

Psychological assumptions of ethical behavior

Consideration of goodness and concern for it cannot avoid topics such as the human personality and its development, its needs and motivations for its actions, interpersonal relationships, etc. These topics are part of the subject area of **psychology**. If ethical reasoning is to be competent, it must be informed primarily by this science, especially knowledge about **ontogenesis**, or the individual development of the human personality and **the motivation** of its actions. A person is not an ethically thinking and acting being, but **becomes** one.

While a newborn, an infant, or even a toddler is not an ethically acting being, and a reasonable person does not make ethical demands on them, an adult individual is such a being. Therefore, ethical reasoning cannot ignore the fact of human maturation (or immaturity), i.e. the **maturity-immaturity dimension**.

There are many theories of human ontogenesis. Some emphasize its biological side, others psychological or sociological. Of the latter, let's pay attention to the concept of EH ERIKSON, which is particularly suitable for our needs, because it strives for a psychological understanding with regard to the hierarchy of values and takes into account the whole human life from birth to death. It finds eight chapters ("ages") in its run. Each of them presents the human individual with a special task that needs to be fulfilled. If this does not happen, a person enters the next "age" with a certain debt, which then makes his life more difficult. Individual chapters are not sharply demarcated, but overlap.

Eight "ages" of life according to Erikson

The first age corresponds approximately to the first year of life. This is the so-called oral period according to FREUD. Its specific task is to acquire **basic trust**, the fundamentally unquestionable knowledge that one is accepted, that one is at home in the world one has entered by birth, and that the world (home) is good. The fulfillment of this task does not depend so much on the child as on his surroundings, especially on the irreplaceable role of the mother. During this period, the child also gets to know the bad, inhospitable, not friendly side of the world (pain, hunger, abandonment), which, however, should not overshadow the good. If the task of this age is not fulfilled, the child enters the next life weighed down by the burden **of basic mistrust** of the world.

The task **of the second age**, which corresponds approximately to the second half of the first, the second and partly the third year of life, is to acquire **autonomy**, the ability to actively respond to the surrounding world. The prerequisite is mastery of one's own body, its movement apparatus, including the sphincters, guardians of bodily exits. In this stage, the child is instilled with order, demands are placed on them and their performance is evaluated. Failure to complete the task results in self- **doubt and shame**. The basic psychological assumptions of moral action and judgment are being created right now. Freud calls this period anal.

The third age (approx. 3rd to 5th year of life) takes place under the sign **of initiative**, entrepreneurship, which presupposes the ability to conceive a plan and implement it. The specific task of this age is the acquisition of this ability. It is no longer just an active reaction, but an active self-assertion, which can face the hostility of the environment, and which then induces a feeling **of guilt** in the child. According to Freud, it is a period of phallic resp. oedipal. – As can be seen, each age takes place under the sign of the fulfillment-non-fulfillment alternative: basic trust-mistrust, autonomy-doubt or shame, initiative-guilt.

The fourth age includes the school years until puberty. Psychoanalysis calls it the latency period. Its alternative is **effort** versus **inferiority**. It is a time of acquiring technologies, "know-how", and tools, driven by the ambition to know, but also a time of the will to cooperate and the acceptance of the division of labor. Inferiority manifests as a demobilizing feeling: I am worse than others.

The fifth age is puberty and adolescence (according to some authors, these are synonyms). It imposes on the sexual adolescent to achieve an **identity** and corresponding stable roles (including sexual role and choice of life path). The desire to find an identity awakens the hunger for identification, hence the fascination with various models, elites and their symbols as well as programs and ideologies. Falling in love is also one of the forms of this fascination. An unfortunate alternative to not achieving identity is **role confusion**, when I don't have a clear and indisputable awareness of who I really am (see the popular saying: "he doesn't know whose he is").

The sixth age, early adulthood, is filled with the construction of the world ("territory") of our **intimacy**, if necessary, its defense, but also with the acquisition of the ability to accept the other into one's intimate protection, to open up and surrender to him, i.e. to be at home in his intimate world. It is the flowering time of mature sexuality. If we do not find the strength in ourselves for this friendliness and if we distance ourselves from the world around us, our fate is **isolation**. The convenience of the sixth age is also the ability to transcend oneself, which will prove itself in the following age, when it will be necessary to accept one's own child with unconditional love, not hesitating even before self-sacrifice in case of necessity.

The seventh age is mature adulthood, the longest life chapter, spanning several decades. Its content is **fertility** or **creativity**, i.e. the generation and education of the next generation, in a broader sense, the work intended for others to become more fully themselves. Failure to fulfill this task is **stagnation**.

The eighth and final age is the period of synthesis of all that preceded it. It cannot be said that any of the epoch-making tasks will be completely and permanently solved within "their" age: basic trust, autonomy, etc. will need to be strengthened or renewed throughout the next life. However, the relevant age is the time of assigning the task

and its acceptance (or non-acceptance, which becomes a significant handicap for the future). The task of the last age is to organize this polyphony into a harmonious whole, i.e. to achieve **the integrity of Jas** . This then establishes a good sense of the value of a lived life (the apostle Paul: "I fought a good fight..."), which is a counterweight to the fear of death. It is the last and most important chord of the last movement of a lifelong symphony. The alternative to the integrity of life is the feeling of its being wasted, i.e. **despair** . Death then appears as a pointless end to a pointless story.

This sequence of life ages is co-conditioned by biological determinants, especially in the initial stages. E.g. the achievement of autonomy depends on the maturation of neural pathways, puberty presupposes the awakening of gonadal function, etc. However, in its course, this determination decreases (even if it does not disappear completely) and, on the contrary, the responsibility of the person himself for his own self-determination increases.

Using the example of the development of sexuality, it can be demonstrated how necessary it is for the fulfillment of the task of a certain age to be prepared by the fulfillment of the task of previous ages. The lack of basic trust is reflected in the inability to create a permanent union, the lack of autonomy leads to constant manipulation by the partner, the confusion of roles introduces into the partner relationship the need for a permanent fight for one's own position and "territory", in a state of isolation sexuality is reduced to mere orgasmic abreaction ("cool sex ") etc.

The development of an individual into an ethically responsible being

However, we are interested in how the human individual becomes an ethically responsible being during this development. In his first age, man, rather a little man, is an **anetic** being , because he does not have to and cannot choose between good and evil. His fully justified **egocentrism** also determines his concept of good: *good* is what *makes him feel good* , especially in the oral sense, which is therefore *tasty* . Only in his second age does he encounter an **authority** that dictates to him what is good and what is not, when he himself is *good* and when *he is bad* (the roots of the concept of *value* and *evil* go back here). His obedience is enforced by the threat of punishment (denial of love, or physical pain). Through this pressure from the outside, the child acquires **primitive morality** (its most original core is, according to FREUD , *sphincter morality* , because the first imperative the child encounters is the parental demand not to pollute oneself; hence the close proximity of the *moral* and *the pure*). Immanuel KANT calls this morality of external authority and its possible sanctions **heteronomous morality** (Greek *heteros* = other, *nomos* = law). The psychic instance that begins to form in the developing personality at that time also corresponds to it; psychoanalysis calls it the **Superego (superego, das Überich)** , a kind of embryonic basis of the future conscience. It arises from the internal representation of parental attitudes, initially commands and prohibitions. - There are quite a few people who in their moral development have not progressed beyond this heteronomous morality of the imperative from the outside, or beyond its negation, which is a defiant protest against it.

A despotic, intolerant upbringing usually leads to an overestimation of the function of the strict Superego, which has an unfortunate consequence: instinctive spontaneity is perceived as evil, and the child's **I** (ego, das Ich) then fights against it in vain. The victims of this constellation are many adults with a prudish, puritanical nature (but let's not confuse this convulsive prudery with chastity, which is responsible for the sense of intimacy). The crookedness of moral prudence is also manifested in the narrowness of language: the concept of *immorality* is reduced to only one of its meanings, namely *obscenity* . Sometimes entire cultural epochs are characterized by it (e.g. "Victorian morality" in England in the 19th century during the reign of Queen Victoria).

In the course of the development of the child's personality, the possibility of **identification** , i.e. identification with those with whom he communicates, motivated by a conscious and unconscious need to "be (have, be able to) like her/him", is of decisive importance. At first it is the parents, then other close people, and at the beginning of the fourth age, the number of **identification patterns** grows rapidly. Such a pattern is actually the building material of our personality, hence the Latin *exempla trahunt* , examples pull. This also applies to later age: the life of people who have not experienced significant encounters tends to be poor. is important for the development of moral consciousness - **Identification with the value attitudes** of our identification patterns .

Achieving a *Jás* identity at the end of the fifth age presupposes the integration of these patterns (which until now corresponded to different fragments in our personality) into a unified whole. Then it is possible to say of man that he is a "being of one piece"; otherwise, he remains contradictory, "knowing not whose he is." - That uniformity can also be noted in the transformation of the Superego instance : until now it was relatively independent within the personality structure, its function was compared to a kind of inner mentor or even a policeman. Now the Superego merges far and wide with the Self, it is "adopted" by it without, however, completely merging with it. It retains the role of guardian and guarantor of the self-identity and becomes - together with the Self - **the psychological substrate of the function of the mature conscience** . This significantly changes the nature of individual morality: while a child did the right thing because he did not want to betray his role models (especially his parents) or out of fear of punishment, a mature person does the right thing because it suits him and because he would like to act differently. KANT calls this morality **autonomous** (Greek *autos* = alone, own, own). KANT'S dichotomous typology of morality corresponds to David RIESMAN'S similar typology of human action, which distinguishes between **an** man by the imperatives of external authority, impulses, moods, etc., and an **out-directed** in-directed man by his own Self.

Moral development

The degree of moral maturity is described by John DEWEY by distinguishing three levels of morality: *pre-conventional*, when the motivation for action is the satisfaction of basic needs without a real sense of good and evil, *conventional* , motivated by the need for conformity with the social standard, and *post-conventional* , when

the motivation is the free choice of a moral principle, which is perceived as right and good. – It goes without saying that this ascension does not happen automatically, but is largely determined by our self-determining will.

DEWEY'S distinction is a close theory of the *stages of moral development* of the American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, based on many years of research on a stable set of 75 respondents. It originally postulated six degrees. Two always roughly corresponded to the DEWEY levels:

- 1st degree – *obedience or punishment* ;
- 2nd level – *morality of the marketplace* (something for something);
- 3rd level – *conformity* ;
- 4th grade – *law and order* ;
- 5th degree – *social contract*
- 6th degree – *universal moral principles* (unconditional respect for the human dignity of anyone). Later laid down by KOHLBERG;
- 7th degree – *identification with an infinite perspective* (morality overcoming the autonomy of the agent, i.e. essentially theocentric).

Conclusion

Various socio-cultural and pathological circumstances interfere with the described ontogenetic and moral development of a person and can retard and deform it. If a responsible ethical understanding, claim, and judgment is to be credible, it must take the sequence of this development as well as its vulnerability into account.

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