

Ethical culture

The concept *of culture* is somewhat vague and ambiguous. If we want to agree on how to understand it, let's first establish the concept of opposite or contradictory, denoting its opposite.

The concept of culture

In the term *culture - nature*, we mean culture as any human work of cultivation (or civilization) in which we are used to seeing a higher quality compared to the pristine nature. In the pair *culture - barbarism*, culture rather means an achieved level of cultivation, compared to a primitive or decadent state. Its originators, the ancient Greeks, corresponded to this concept only partially, because the non-Hellenic peoples, described by them as barbarians, had their own culture; it was often easier, but mainly it was different. Let the pair *culture - other culture* be authoritative for us. In this context, we understand culture **as a distinctively developed lifestyle**, which is the result of a continuous effort. We mostly mean the efforts of a certain human collective, developed over generations and giving the appearance of an entire epoch. It then depends on the focus of our interest, how broad the horizon of research we choose: we can legitimately talk about the culture of Renaissance Florence, Renaissance Italy or Renaissance Europe, etc. We can, however, with the same right narrow our lens and think about the culture of a small social group, even of an individual person.

In addition, the language usage of continental Europe (less so the Anglo-Saxon world) presents the conceptual pair *culture - civilization*. They are two aspects of the same thing. Culture is understood here as attitudes and creations of a spiritual nature, while civilization means more technical and organizational (institutional) conveniences. This distinction is useful for some considerations, but we will omit it unless explicitly stated otherwise.

A part of every culture is its framework structure for understanding the world (otherwise communication would not be possible) as well as its distinctive **morality** (see Words and their meanings), i.e. a set of ideas about what is good and the standards for achieving it. Does every culture have its own **ethics**? Based on how we have defined these two terms and their relationship, we have to say no. Morality is a relatively ready-made creation, while ethics is a permanently open topic (accessible as long as there is concern for them). It can be said that the most important representatives of developed cultures of different times - Moses, Lao-Tzu, Buddha, Old Testament Prophets, Socrates, Kung Fu-tse (Confucius), Stoics, Apostle Paul, Muhammad, etc. - **in their concern for the good went beyond the given morals of their culture** and that their positions converge on the most important point.

Modern Euro-American culture

Let us pay attention to the culture that is our current environment, i.e. **modern European culture** (more correctly: Euro-American). So far, this is the last stage of European culture, which arose roughly two and a half millennia ago from more original ancient (Greek-Roman) and Judeo-Christian sources. It began to shape itself on the ruins of its predecessor, the reformation-counter-reformation culture (baroque in our country). Its origins were heralded by a spiritual movement called the **Enlightenment**, but it was brought to life only by the social restructuring process, called **modernization**, which is still ongoing. In the 20th century, it crossed the borders of Europe and North America and penetrated the so-called third world; the resulting tension is one of the world-changing forces of the present and the future.

The modernization process is breaking up the traditional pre-industrial society, first in Europe, then elsewhere. It is a multidimensional movement, the most visible component of which is precisely **industrialization**, i.e. the emergence of industrial mass production; it automatically creates the conditions for its further existence, which include its own growth, the growth of consumption, i.e. the market, but also the reduction of the diversity of human roles to the dominant role of the workforce. The functioning of the workforce is not possible without far-reaching **urbanization**, i.e. the concentration of the population in large cities and their agglomerations. Traditional habits, relationships, attitudes - including worldviews, especially religious ones - lose their validity and appeal; we call this component **secularization** (from the Latin *saeculum* = age, especially human age, the measure of earthly life, as opposed to *aeternitas* = eternity). was adopted for breaking out of traditional bonds **The term emancipation** (civil, national, female, generational, etc.).

Modernization affected the structure of traditional communities, especially the family, from which it first uprooted the father; her mother is also moving away from her at the moment. National emancipation also took over large multi-ethnic communities and made room for the nation state. The disappearance of traditional authorities, together with civil emancipation, enabled the wide participation of everyone in the administration of public affairs, i.e. **democratization**, but its possibilities are substantially limited by the introduction of the most economical way of administration, i.e. **bureaucratization**. Bureaucracy is a management strategy that is adequate to the complexity of modern society, but it pays for its effectiveness by losing interest in everything unique, i.e. by depersonalization. It is precisely on it that one can vividly show how each of the conveniences of modernization in the interest of its effectiveness inadvertently creates a number of unsolvable problems. These, in their totality, condition **the permanent state of crisis in modern society**. Expanding industrial production threatens the environment, the market mechanism removes the utilitarian (prosperistic) motivation of human action, urbanization makes it difficult to create a home, secularization created a vacuum filled by fashion and ideology,

emancipation threatens the cohesion of the family, another emancipation cleared the way for nationalism, democratization created a mass in which anyone is replaceable by anyone, and the mass allows existence so undemanding **mass culture** , sharply different from the culture of small exclusive elites.

The "worldview" of modern culture is largely determined by **science** , or by what it is believed to be. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, the world is considered a mechanism (machine), the causal explanation of which belongs to science, built on the model of 19th century physics. The meaning of science is seen in the practical use of its findings, i.e. in **technology** . What is not grasped by such science, what is not "objective", is somehow less real; what is not practically usable is less valuable. The criterion of practical utility also determined the face of **politics** , the main content of which is the technology of power. – All these authoritative trends of modern culture certainly have their counterparts in the form of opposing trends, but they only have a *minority vote* ; they contribute so far only a meager contribution to the overall controversial character of modern culture, whose internal *discourse* is a mixture of endless polemics. The fatigue caused by such a state, as well as the awareness of the impossibility of changing it, are two of the motivations for the attitude that describes itself as **postmodern** .

Ethics and culture, moral plurality

To what extent is our culture receptive to ethics , which, as has been said, is careful consideration or debate about what is good? We already know that a concrete practical response to the topic of ethics is morality. **So what is the morality of our culture?** It is inconsistent, contradictory. The validity of a number of norms of *religious* morality of the disappearing traditional society remains. Next to it, *anthropocentric* (" *humanistic* ") morality prevailed, the foundations of which were created by the Enlightenment, and which in itself is also inconsistent: it can be *individualistic* , but also *collectivist* , depending on whether the welfare of the individual or the collective (nation, classes, the current generation of residents of developed countries, etc.). Regarding interests, styles, attitudes, the situation of our society is *pluralistic* . also corresponds to this **Moral plurality** . *Consensus* (general understanding, agreement) on values is not easily created in such a society. Society, for reasons of self-preservation (so as not to disintegrate or find itself in a state of struggle of all against all) does not quite willingly put up with a kind of moral minimum - with **tolerance of plurality** , which thus becomes one of the basic target values and is often claimed as the highest moral standard of our culture in general.

Modernization has created a mass society, extremely susceptible to various *ideologies* , that is, doctrines (teachings) that always justify someone's particular (mostly power) interest, while rejecting their own revision. Some ideologies became a tool of influential mass movements (Nazism, Communism, various types of fundamentalism, etc.), which then established a regime of *totalitarian power* . Unpleasant experience with them conditions a characteristic feature of our culture – **an anti- ideological attitude** , i.e. opposition to ideologies, but also to what can be considered them, what invokes any authority, even if it were the *binding force of truth* . Hence the widespread tendency towards relativism and skepticism, hence the frequent ambivalence, even dislike *towards morality* or " *moralizing* " (see Words and Their Meanings). The second fundamental value of our culture is the **autonomy** are intended to achieve *of the individual or group (different methods of emancipation* , as discussed above, this). The desire for autonomy leads to a fundamental **rejection of manipulation** ; a rejection, alas, inconsistent, because mass society is defenseless against refined non-ideological manipulation. The defining experience of many members of our contemporary culture is therefore – to say with ERIKSON (see Ethics and (psycho)pathology) – *threats to basic trust and autonomy* .

Respect for plurality and concern for one's own autonomy are inclined to a purely *self-centered individualistic morality* . Her recognized imperative is **self-realization** . This is conceptualized essentially arbitrarily, because there is no consensus regarding *self-* , nor regarding *realization* ; it is not clear *what* is to be implemented, nor what is to be *implemented* . often acts as an opponent of the desire for self-realization **In the life of an individual, the need for conformity** , as many people struggle with a feeling of loneliness.

Our cultural environment is therefore characterized by the questioning of a number of values and their hierarchy. **Such a situation is not favorable to the consideration or the debate about what is good** , i.e. - **ethics** . The very concept of *good* is relativized: it has become difficult to imagine what is good "objectively", i.e. "for all". Its place has been taken – and is considered authoritative – by the concepts of *legitimacy* and *legality* . Legitimate is what corresponds to the feeling of the majority and what can be defended ("argued") in controversy, legal is what corresponds to a positive (written) legal norm.

Ethical reasoning also became problematic because the concept of freedom was fundamentally questioned. Our current culture owes its *belief in determinism* , i.e. in the causal determination of our thinking and actions, whether biological (genetic), psychological (instinctual) or social (conventional). Freedom as *a fundamental possibility of self-determination* can hardly survive under this assumption. The word *freedom* does appear in numerous proclamations, but rather in the sense of *autonomy* , i.e. *freedom from something* (from coercion, from suffering), which is usually not associated with *responsibility* (the charters of rights and freedoms do not have their counterpart in a similar list of obligations). What escapes attention is that the autonomous individual need not yet be free.

The possibilities of ethical reflection and debate are also limited by the separation of entire areas of human activities from the realm of good and evil. morally *neutral* Science, technology, art, economics, politics are declared to be . These spheres are truly autonomous in the sense that specific principles apply within them (e.g. what makes science science is its scientificity, not moral integrity, etc.). However, that moral neutrality was also applied to specific people who are active in these spheres, i.e. to scientists, technicians, artists, entrepreneurs, politicians. is considered correct *In general, therefore, the superiority of professionalism over morality* , although its specific consequences tend to be rejected ad hoc.

The lack of consensus in the understanding not only of values, but also of some important concepts that characterize our culture, makes it significantly difficult or even impossible to discuss any ethical issue. Debates, for example, about the relationship of man to his environment, about the death penalty, artificial abortion, euthanasia, etc. generally end in failure; they are not debates, but rather polemical confrontations of incompatible positions, which cannot be reconciled, but at most *interpreted* , i.e. trying to *understand their motivation* , i.e. needs, wishes, dislikes, etc. in their background.

This situation, somewhat reminiscent of the biblical confusion of Babylon, has prompted some critics of our contemporary culture to state its decline and pronounce an unfavorable prognostic judgment about its future. Others, such as Hans JONAS, judge that the **age of responsibility** is dawning , and hope that the heroic assertion of a higher degree of moral development on a societal scale will bring about the salvation of our culture.

Summary

We call the developed way of life, which is the work of generations and establishes an inertial tradition, **culture** . Every culture has its own shared view of the world and a hierarchy of values, i.e. morality.

Our environment is contemporary **Euro-American culture** , which is the result of the modernization process that has been going on for the last two centuries. This process led to the breakdown of traditional society and the creation of modern society. Its conveniences were achieved at the cost of a number of difficult-to-solve problems, which in their totality constitute the permanent crisis of modern culture.

Modern culture is pluralistic . It involves a variety of incompatible attitudes and interests. For reasons of self-preservation, they must insist on their coexistence, that is, on tolerating this diversity, including the tolerance of moral plurality. In addition to this tolerance, the proclaimed values of our culture are autonomy (often incorrectly called "freedom") and individual self-realization. Values that are only proclaimed are often at odds with values that are actually lived.

Questioning the concept of good, freedom, responsibility and denying the ethical relevance of extensive spheres of human activity significantly complicates the consideration and debate that is the essence of ethics.

Literature

- Cohoe
- Arendt
- Ortega y Gasset
- Mitscherlich
- Jonas
- Lorenz
- Keller

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