian ethics, highlighting some aspects that define this system and presenting arguments in its favor. The argument is justified, as human society is in a constant search for an ethic that benefits each individual. The present discussion has a general footprint, offering only a few of the comprehensive multitude of the Christian ethical system meant to open the way for easy communication between different ethicists.

KEYWORDS: ethics, human beings, altruism, religion, morality

Introduction

Ethics is a complex system of moral actions by which human beings define their existence (Rotaru 2005, 38). Where there is humanity, there is ethics, and humanity cannot exist outside ethics. Interest in ethics must be at the top of human concerns. The moral norms established by ethics indicate the perimeter within which human relations can take place and be maintained, so that ethics becomes the filter through which all the interactions of earthly existentialism pass. In particular, Christian ethics is part of Christian theology and defines human behavior and attitudes from a Christian perspective. The universal validity of ethical norms, ethical-religious inerrancy and altruism are the practical dimensions addressed in this foray. Offering claims or principles, concepts or obligations, these practical aspects define step by step the cognitive pattern of Christian ethics and behavioral norms. The author does not set out to regulate ethical systems, nor to offer absolute verdicts in favour or against certain ethical approaches, but to present the arguments used by Christian ethicists in support of their views. As a result, the arguments of these ethicists will be considered as defining for establishing the understanding of Christian ethics.

The universal validity of ethical rules

The moral norms of an ethical system define the ethical behavioral patterns of society or of a group that is more or less heterogeneous in thought and manifestation. For reasons of group freedoms or past but accepted prejudices, these moral norms may be universally or only partially accepted. Everything centers on what the ethical system considers to be true and valid. Benedict discusses these issues, emphasizing the difference between the norms of morality accepted by different societies. He notes that instead of being non-negotiable norms, ethical systems are flexible and influenced by different social cultures.

We recognize that morality differs in every society and is a term that conveniently expresses socially sanctioned habits. Mankind has always preferred to say "it is morally right" rather than "it is customary [...]," but historically these two expressions are synonymous (Benedict 1934, 195).

Christian ethics claims universal validity of its own norms, and the resource of these norms is considered the absolute Truth. The form of ethics necessary for human beings and defining inter-human relations does not annihilate the potential existence of an absolute, universally valid moral truth, the standard for any other ethical system. The distinction between what is right and wrong, between what is true and what is not true, can be made by man, not only on the basis of an ethical system of his own, but also on the basis of what is ontologically already present in him. This is the moral conscience generated by the absolute Truth, but also by personal prejudices. Thus ethics and reason are not social or cultural constructs but are embedded in the essence of human existence. The argument is supported by various theories of ethics, such as Kant's ethics, which asserts the existence of absolute moral principles independent of circumstances. The moral order is becoming a primary necessity in all areas of society, and its maintenance is imperative.

The moral order in any society must be explicit; it must prove itself and show what it can do in practice to maintain social order. It must also be organised down to the lowest strata of society throughout the country, and it must lend support and extend its influence to all levels of society. And it should be supported from below, by ordinary citizens, not imposed from above, by the elite (Carson 2006, 236).

Despite the diversity of forms of ethical systems and the relativization of morality in different cultures and social contexts, there is the premise of accepting an absolute and universal moral truth. Even though the form of ethics may vary and be influenced by cultural and social factors, the existence of a moral conscience and a human capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, is recognized as an essential characteristic of the human being. The flexibility of one ethical system cannot override the invariability of another. What is at stake here is individual moral autonomy, whereby people act and evaluate on the basis of their personal moral principles and beliefs.

From the perspective of absolute truth, for the proponents of Christian ethics, things are more comprehensive: 'Christian ethics insists on the unitary character of truth and on the universal validity of moral norms' (Henry 2004, 163). Among all ethical systems assimilated or rejected by the human race, Christian ethics comes with the claim of universal validity of all its arguments. The concept is based precisely on the recognition of the unitary character of the truth recognized as Truth and prefigured in the person of the Creator. According to this logic, Truth can only be one in all historical periods, in all dispensations and in all forms of manifestation. As a rational extension, Christian ethicists argue, on the basis of this condition, moral norms become universally valid. The idea of unity of truth can point to the existence of a higher reality, constant and unaltered by historical or cultural context. On the basis of this reality, moral norms, derived from this absolute truth, are universally valid and applicable.

This claim of Christian ethics inflames the spirits of philosophers, demanding plausible and logical explanations. The tension is heightened by a dual dimension in which Christian ethics demands that the whole world conform to its patterns, while every other form of ethics rejects Christian ethics as an addition to a particular system of thought. Christian ethics upholds this universal validity of norms because it considers its nature to be revealed. In explanatory patterns, both Truth and Christian ethical norms transcend time and remain valid from their revelation until the end of the history of human beings.

Criticism or alternatives were not slow to appear. For example, 20th-century humanists asserted the supremacy of reason and, by implication of science, developed arguments that attempted to place all ethical values on a humanist basis (Kurtz, Bullough 1991, 12-13). Reason

was seen as the main source of knowledge and as the instrument by which ethical values could be evaluated. Science was taking over the spectrum of knowledge as the ultimate way of understanding the world, and scientific methods were seen as a good filter for behavioral assessment. Twentieth-century humanists were outraged by this authority of Christian religion, believing that ethics should be based on reason, not religious interpretations.

Despite the criticisms raised, Christianity in all its forms, implicit in the ethics it promotes, insists on this unity of Truth and on the universal validity of Good and Justice, i.e., of all its own ethical norms. Even if philosophical ethics "always categorically rejects the basis of a transcendent revelation" (Brunner 1947, 35), the cause of this rejection, according to Christian ethicists, is the attitude of the human being not to recognize his state before the absolute landmark, God, which for philosophical ethics does not exist in the form recognized by Christian ethics.

Christian ethicists believe that no ideology and no naturalistic, speculative or other ethics can deform the moral concepts of Christian ethics, nor is it accepted as a partner in dialogue for potential change. Because they derive from Christian culture and tradition, the fundamental moral concepts of Christian ethics are considered absolute and indisputable. These include mercy, altruism, justice, love, and forgiveness. Other ethical systems or theoretical ideologies are rejected as incapable of modifying or influencing these concepts. Christian ethics is presented as a well-defined, invariable and universally valid system. Nothing can be negotiated or changed. Its nature is theonomic and eternal. All its rules are transcendently applicable, surpassing in intensity and influence any other ethical system.

Ethical inerrancy – religion

In every ethical system, there is a religious dimension, but in some, religion has been separated from ethics. In the Christian perspective, "religion and ethics are inseparable" (Henry 2004, 187). Ethics is reflected in religion and religion is projected into ethics. Christian ethics is present in Christian religion through its moral norms and values, and Christian religion projects its image into ethics through the behaviors and thinking associated with the Christian faith. This interdependence is considered essential for a proper understanding of Christian ethics. It seems like an illogical system, but proponents argue that it all works out when it is experienced. Christian ethics claims acceptance of Christianity, while Christian faith claims the behavioral and thinking patterns of Christian ethics. Thus, within the Christian ethical system, religion and ethics complement each other through affinity.

Christian ethics and Christian religion are inseparable, because acceptance of Christianity presupposes acceptance of its specific moral norms. This assumption is not done violently or abusively, but comes by itself. The Christian faith carries with it the burden of Christian ethics. One cannot speak of Christian ethics without the imprint of the Christian religion, nor vice versa. In any approach or understanding, Christian ethics is not independent of the Christian religion, nor could the Christian religion exist without Christian ethics. Ethics and religion are not two separate elements that are required to be harmonized, but are part of a whole.

The unifying factor seems to be Jesus Christ, who is considered the founder of Christianity. Christian ethicists claim that "Jesus Christ has forever allied and reconciled religion with morality. [...] He has found a moral factor in religion" (Vallings 1889, 224). This interpretation makes sense through experience or faith in Jesus, but for other ethical systems it seems illogical. Why is this position held by Christian ethicists? An analysis of historical data and those related to Jesus' biography shows that there is a plausible coherence between the religion Jesus practiced and the ethics he displayed. He did what he thought or thought what he did. In this dualism there was no factionalism, it is unitary. Thus, "just as Jesus' ethics is inseparable from his religion, so his religion

demands morality. [...] Jesus raised ethics and religion to new heights from which they cannot descend without decay" (Henry 2004, 186). Jesus' religion and ethics are in accord and concordance and cannot exist independently.

A brief definition of religion might clear things up, and Tillich captures this definition thus, "religion has to do with the ultimate concern of an individual or a people. Religion is concerned with the depth dimension of human experience" (Tillich 1959, 7). He also believes that this depth must be understood through the prism of the religious aspect, which points to "what is absolutely infinite, unconditioned in the spiritual life of man" (Tillich 1959, 7). In defining ethics, Christians believe that "Christian moral law gives us the Creator's instructions as to how His creation can function harmoniously" (Carson et 2006, 240). Thus, Christian ethics and religion originate from the same source, the Creator. They cannot be separated nor individualized in their approach, for "the answers of the Great Teacher are aimed at precisely that problem on which the human mind has always pondered" (Stalker 1909, 17).

The great support of Christian ethics, ethicists believe, is the affirmation of its origin. "Christian ethics begins unequivocally with God" (Pike 1955, 99) and is defined exclusively by Him. This argument is common to Christian theology and is supported by various Christian traditions. Christian ethics is not based on conventions or norms devised by humans and adapted to social contexts, but on divine will. God is the source of ethics. This has profound implications. Christian moral standards are not subjective or relative, but are rooted in the nature and absolute character of the Creator. They are inextricable. In the language of Christian ethics every human being must orient his or her desires and behavioral patterns, i.e., religion, in accordance with the approval of the Creator. This implies a personal responsibility on the part of those who have assumed Christian religion and ethics to seek and follow God's will in their daily lives.

This ethical-religious inertia has several advantages. It gives certainty to both elements, ethics is certain through religion which in turn is certified through ethics. The two verify and support each other. Religion becomes the filter of ethics, while ethics is the filter of religion. The system is not wrong, religion and ethics coincide perfectly. In no other belief system can such a unitary dualism be found, which offers the advantage of getting everything in a package. Interaction with Christian religion reveals Christian ethics, while contact with Christian ethics creates the prerequisites for knowledge of Christian religion.

Moral support is another advantage of this inertia. The human being (Rotaru 2016a, 29-43) is placed in a community in which mutual support is exercised and attitudes consistent with Christian morality are promoted. The mere existence of the community or support group is a sufficiently solid basis for ethical choices. But there is a broader perspective that convinces that human choices are not limited to conformity to internal rules, but are part of a deeper search for meaning in life.

Social altruism

From the perspective of Christian ethics, altruism is a moral concept derived from Christian teachings and based on the teachings of Jesus. It is centred on loving and caring for other people and especially for those in difficult circumstances. Christian ethics discusses the issue of altruism as a basic benchmark in human relationships. The commandment to love one's neighbour is not conditioned by anything, but becomes the norm of ethics and implicitly of social or community relations. This ethical aspect is present in the human mind because "the human mind is designed to act morally" (Haidt 2016, 18). Phenomenal analysts consider that the premise works not only in Christian ethics, but in any other ethical system in which fundamental human rights are respected. "In order not to harm your neighbor and to love him you must learn not to say

anything bad to him or about him and for that you must learn not to think anything bad about him. It is possible. Only then can you do no harm to the man and love him (Tolstoy 2022, 25).

Altruism from the Christian ethic is not a solitary concept or one of many possibilities, but a duty. It is part of the spectrum of virtues that are found as a whole, as a whole in the spectrum of Christian ethics. Virtues are not "a series of gifts from which man can choose those which accord with his preference, neglecting the others" (Dana 1943, 78). Altruism encourages involvement and help of every kind, based on compassion and love and without expectation of reward. Because "the reward is always added to the nature of the action, it is not the direct result of it, so that it becomes part of the prudent calculus of the agent" (Ramsey 1950,134). The point of maximum intensity is the moment of sacrifice. "Man adheres to beliefs concerning right and wrong. He strives to adapt his life somewhat to the moral order, often denying his personal desires, sometimes with sacrificial heroism" (Henry 2004, 212). But the altruism advocated by Christian ethicists does not claim permanent sacrifice, but merely mentions it as an existential possibility.

Altruism claims the renunciation of selfishness and is promoted and supported as an ideal model of living. "In sharp contrast to selfish hedonism, and in even sharper contrast to selfishness, the ethical conception frequently preached in Christian countries has held that the chief virtue is altruism seen as the willingness to sacrifice oneself for one's neighbor" (Ewing 1953, 31-32). Permanently, altruism stands in antithesis to selfishness and every other such attitude. The antithesis is perfected by understanding the concepts. If selfishness is associated with exclusive concern for personal needs, ignoring the needs of others, altruism proposes concern for the good of others.

The conflict between selfishness and selflessness, the promotion of self-interest over the interest of humanity, is given a new direction in the second half of Christ's summary of the law: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Unrequited love must structure the whole of life as a divine command. If he does God's will, the moral agent will promote both His best interests and the interests of his neighbor. In love, the supreme interests of all men coincide" (Henry 2004, 191).

In the system of Christian ethics, one can discuss a possible reconciliation between selfishness and altruism, a duality in which love of neighbour and love of self are part of the same whole, called altruism. The approach is plausible and necessary, especially since "the selfishness of modern times exists as a defiance of morality" (Seeley 1892, 151). The promotion of self-interest undergoes a profound transformation through the commandment of love, and so it is not a matter of invalidating and rejecting it, but of understanding and applying it in the spectrum of altruism, of support for others.

Self-centeredness and self-interest are "the main problems in the moral life" (Dewar 1949,49), so there is another facet to the discussion of altruism, namely human rights. Altruism recognizes that man has a varied multitude of needs as well as rights that must be fulfilled. Thus, fulfilling the needs of another can be a recognition of the rights to be enjoyed. "Rights, in us, are nothing other than just demands to fulfill our duties to one another. [...] The religion of Scripture, as it produces the punctual performance of all duties, so effectually secures all the rights of men" (Dwight 1837, 120). Altruism is only complete in the posture where needs become legitimate rights and rights become legitimate needs.

In observing the Christian ethic, some have noted that "Jesus again and again raised his voice on behalf of broad humanist ideals, such as the spread of altruism, the brotherhood of man and peace on earth" (Potter 1930, 14). He is seen as a promoter of altruism also in terms of the teachings he gave. His calls for forgiveness, reconciliation and overcoming conflict through

mutual understanding and acceptance are far-reaching humanist ideals. The difference arises in humanism's claim that these values are promoted without a religious basis and without any connection to the Christian ethical system. Opinions are divided, with Christian ethicists believing that outside the Christian faith, altruism does not bring the supposed benefits.

Conclusions

Christian ethics is a system that establishes and assumes its own rules by which it establishes the legitimacy of human behavior. Taking as their source the sacred writings, the Christian tradition and the teachings found in the Bible, Christian ethicists consider the rules of Christian ethics to be fundamental to the good functioning of any civil society. The arguments put forward, Christian ethicists argue, are valid only from the perspective of experience. Outside this empirical forum, Christian ethics could only be understood as an existentialist theory.

Agreeing with the universal validity of the norms of Christian ethics, Christian ethicists believe that every social aspect should be subject to these revealed norms. Ethical-religious inerrancy is seen as a necessity and as inter-human probity, while altruism is emphasized as a fundamental aspect and as an absolutely necessary virtue in the ethical field. The Christian ethical system should be considered as a potential guide for human ethics, as a behavioral pattern and as an expression of the freedoms of conscience of the human being (Rotaru 2016b, 30-37).

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