

Pavel FOBEL

University of Matej Bel, Banská Bystrica

INNOVATIVE POTENTIAL OF APPLIED ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

Summary: Applied ethics in Slovakia gradually has gained steady footing in the humanities. Its good social reputation is required mainly because it was inspired by new theoretical trends and strengthened by practical achievement abroad. These trends demand the training of specialists who will promote nontraditional approaches. Applied ethics also develop their theoretical and methodological potential to respond to new societal expectation as well as to acute problems with the nature of risk. Applied ethics is therefore forced to develop specific discourse and exploration, or to formulate its own approaches of solutions. Ethical competence is essential for professional discourse, solution of the problems having generally interdisciplinary nature. Orientation towards issues in praxis encourages applied ethics to make more precise in teaching methodologies and procedures within the purview of the new post-fundational paradigm.

Keywords: Applied ethics; Innovation; Post-fundational paradigm;

INNOWACYJNY POTENCJAŁ ETYKI STOSOWANEJ W KONTEKŚCIE NOWYCH OCZEKIWAŃ SPOŁECZNYCH

Streszczenie. Etyka stosowana na Słowacji stopniowo zyskała stałe miejsce w humanistyce. Jej dobra społeczna reputacja wymagana jest głównie dlatego, że była inspirowana przez nowe tendencje teoretyczne i praktyczne osiągnięcia wzmocnione przez praktyczne osiągnięcia za granicą. Tendencje te wymagają szkolenia specjalistów, którzy będą promować nietradycyjne metody. Etyka stosowana również rozwija swoje teoretyczne i metodologiczne możliwości dostosowania się do nowych oczekiwań społecznych, jak również do poważnych problemów obarczonych ryzykiem. Etyka stosowana jest więc zmuszona do opracowania konkretnego dyskursu i poszukiwania lub formułowania własnych rozwiązań. Kompetencje etyczne są niezbędne do profesjonalnego dyskursu, rozwiązania problemów mających na ogół charakter interdyscyplinary. Ukierunkowanie zagadnień w praktyce zachęca etykę stosowaną do stawania się bardziej precyzyjną w metodologii i procedurach nauczania w zakresie nowego, post-fundacyjonistycznego, paradygmatu.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka stosowana, innowacja, paradygmat post-fundacjonistyczny

Today, applied ethics is socially and professionally appreciated, with its academic sympathizers as well as a certain scientific credit. With respect to its internal development we conclude that quite a large number of independent sub-disciplines and professional intentions have been differentiated. Ethics is more perceived against the background of one special ethics or it is reduced on this one relevant sphere (for example it is often associated only with business ethics, bioethics or career ethics). On one hand, there is a process of professional and career specialization, but on the other hand some social and theoretic platform as well as a unified methodological framework have been developing, which enables enriching them mutually, and to support the development of ethics. Its unified framework proves an almost 50-year tradition, which resulted in the current situation where applied ethics more and more claims a specific professional status and a higher autonomy in relation to philosophy. At the same time, the current discourse of professional community emphasizes the topic of the new mission for applied ethics, which creates its new position in the system of knowledge and new forms of action. Thus it also shapes its more effective mission towards practice.

Despite its trend, the representatives of applied ethics do not lose their interest in the ethical –theoretical message of past and recent past, and they try to look for the points of reference for the application at present. Today, theoretical ethical initiatives by M. Nussbaum, H. Jonas, J. Rawls, B. Williams, A. McIntyre, Ch. Taylor, Z. Bauman, G. Lipovetsky, A. Rich, D. Ross, P. Singer and other exceptional philosophers and ethicists are constructive for applied ethics.

It is justified that the theoretical potential of traditional ethical theories is complemented by efforts to adapt them to current social conditions and problems that, as a rule, are absolutely new from the ethical point of view, too. Therefore, the current discussion related to this sphere is reasonably focused on their applied disposition. It can be proved for example by the criticism of essentialism, intuitivism, universalism and principlism. With respect to this, the possibilities of pluralism, coherentism or postfoundationalism are pointed out. However, the standpoints on this sphere are so differentiated that it is very difficult to come to an unambiguous conclusion about the effectiveness of these theoretical concepts, their principles, or to formulate unambiguous recommendations for applications. Similarly, it is problematic to compile and determine some concrete catalogue of ethic-problematic recommendations that could be universally applied for all the spheres of practice. However, the recommendations from practice also tend to simplify the issue and even to be theoretically independent or are oriented on particular professional activities, which strongly influence the opinions of professional ethical competences, the opinion of the role of ethical theory as well as the utility of applied ethics itself. Theoretically and practically, we can consider the argument that some

special applied ethics succeed in formulating their theoretical framework and principles, not taking into account the fact that they are still the subject of internal changes and new experience which lead them to correct their theoretical bases and made their practical approaches more precise, a weak argument. These dynamics are not only evoked by discussions among theorists and anti-theorists, but also by institutional practice itself, new problems and social expectations. The well-known experience of practical sciences, that practical efficiency is low without theoretical support and theory is hardly acceptable without practical experience, is repeatedly confirmed.

The typical feature of applied ethics is the fact that it does not represent a theoretical monolith as traditional sciences, but the plurality of opened interdisciplinary discourses. This emphasis is quite important because it results in other theoretical consequences.

The interdisciplinary nature of these actual practical issues is currently an important innovated challenge for applied ethicists, too. Our task is not only to discuss these topics, to achieve epistemic unity, but also to propose conclusive (optimal) ethical solutions, which is possible to implement in decisive spheres of practice. "If we consider the integration of knowledge, in particular the knowledge of various fields and disciplines, we usually bear in mind the solutions of a complex problem in research, decisions and evaluation of the problems of sustainable development and the maintaining of an acceptable environment, the options, decisions and evaluation of large investments and complex technical solutions"¹. We respect the previous ethical paradigm, but the problems and their solutions were offered in terms of a dominant ethical theory. Today, we are confronted with the topics and challenges of a multi-subject and multi-disciplinary nature. Interdisciplinarity, ethical application, the ability to create interdisciplinary teams and epistemic communities are the prerequisites of important social decisions, new solutions with ethical adequacy. Otherwise, we face moral risks and serious failures.

While fulfilling our social role, we should take into account other complexities and solutions. Current applied ethics acquire specific forms in individual countries and continents. There are differences not only between applied ethics in European countries and American continents. There is also a difference in its social acceptance and support. For example in Austria, applied ethics have become a significant base for social analyses and social strategies. In the USA, professional communities in the sphere of applied ethics operate through centres and associations and a governmental advisory body, experts in this profession working for corporations and holding special posts. With respect to the preparation of specialists, various academic preparation models are applied, and as a rule it is included into an exclusive form of preparations. Many universities in all continents have opened counselling centres focused on ethics, and they offer advisory services for the spheres such as business, economy, public administration, environmental science and medicine, for

¹ Tondl L.: Hodnoty, komunikácia, múdrosť. Výber vedeckých prác Ladislava Tondla pre aplikovanú etiku. Belianum, 2014. Banská Bystrica, p. 174.

professional groups, state institutions, health sphere, military, information technologies, nanotechnologies and others. The current diversity of the forms of activities applied against the background of applied ethics motivates us to educate professionals, for the various spheres of practice based on professional practice, who could flexibly respond to social requirements. Therefore, we understand it as a socially active and innovative element at the micro, mezzo and macro levels of social life.

There also exist specific features from the point of structure and subject determination, and it leads to some ambiguity in discussions. To illustrate it, we can mention some specific features in the understanding of business ethics and economic ethics in Germany, differences in the understanding of science ethics (research) in the EU countries, or different opinions in the spheres of the subject area of bioethics, often reduced to bio-medicinal, medical ethics or its wider understanding expressed conversely, which includes environmental ethics or animal ethics. Serious risks also relate to the contextual framework of applied ethics. Furthermore, serious risks also relate to the contextual framework of the application of ethics, to the transfer of the models of special ethics from another value environment into our cultural-value environment. The theoretical acceptance and practical effectiveness requires a creative approach, the knowledge of specific features and specific expertise. The underestimation of this part of the application often brings ambiguities, and creates distrust to its exploitability under our conditions. Methods and approaches can be opened against the background of good practice abroad, but its contextual transformation is desirable. This is necessary to reflect it in the methods of education as well as in the ways of institutionalisation. A creative approach, critical analysis, contextual sensitivity, coherent consideration and procedural reliability are important principles for the application of the effectiveness of ethics.

In this context, we would like to point out for example the multiculturalism project, which sounded ethically convincingly in some social paradigm in the long term. However, it has been questioned more and more, and it is practically problematic. Similarly, war and military conflicts are considered to be morally controversial at the minimum, and the activities against them are occasional and currently seen as a common civilisation norm. Many other fundamental approaches and the categories of ethics such as ethics of discourse, altruism, humanism, global ethics, utilitarianism, social solidarity and obligation are also the subject of ethical and moral doubts. For example at the XX and XXI International Philosophical Congresses, discourse ethics were seen critically and as a unilateral initiative by African intellectuals; i.e. as a Euro-American model of morality that does not respect the equal role of these countries in dialogue. Therefore, it should be critically reviewed. Humanism and justice have manifested themselves as controversial categories in moral practice, because they have demonstrated weaknesses; e.g. when applied to mass migration, military conflicts, corporatism and environmental problems. Ethical discourse also includes hot topics such as the revelation of American unethical experiments in developing countries, ecological catastrophe and social situation in Kenya as a consequence of trade with roses with the

Netherlands and their subsequent re-sale in the Lidl supermarket chain, ecological responsibility and the sale of ecological packages, the value integrity of migrants in the EU, unequal remuneration for work performances in economically developed and developing countries, the respecting of the third gender legalised in Germany, legislation for the moral status of animals and their inclusion among human beings, and others. Attention should also be paid to new trends with a moral content. With respect to the non-economic indicators in the world, the indicator marked as a surplus of goodwill is asserted in the world. According to current data about companies and organisations *goodwill* on the market comprises as much as 80% of the total company's value. It seems that the creation of the good name of organisation in the market economy becomes more significant than the market value. The vision is a key factor for the growth of the value of companies and organisations. Today, it is measured according to the newest standards of ISO quality. For example ISO 26000 is applied in a business environment as well as in the non-profitable and public sectors with the use of soft factors. First of all, giving priority to new trends in this sphere requires answering two questions: Who can be a participant in these non-economic intentions? How to prepare various target groups for this sphere? The introduction of the happiness index as a decisive social indicator is a good example of new ethical challenge in the current world. Today, Ministries and specialised governmental bodies of happiness have been established, and they prefer the management of the **Gross National Happiness to Gross Domestic Product**. The UN also makes the ranking of the happiest countries. There are many inspirations for the work of experts in ethics with new projects, for their cooperation or particular professional interests.

As far as Slovakia is concerned, there is a special situation and some paradox with respect to the enforcement of applied ethics. Despite the fact that we succeeded in including ethics to the system of study fields in Slovakia, and thus it has been possible to educate experts in applied ethics, we failed to be presented more markedly in social institutions, to establish ourselves in this specific professional role and in profitable as well as non-profitable sectors. Such working positions are not common, but very rare. An ethical vision is not present in national strategies, not required by society, also missing in ministry priorities as a requirement for foreign investors. This absence of a system requirement in institutionalised practice qualifies ethics to the declarative and formal level, without career requirements for the positions that manage ethics in some companies. We have educated hundreds of experts in applied ethics, but this position is not present in the catalogue of working positions or the needs of practice and contrary to economically developed countries, it has not become a subject of professional interest. Being inspired by foreign experience, modern corporate efforts, by the dynamics of developed economies where ethical policy has become an integral part, we are convinced that it can serve as an important part of a better life, innovative social changes and for the maintenance of competitive advantage and the parameters of humanity.

Similarly as in other countries, we also see a trend of disciplinary autonomy and low interdisciplinary openness in some applied ethics. This trend is apparent not only in business ethics, medicine ethics, but also in career ethics, modern media ethics as well as in some other applied ethics. This issue brings up the questions such as ethical-professional competence, educational methods, professional institutionalisation as well as certification. The ethical codices of companies, professional associations and institutions are, as a rule, created unprofessionally, they miss elementary requirements valid for ethical programmes, for the implementation of ethical audit and checking mechanisms. In general, ethical commissions either do not solve or are not able to solve problems of an ethical nature, the issue of non-profitable and governmental organisations managed without any professional competence and cooperation with ethical centres, and the problem that the positions of ethical consultants, commissioners and ethical directors are held by people without ethical competence, and so on. Such an approach and institutionalisation can damage ethics, and to undermine trust in ethics and the role of applied ethics as a whole. Formalism or a simplified approach in the individual procedures of the institutionalisation and interiorisation of ethics, without interdisciplinary acceptance and professional support can shift ethics to a formal level and underestimate its mission. To justify this role of ethics, a well-known statement by Aristotle is of fundamental importance for us as well: “We can recognise an educated man because he knows what kind of preciseness and in which of the spheres it should be demanded”². We are aware of a new professional role that applied ethics can fulfil in this millennium.

This issue closely relates to the theoretical discussion about the building of ethics from bottom-up or vice versa. The preparation of professionals in the sphere of counselling in ethics and the solution of this issue is important not only from the point of the understanding of ethical competence, but also from the point of view of the mission of applied ethics. It also directly follows the issue of ethical expertise, the methods of the preparation of experts for the institutionalisation of ethics. It specifically results from the question of how and who should offer counselling in ethics, how to overcome a system (overall social) and organisational opportunism against ethics, how to build an ethical culture in companies or institutions with respect to recent experience. Today, these fundamental issues have been included into discussions about foundationalism and particularism or the possibilities of a new paradigm against the background of post-foundationalism. Unfortunately, this sphere is dealt with vaguely in Slovakia, ethical theory and practice corresponding more with the intentions of a previous paradigm. The opinions of methods for the institutionalisation and interiorisation of ethics evoked the recent debates on the new mission of applied ethics, how to teach ethics in terms of post-foundational paradigm. Therefore, special attention should be devoted to the debate evoked by R. Rorty in *Business Ethics Quarterly*³ in 2007 with respect to

² Aristoteles: *Etika Nikomachova* 1094b 23-24, Kalligram, Bratislava 2011. s. 296.

³ Rorty R.: *Is Philosophy Relevant to Applied Ethics*. In.: *Business Ethics Quarterly*, July 2006, Vol. 16, No. 3, s. 391-399.

considerations on the new mission of applied ethics and the innovative methods of its teaching. These bases for discussions are also essential for our considerations on the solution of this issue: What should we do? How to become better people? How to build a better future? What can or cannot be considered ethically adequate, and what are the ethical limits for implementing a specific intention? With respect to this, more categories such as “moral imagination”, “epistemic community”, “ethical infrastructure”, “the ethical responsibility of corporations”, ethical congruence”, “ethical leadership” are more frequently considered in the category terms of applied ethics. Furthermore, the concept of “*effective altruism*” (P. Singer), *imaginative sympathy* (R. Rorty, P. Werhanová) as modern effective tools with an ethical focus acquire the innovative significance of application practice. Their theoretical and practical importance lies in the fact that they have more and more sympathisers among professionals and at the same time they are used as tools of moral practice.

Despite these examples and strong challenges, ethics is more perceived in its traditional role and not as an active part of changes and a direct practical utility. The preference for economic rationality, political or military interest and the underestimation of ethical framework always resulted in conflicts in the sphere of humanity and serious social collisions. Ethics with its professional potential is a prerequisite for the fulfilment of an innovative role in a new moral perspective. It can become an important part of the moral revitalisation of society, the strategy of sustainable life, the prerequisite of a good life.

There exists quite a wide range of actual problems, which will have to be solved through ethics and its tools. Not only new sciences and knowledge, but also approaches and practical experience are included into discourse. It is up to us whether we will be competent in responding this change and challenges.

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Omówienie

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