Abstract

The Greek term 'ethos' implies behaviour in general. When complemented by the values behind any behaviour, the formal term gains the significance of a system of rules or even commands to be obeyed. Ethics become a Decalogue prescribing how to behave properly; that is following the actual ethics embodied in behaviour learned, in customs or codified in laws. From the beginning philosophy enquired, which central values ought to be distinguished. A precondition for an answer, the Unde, Ubi, Quo had to be elucidated: the origins of man, his position in the world and his destiny. On that base only it can be explored 'how wo-men ought to act rightly'. Justice to be done, and justness to be exhibited in behaviour, appears one of the, if not the focal, value founding of ethical systems. Any culture, any sector of individual or societal life centres around justice, justness, and the concepts connected.

Key words: Behaviour, ethics, interdependence, re-invention; enaction

Prologue

A glance into the translations of the term justice in various European languages discloses the kernel ‘just’ in English connected with ‘fair’; deserved’; ‘valid’. Slovenian points to ‘prav’; ‘rêš’ (true, right). French adds honneté and équité, moral principles and equality pointing to interdependence. German emphasizes ‘recht’ relating to destiny, moral and law; ‘richtig’ suggesting efficacy and entailing also ‘wahr’ (true). All the concepts express relations to be obeyed when acting. Among other close concepts they may be condensed into the pivots of an ethic of interdependence between wo-men and their world. These topics will be explored when exhibiting ‘justice’, ‘justness’; concerning impacts, obligations and challenges in a fundamentally and dynamically changing world.

Justice and its connotations as in particular trust and safety establish a key rule to conduct life. Justice e.g. encourages trust and in turn security, motivation and performance. A central commandment of ethics, it exhibits all the opaqueness and ambiguity of general ethic principles. To thrive and to proliferate – sustainably as far as evolution and environment permit – life presumes a delicate balance. Foreshortened: first, it has to secure the necessities of staying alive and to reproduce, a command valid from primitive first pre-life forms to higher consciousness. Survival and the chance to develop prevails. In case of higher consciousness, second, it ought, by power of ethical reasoning, also follow behavioural rules of pragmatic moral and value determined morale as an evolutionary consequence. Such value based ethics are superimposed, complementing the general/individual rules by social and environmental ethical directives. As well known from everyday life, conflicts between the two forms are predetermined. Accordingly ethics is always an act of balancing between individual and social/environmental quests. Moreover, making decisions in assessing and valuing more often than not has to compromise between forces of the factual and ethical principles. Though cultural, ideological and certainly religious ethics in origin and actual structure reflect their evolutional roots, the derivations there from for action practice may conflict. Evolution does not know morals in the strict sense other than survival, nor does nature. Though based on natural life conditions, moral as well as morale is a mental construct. As such it may, and does, in the human range shape evolutional principles into social principles and visions, interpreting its open or hidden causation and reasoning.
The outcome in actual decision and behaviour can be vastly contrasting and ambiguous. Fiat justitia, pereat mundus. If but justice and moral prevail, the world may perish.

The following argument predominantly relies on what may be termed roughly an evolutional and historical (Darwin 2000; Morris 2011; Tarnas 1997) approach; less on a psychological (Kahneman 2011) or an ecological one. Consequentially it points out the social and societal aspects, indicating actual societal challenges.

1. Pragmatic Ethics of Interdependence: A Delicate Balance

Thus pragmatic everyday ethics resemble an act of continuous balancing. It differs and often contradicts in claims how act rightly in the moral sense, to decide justly, or to act true to principles. The necessity to equilibrate, to secure a balanced and flexibly floating equilibrium may be called the key function of pragmatics in perpetuating life in all its stages and forms. To follow morals or ethical principles too rigorously may turn out detrimental for existence. Ethics developed a means to master life and secure societal co-operation, not to constrict. Culture is abound with striking examples. Ethics are no one-sided command. They respond to the interdependence of all life, in all phases, on all levels, in any respect thus act as ethics of an comprehensive interdependence. As aforementioned, ethics are bound to evolutional, natural evolutional rules to preserve and to propagate life. They need obey also the factual, natural interdependence with the natural conditions for life and their development. Such double interdependence is displayed throughout evolution and actual life systems. It shows in the double coding of genetic strands, in competition complementing co-operation, in individual needs and those of the community and society. Our world co-evolved, that is establishing rules for interdependence for further evolvement. By inventing ethics evolution proactively interacted with and steadied the changing inner and outer environments to a floating equilibrium, enabling development to continue.

The need – and the difficulty – to balance manifests in particular in the social and societal sector. After ‘Paradise Lost’ (J. Milton, 1667) life resources cannot just be found in an abundant environment. They have to be gained by hard work and carefully to be tended. To earn a living preconditions performance, request a contribution to the wealth of the society that can be distributed. (See e.g. the discussion on the social responsibility of old age, the ‘right’ wages etc.) On the other hand any human being, by Western social ethics (and by the UNO), is entitled to enjoy a material, social and cultural minimum. Already the sermon of the mount, by the metaphor of the workers in the vineyard, addresses the main ambiguity. Which relationship between performance and existential need is just? Today’s social situation is accentuated by too many people living on social welfare in the third generation and won’t change that. The chasm is widened by politicians buying feet rather than convincing citizens. Another even more dangerous deviation destroying the balance between the principle of contribution by performance and ‘rights’ derived from mere ‘being existent’ is displayed by the ubiquitous and growing parasitism. A recent example is provided by the financial warfare for the Euro, fought with all weapons including blackmail.

Parasitism should be seen as the evolutional principle of symbiosis deteriorated. Where symbiosis, even in the case of prey-predator relations, furthers life, a parasite but takes and does not give or gives less; it thus dissolves and destroys. All intermediary forms can be observed. The borders are not always clearly to be defined. Pragmatically and in terms of ethics today’s society is to a life threatening extent outright parasitic. Worldwide environmental parasitism has is fervently discussed and needs not be elaborated here. Latent and often politically suppressed is the awareness of social and societal parasitism. Corruption in all open and hidden forms costs worldwide – including Europe – about up to thirty to forty percent of the ‘effective’ GDP. It is aggravated by lobbyism in all societal sectors exhibiting a plethora of open and hidden forms. Bureaucracy, per se a necessity to uphold society and culture, since long has developed for its larger part to parasitic states. It renders for example ‘services’ not factually needed, adds to complexity as to be entitled to control just the self-created conundrum. It grows like weed stifling useful plants. Seen from the daily practice, governmental ethics or public administration ethics seem a fata morgana disappearing when but named.

Check and balance have been skilfully weakened by institutions interested and by vested interests. As has been the stabilizing negative feedback. Democracy is undermined. On the European level for example democratic principles, following obvious interests, have been voluntarily neglected already by the founding principles. But recently they have been further defamed and weakened. - Bureaucracy everywhere is used as an instrument and as weapon for dominance.

2. Justice, Justness: Disturbances During Change

The Confucian Chinese expresses it metaphorically: when the tune of the music is harmonious, the society thrives. When it sounds distorted, the society disrupts. High technology and in particular the ICT sector plays an essential role. Technological means, lacking effective control, encourage terrorism and criminality, petty to organised, worldwide. The need to fight criminality and terrorism is used to proliferate an already comprehensive control of human behaviour, individual, group, institutions, governmental functions. Big Brother has been embodied beyond all suspicions and continues to tighten its grip. The rapidly changing role of the media reflects the technological
development. In an extensive understanding what is ‘fit to print’ media even overstep the old statement (slightly adapted here) that the medium is the message. The ‘new media’, and the development following, altered the function of the media profoundly. They often do not to support the founded building of opinion, individually and in the societal sector. Media often do not encourage thinking, but provoke bare uncritical reception and non-founded emotion. Information is consumed, not understood. Media deliver facts without the information to evaluate and to assess them. Or they evoke meaning without founding and connecting meaning with facts to be checked against. The data and information overload makes it difficult to adapt technical means to uphold a media ethics. So does the pressure of interest groups to instrumentalise the media as a tool of power in an extended mode. Justice and justness often are scarcely but in particular obvious cases or aggressively addressed.

In times of fundamental and rapid change these developments are to be expected. Which does mean that the more they should be fought against. The lessons of history are clear. History tells that dynamic change points in tendency to centralism and group egoism and normally cannot be reversed. It will lead eventually –rise and fall – to anomie, and in consequence to low level subsistence or near-extinction. The typical indicator of anomie displays, that the formal ‘justice’ is not felt as ‘just’, not as ‘right’. The discrepancy should not be accepted. Instead the ethics of interdependence need new encouragement. A host of examples corroborates. They include not but justice in the narrow sense. They concern technology development as expressed in ‘technology assessment’. They set on to protect environment necessary to sustain life, and so on. Encouragement needs originate expressively not from the ideological and from unfounded emotional arousal, badly if at all informed. Encouragement must be carried by learned analysis, by informed prognosis and a self-critical self-learning strategy developed on that base. In particular the change in technology, the distribution of influence changing e.g. from the print media to electronic ones need critically be observed as to their consequences. A main point relates to the capacity to social/societal learning. In turn societal learning is closely connected to the ethics of societal responsibility. As the foundation of ‘togetherness’ and cooperation social responsibility is to be reconsidered. Id necessary it needs and to be re-invented, thus reacting, and eventually counteracting, to the emerging noxious structures of individual, social and societal communication as above. Following N. Luhmann (Luhmann 1984, 1986, 1998) and supporters, communication, that is responsible communication, constitutes society. Accordingly the ethical quality of ICT co-determines the capacity of a society to secure its survival and development. It does so biologically, materially, socially, societally and, embracing the previous arguments, culturally. Again, a pragmatically, historically and culturally comprehended ethics of interdependence needs be reconsidered and be re-invented.

3. Resolving Ethical Conflicts

In the long range context, ethics of interdependence centre on balancing short- and long term objectives towards to steady and open new potentials of survival and development. They do so on all levels: biologically, historically, socially and individually. Thus they shape the character of justice oriented on sustainability: manifested in individual behaviour, in rules of social co-operation/competition, in mental constructs as ideologies and religions. The latter represent intrinsically the ethics of ethics; in the positive: upholding of basic standard values as justice and justness. In the negative they may give leeway to misuse and perversion, as it is observed in processes of decline. Ethics, as any human guide to act, is as ambiguous to the actual situation as it is to historical developmental phases; in general tuned to prevail factual preconditions. Evolution is a story of power competition and power balance. It emerges a result of competition interacting with co-operation as competitive advantage. Studies into the evolutionary and the motivating forces of historical development corroborate. As evolution, so history is determined by biology, geology and the social developmental status. Human history is driven mainly by fear, sloth and greed (Morris, 2011), and the complementing qualities sharing, performance, and emphasis. The resulting oscillations between evolution and revolution, between progress and regress, spawned high cultures followed by destruction and Armageddon. Such recurring phases of decline and eventual reconstruction do not lead to extinction as long as there had been environmental and with that evolutional space still open. Actually, in 2011, mankind and Gaya carrying mankind encountered the limits: of environment, of resources, of space. They face not least the amassed power of de facto wilful self-destruction. Again, ethics cogently, as an absolute unquestionable necessity, is forced to remind that its must be ethics of responsible interdependence. Such a sentence is no exaggeration, but a fact statistically and systemically based. It conjures no mere black painting, but gives a founded last warning. The discussion on political side of justice has been stimulated by John Rawls theory of Justice (Rawls 1971). He argues from a theory of contract. How to resolve ethical conflicts, and with what to decide as to meet the evolutional as well as historical challenge? There is no ready nor easy nor clear cut answer. How to cope with the imminent point of no return? First, it’s imperative to be aware of the situation; of facts, of options and action spaces. To be aware not barely by cognition and emotion, but affecting the deep awareness of being alive in a world of tight, of highly tensioned and stressed interdependency. Such awareness may be learned from Buddhism, or from Mystics of all main religions. Second, again, it is vital to perceive ethics as ethics of pragmatic interdependence, again calling forth a deeper
understanding its ambiguities, challenges, chances, as well as its deviations, perversions, misuses. Third, to assess with a clear head, what still can be done and how so; abandoning non-rationally and non-controlled emotions as fear, sloth and greed. The keys are co-operation, comprehensively realized, and preservation which will also and preponderantly include the prevention of deviant courses. Which options are still open and how can they be accomplished in which modes and to which end? The endeavour needs fundamental learning, not restricted by ‘non-thinkable’. Learning which is capable to question and reinvent fundamental presumptions and reshape behaviour, mainly politics on all levels. Political learning is based on factual learning from life systems: what constitutes an individual, a society; how to optimise institutional choice, power balancing, conflict resolution. It needs to distinguish cultural universals as opposed/ complementary e.g. to cultural differences which make the difference. Again such claims points to a world wide re-contrivance of essential parts of the social and the environmental systems. It amounts to pronounced ethics of interdependence by learning and acting, guidance and control understood as active, investigative learning.

4. Ethics: Comprehensive Responsibility for Life

Justice as justness imply responsibility. Acting ‘right’, acting ‘true’ to life conveys acting responsibly. In the ‘global village’ responsibility has been necessarily been extended to acknowledgment of planet wide dependability and of worldwide accountability. What happens in Arabia, North, West and South, no longer but indirectly affects Europe and e.g. Europe’s fuel tanks, but its political status. Recent laws permitting to cut down large parts of the rain forest change directly climate, and indirectly influence agriculture in Slovenia. Stagnating poverty in Africa and the Latin Americas as well as successful efforts to curb it in Brasilia can be felt in European foreign politics. Additionally, the examples elucidate the interdependence of our life base with environmental conditions in the widest meaning of the term. The diminishing arability of soil is implied as well as the rising danger from mutating viruses originated by so distinct causes as dense population and modern medicine, antibiotics as well as inoculation. Environmental pollution and the Scylla and Charybdis of energy supply state but commonplace problems. The evolution of life, not only but in particular of human life, caused a comprehensive interdependence of all and entire life on Earth, any continent. Human beings, based on higher consciousness, owning increasingly powers to balance or destroy, ought face the their general responsibility for the intricate networks of life, any kind and location.

In a sharp outline pragmatic ethical ambiguities rise again. Change, first, is inevitable part of life. There will be always winners or losers. The ethics of nature, if far from a simple survival of the fittest, favours the life system which is more adaptive, more active, better capable to fit into the changing conditions an open new potentials. That is valid in particular for short adaptive phases. In the medium and in the long range evolutional fitness may end in a cul-de-sac. Or, as it seems to happen with humankind, too extensive a success may lead to the over-taxation of the life carrying environment. Neglect of the limits of resilience and of renewing capacities will provoke decline. Concerning the inner environment bioethics warns against the too careless use of drugs for example for the enhancement of mental fitness, gender change, genetic engineering and the like. It needs be stressed that any, repeat any intervention with the course of nature alters its direction and results. Which does not mean that interference it bad per se. Human higher consciousness with all its sequels e.g. in technology is part of evolution (if sometimes inclined to run wild?). Neither does that mean unsophisticated preservation. Obsolete phenomena, whatever the causes, ought be removed to give room to new life. It must not turn out ultimate destruction and death, but metamorphosis, the caterpillar becoming butterfly. In the positive: it is sophisticated technology if compliant with environmental and social responsibility that has become for long constitutive essential part and sine qua non of life and a main if not the means to find anew balance.

5. What to do by Whom?

Who puts the bell around the cat’s neck? It’s all and everybody’s duty and responsibility, sensibly transferred into joint action. Action begins not necessarily with a declaration, but with practical doing on the level of everyday life. It follows the general rule as to conduct important issues and emergencies: first make sure that your own person remains healthy and capable to act. Then care for your immediate environment: your family, your house, your neighbours. Expand the range in the next step to community and to its institutions: fulfil your responsibilities as a citizen and look out whether you could be of further use to the community. Vote, and do so critically. Conceded, there is mostly no real choice for the citizen and voter; political constellations as parties formed more for the gain and preservation of power than to serve people. However, that’s no reason to stay in the background. One needs be grateful that one still can vote, and there is a choice at all. Remind: people on the political rise normally rise from positions acquired locally. So pay strategic attention locally to which people will politically rise – and use your influence however marginal to support to right people.

Closing the argumentative circle: Justice needs be apprehended in the actual context and in its comprehensive meaning entailing justness. Actually the indicator and the values contained in justice offer a central point of appraisal to gain transparency and show option and action spaces. I clarifies the opaqueeness of conflicting views on
societal quests. It suggests sign posts for analysis and for consideration how to react to demands and to meet challenges. It opens deeper awareness and insight into the values which human behaviour ought follow as to survive and to develop. Pragmatically it helps to decide ‘how to act right and responsible’, based on given facts and necessities. Besides facts and necessities other complementing basic moral codes in a net of values are to be taken into account. Culture will turn out a crucial determinant. The notion of justice will serve as a nodal point in a network of meaningful codes connecting human culturally defined conduct. Moreover, the measure of justice as a construction element of life supporting behaviour will provide insights into institutional choice and institutional policy: how social institutions implicitly deal with justice, embodying a strong motivational force concerning acceptance and support of societal institutions and their courses. Not by chance any revolution is demanding justice and justness. Remember the triad of the French Revolution: égalité, liberté, fraternité. Which the priority is assigned to has been in question ever since.

Social tensions, the two- or three-part society, f. ex. between the welfare receivers and those enjoying profitable employment, imply justice. They show in particular its ambiguity as indicated metaphorically in the sermon of the mount (workers in the vineyard). Justice emphasizes the right to exist as well as the linking of justice to performance and contribution, and in consequence the ‘right’ to an opportunity to work and perform. From the antique philosophers as well as revolutionaries as the Gracchi in ancient Rome up to the moral (!) philosophers as Adam Smith (Smith 1908), to Rousseau’s Con trat Social (1762), to Marx and recent theorists as Rawls (Rawls 1971) and Sandel (Sandel 2009) the discussion continues. Each time, each culture has to find its own answers to the unchanging basic evolutional preconditions and the changing actual environment. How the space for the cultural design of justice is exploited co-determines the chances for the society’s well being and its future. Every individual, any institution an any government is entailed in the responsibility to act accordingly.

Epilogue

Contemplating justice, justness and its connotations may well prompt to consider the very nature of dependence and interdependence. To do justice (!) to the all embracing interdependence, its highly complex character needs more thoroughly be understood. Still knowledge and insight are rather insufficient into the high complexity characterizing the intricate networking of life and social life. Again: much more translucent transparency in detail is paramount. With complexity – cause and result – comes ambiguity arising from the controversial particular interests of life units connected in the fabric of life. Moreover, moral principles need often be understood as relative to factual necessities. There is, if not always, yet mostly a winner and a loser in the long run. Is it decidable at all who ought under the principle of interdependence lose or win, who must draw back or even disappear? Does not interdependence and its meaning change itself in a changing world, and if, where lies its hard core? Tentatively all aspects and levels of individual and societal life are affected. Therefore not least ethics themselves need a continued reconciliation as to their fundaments, their actual validity and their adaptation. To conclude with the last line of a German poem (Erich Kästner, freely translated by the author): Living is always endangering life. The compelling cause and reason to live it to the fullest. Responsibly, trying to be just.

Acknowledgement

The author is indebted to life long transdisciplinary discussions. They virtually entered from all disciplines and life sectors: natural sciences to social sciences to humanites to shamanisms and religion. Over the decennia their contribution changed from rather simplistic approaches confronting ‘materialistic’ – ‘idealistic’ stances to a complementing sophisticated dialectic reasoning. Framed by systems and systemic thinking, as sociocybernetics and cybernetics of human knowledge and knowing, recently e.g. environmental sciences and in particular biosemiotics paved the path into a more thorough understanding of the many foundations and faces of ethics. – The richness of possible aspects and reasoning had to be confined to the topics of this conference. The workshop can not but try to provide a more general frame to support deeper understanding the nature of ethics and the challenges confronting when transferring them into life practice. Thus e.g. philosophy theology has been dismissed, as have ideological movements.

Selected References

1. Assheuer Th. (211) Alles was gerecht ist. Die Zeit no 51. Dec 15 p 66 Hamburg
20. wikipedi.org/wiki/Gerechtigkeit (2011) 07.12 Internet