



Ethics of Globalization; Exploring a Universal Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Modern societies are no longer isolated and self-sufficient; they have to rely on constant interchange with others who are sometimes radically different. Globalization is a process by which we are permanently confronted with moral choices and the need to reconcile contradictory requirements. Within the framework of several ethical theories and considering that ethical principles are universal, where do the ethics of globalization stand and what are the distinguishing features of global ethics when compared with individual ethics and national ethics? Is it possible to reconcile a universal ethical theory with the dominant economic theory based on utilitarianism and the maximization of the utility function? Is it necessary to substitute the utility function with another that includes new ethical principles? Or is it possible to change the utility function in such a way that it reflects an ethics based on virtue, duties and affections instead of the utilitarian ethic? Or does a new ethic of globalization imply a new economy and a new economic theory? Is it a utopian ethic, or, on the contrary, the Ethic of the Future? How to humanize the global market?

In this paper an attempt been made to analyze and understand the ethics of globalization within the framework of a universal ethics.

Keywords: *Ethics, Globalization, Universal, Utilitarian, Environment, Mankind*

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INTRODUCTION

Ethical questions have occupied center stage in human thinking since the time immemorial. Philosophers, novelists, playwrights, politicians, historians, religious leaders and many others down the ages have produced some of their best efforts in addressing questions such as “how should we behave in the face of others”, “what is the sense of personal responsibility”, “how should we pursue a good life without hindering the rights of others”, “how can we define rights and wrongs, good and bad” or “should we act based on consequences or should we merely concentrate on principles”. Despite the fact that each historical society has approached the world of morality in particular and nuanced ways, it remains a fact that it is impossible to find a civilization or a culture without moral rules or ethical constructions forcing or constraining people to follow “the right path”. Defining this path implies moral behavior that may be compared to a tightrope on which you are permanently adjusting your balance while not meaning choice is ever absent from your mindset. The morality conundrum results from the fact that you have to reconcile your self-interests, rights and duties with those of all the others with whom you interact. Moral issues arise exactly because you have to consider the other as an individual and not as some abstract dehumanized figure. Each particular period raises new moral questions and new puzzles to solve. It is easy to be trapped by the feeling that we are living in a very special and unique moment in time and subject to never before faced moral pressures. But comparing moral requirements and the difficulties of complying with moral imperatives leads us nowhere – the question lies elsewhere – what kind of morality is emerging as a response to the present social, political, economic and cultural transformations taking shape in today’s society?

But modern societies are no longer isolated and self-sufficient; they have to rely on constant interchange with others who are sometimes radically different. Globalization is a process by which we are permanently confronted with moral choices and the need to reconcile contradictory requirements.

Within the framework of several ethical theories and considering that ethical principles are universal, where do the ethics of globalization stand and what are the distinguishing features of global ethics when compared with individual ethics and national ethics? Is it possible to reconcile a universal ethical theory with the dominant economic theory based on utilitarianism and the maximization of the utility function? Is it necessary to substitute the utility function with another that includes new ethical principles? Or is it possible to change the utility function in such a way that it reflects an ethics based on virtue, duties and affections instead of the utilitarian ethic? Or does a new ethic of globalization imply a new economy and a new economic theory? Is it a utopian ethic, or, on the contrary, the Ethic of the Future? How to humanize the global market?

Moral and Ethics

Moral and Ethics are two concepts often deployed as synonyms[1]. Both Moral and Ethics deal with the system of conduct rules in our relations with the other. The Moral is a concept more adequate to philosophical systems, to theory, while Ethics is more applied to practice, to the rules of day to day practice. We may say that the domain of Moral is wisdom, theory and contemplation while the domain of Ethics is feeling, acting and interaction with the others. Moral and Ethics begins when the Other comes into the scene. The rules of conduct, the good reasons, the virtues of character, the utility of a certain action are thought through hand defined to regulate interpersonal relations. If happiness lies in an understanding of what we are (Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics), it is the Other, his recognition, his vision that enables us to understand ourselves.

Concepts of globalization

According to the sociologist Anthony Giddens, "globalization means the intensification of social relationships on a global scale in such a way that makes dependence on what happens at a local level and can be verified over long distances, and vice-versa." adds the global village idea, defining the phenomenon of globalization as "the integration of capital, technology and information across national borders, creating a single global market and to some extent a global village".

Stiglitz[2] introduces the concept by defining economic globalization as "the closer integration of countries and peoples, that resulted in a huge reduction of transport and communication costs and the destruction of artificial barriers to the cross-border circulation of goods, services, capital, knowledge and (to a lesser extent) people." Regardless of which side we examine, there is consensus that globalization affects everything and everyone and contributes to an inevitable and constant process of change at all different levels, whether social, economic, cultural or environmental.

The Ethics of a Globalized World: a Universal Ethic?

In Adam Smith's book *The Wealth of Nations*, 'homo economicus' is generally presented as the rational and selfish man (rational selfish and ethical selfish) of marginal/utilitarian economic theory. However, this is an incorrect understanding. The dominant economic science reduces man to his economic dimension and to a very partial rationalism: rationalism deprived of affection and compassion for others, the self-sufficient egocentric rationalism. If each seeks to maximize his own interest, all will be improved. It is an illusionary and dangerous utopia. There is no interdependence: each is an isolated island and can count only on oneself. The underlying ethics can be summarized by the sentence: "Do what you want" because that is what rationally benefits you and gives you the greatest happiness. If all do the same, everyone will be better.

St. Augustine says something profoundly different, though it seems formally similar at first sight: "Love and do what you want." The difference is the commandment "Love" meaning the consequent actions (the "do what you want") are based on love. The utilitarian ethic is a consequential ethic. Only the results of actions count. In this case the endings - maximizing utility - justify the means. The means do not have a plea. They are not based on love/respect for others. Utilitarian ethics do not even consider the existence of the other as essential to individual existence. The whole is the mere sum of its parts: no feelings, no altruism, there is disinterest, there is no love. This is the reason why utilitarian theory clashes with Adam Smith and his Theory of Moral Sentiments. In this Adam Smith work, there is always a concern as to love and justice that prevails over selfish interest. "In recent years the philosophers have considered mainly the purpose of affection, paying little attention to the relationship it keeps with its originating reason why it exists". And furthermore, "Naturally, the man does not want just to be loved but wants also to love; or be the natural and appropriate object of love". Or, also: "When we read the stories about the pride and cruelty of a Borgia or a Nero, our hearts rebel themselves against those hating feelings that influence their conduct...". Sympathy, solidarity, compassion, justice and love are concepts used repeatedly in the Theory of Moral Sentiments. There is, in the work of Adam Smith, the defense of non-egocentric and solidarity individualism. "An individual should never choose himself over the other to the point of hurting or harming the other for the benefit of itself, even if the benefit of one is much larger than the pain or injury of another". No more anti-utilitarianism - where the scapegoat, that allows the maximization of value - is accepted.

Economy and Environment

Singer[3] raises the following question: "How far will political leaders see their role in a limited way, just in terms of promoting the interests of its citizens, and how much should they be concerned about people's welfare around the world?". September 11th, followed by terrorist attacks in Europe and natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and El Niño showed us the extreme need for richer nations to take a global ethical perspective, which reflects the idea that we all live in one global world, where no country is free of catastrophic consequences wrought by global environmental mismanagement or global terrorism. A unilateral, egocentric policy that cannot see beyond national borders is incompatible with a global/universal ethic. Any distant event can have serious consequences in our own home - space or time no longer exist to protect us from what happens in other corners of the world. The planet has become smaller and

the problems of others are now much closer and as much ours. There is just one biosphere and the planet is getting warmer. Nine of the ten warmest years in the last 140 occurred after 1990, melting ice around the planet and increasing the sea water level hence causing large scale natural phenomena of huge intensity such as hurricane Katrina and El Niño. For the first time in world history, the governments of most countries began expressing concern about these issues and started acting. Global warming is caused by greenhouse gases emissions and, in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol set targets for limiting or reducing greenhouse gas emissions for 39 developed countries, to be achieved by 2012. This protocol was signed by 178 countries and begun in 2001, leaving out countries like the U.S., which rejected the protocol and issues four times the greenhouse gas quota that would have been permitted.

In response to this need, The Hague International Tribunal was set up in 2002, a permanent international body with the aim of implementing international law against human rights crimes for all countries accessing its jurisdiction. There has been, from the U.S., pressure to implement a clause of exception allowing for the immunity of all holders of official positions and the U.S. military. However, those requirements have been rejected by the remaining member countries. The court was established so that all criminals who violate human dignity are tried on an equal footing regardless of their nationality and country.

The United Nations could assume the role of an international body authorized to decide and determine whether military intervention is justified or not. But to do so it needs to be subject to serious reforms and take responsibility for the protection of the universal rights of men overriding national member interests. The feeling that we should take care of "ours" to the detriment of "others" has been assumed over time, that is, each of us citizens of the world, continue in helping those who are close, even when the foreigner requires much more than our neighbor. Neither race nor nationality should determine the value of human beings and there must be a collective awareness of the existence of a single community and a single nation. External aid is far short of what is needed to eradicate poverty, pestilence, illiteracy and wars. Concern and collective awareness of the need for a global ethic based on the perception of a single world is fundamental. Justice and solidarity are human values that can contribute towards the future of humankind in the globalization era.

Attention should not be restricted on how to avoid the consequences of globalization since they are inevitable, but rather how we can ethically enhance its benefits to allow equal opportunities for all individuals and a guarantee of a future for generations to come.

An Ethics of Globalization

The ethics of globalization should be based on the following reality: the existence of only one atmosphere, one economy and one community. Therefore, a law applied by only one institution, the UN, and only one ethics. Universal ethics, the ethics of globalization, should be an ethics of virtues - be free, in the sense of understanding each other, be true and fair, be tolerant and sensible; necessarily an *ethic of duty* - a duty in itself, with family, friends and humanity, the duty to comply with commitments freely made; should be an *ethic of affections* - preferential treatment for relatives and friends, although the end is to extend such treatment to all humanity. It must be an ethic of universal values: freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, truth and reason. It should understand and accept the partiality of fraternal affection, familiar and friendly, common to all cultures.

Despite glorifying reason - following Kant - this should not exclude emotions. We can say that from scientific discoveries about the human brain, particularly on the relationship between feeling, emotions and reason (see Antonio Damasio), it is not about "controlling emotions and glorifying reason" but to "understand emotions as a basis of good reason." The understanding of emotions reinforces positive emotions, helps control the negative and allows more sensible judgments and decisions. Universal ethics for a globalized world (the ethics of the global village) have to consider both the duties and the rights of the individual and defend that individualism is not only compatible but also requires altruism. It should reject psychological egoism, ethical selfishness and cultural relativism.

In the spiritual field, it must consider that the construction of the human temple, which is the man, an individual task - "know thyself" - that cannot be done without the eyes of another returning the echo, the true light on inner nature. Spirituality based on the sacred condition of human nature (with its light and shadow) and its respect has a universal duty. Joining all traditions, all religions (including atheism) and all cultures that respect the principle of non-violence (according to Pope Benedict XVI there is an incompatibility between the idea of God and the idea of violence) and tolerance based on the sense of Justice, Truth and Reasoning, in an interreligious dialogue.

An ethics of globalization that meets the principles of Justice, of Truth and of Reason, does not exclude inter-religious dialogue between different cultural traditions: they complement each other. The only requirement is that religions and traditions promote peace rather than violence. To become better, with awareness that Man is not the only living being, that we are just a grain of dust in the vastness of the universe (or universes), that spirituality does not end in

religion and that the inter-religion debate does not exclude agnostics and atheists. Be free – in the sense of knowledge of oneself - and respect others / other. Be tolerant except with intolerant customs and practices. Being itself is a spiritual experience that begins with individual transformation towards Goodness, an experience of the sacred that feeds from our concern to know and improve ourselves.

CONCLUSIONS

The Ethics of the Future, the Ethics of a Just Globalization are limited by inter-religious tolerance and respect between social classes. Hence, such will never be tolerated by the various religious fundamentalists and political totalitarianisms. Being free is not about not being a slave. Today, being free is to be oneself, it is to implement the 'know yourself' of Socrates.

Fair and global ethics is an ethic based on defense of humanism as a living and dynamic humanism, which recognizes the state of ignorance of human beings regarding themselves and the timeliness of the Socratic commandment. It is a humanism that does not exclude other living beings (so the ethic of a fair globalization is not a contractual ethic) and, hence, defends the ecological balance. It is a humanism that advocates constant human improvement - the virtuous character traits towards Aristotle's ideas –and the accomplishment of one's duties with oneself, with humanity, with other living beings and with nature. It is a humanism that is based on universal ethical principles, which does not exclude preferential treatment for friends (ethics of affection). It is a humanism that combines individualism and altruism, duties with rights, reason and emotion (so the overall ethics we advocate is not a utilitarian ethic). It is a humanism that is not compatible with the current state of humanity: there is much to do in terms of the two main objectives mentioned by Aristotle: be happy (to know oneself) and lead a dignified life.

In this paper, we approached the ethics of globalization as a way to express the idea that man is not only *Homo economicus*. But, even here, there is also a necessary minimum condition for us to start thinking about being free. World institutions play a crucial role in protecting an ethic that promotes public awareness of the existence of only one atmosphere, one earth, one world where all living beings - human and nonhuman – have an interdependent existence.

The need to develop weaker economies must be understood not as a threat but as an essential factor for the development of the world economy, which can only benefit all. We must be aware of the need for global legal and economic rules, equal for all. The ethics of solidarity and the fulfillment of obligations do not exclude affections. But there is no solidarity or fraternity without the individual sense of justice, in national and global terms. The values of patience and tolerance, respect and kindness are linked to the courage to resist, in a peaceful way, to all kinds of injustices and power abuses. We are free and we are also co-responsible for everything that happens in the global village. The fight against hunger, extreme poverty, disease, illiteracy, war, environmental destruction, weapons of mass destruction, can only be understood as something that benefits us all, citizens of the world, as interconnected beings in an area without borders, aware of social responsibility in the existence of a single community. There is a minimum of material goods related to physical survival without which not even the idea of freedom survives. If there is no sense of justice and solidarity, globalization will cause the gap not only between developing and developed countries but also between rich and poor individuals within the same country, towns and villages to yawn still wider.

The benefits of globalization can be maximized if the ethics of globalization do not become utilitarian ethics and if economics (economic science) is not based on the poorly rational assumption that the predominant individualism in humans is selfish individualism and the need to maximize egocentrism. The maximization of ego centricity does not lead to the happiness of all or of the largest number but to the unhappiness of many or almost all. The axiom/dogma that general happiness would be achieved by the maximization of individual selfishness has been combined with another axiom/dogma: that the end justifies the means. But, in a logical perspective, we can always argue that the happiness of the individual results from the maximization of happiness of other(s) and that the means justify the end. The ethics of the global economy will thus have to be based on altruistic individualism. If the selfish gene had been, in the past, a winning strategy, Man would never have reached the levels of scientific knowledge reached or perhaps would even have perished. The selfish gene can win in the short term. The successful strategy in the long term was, and will always be, the altruistic gene. It still is not the Jesus Christ strategy of infinite cooperation -perhaps a strategy too human to be feasible. Perhaps the humanity possible in humans can only deal with a winning strategy in the case of non-unlimited cooperation when the other decides to repent and cooperate. Hopefully repentance is not only in the last days of life as with the repentance of the good thief. At any time of the game, the goodness of the unselfish should result in reciprocity.

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