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Moral education for the infra-moral level of the personality

The moral life, so complex and „always changing” in a continuous change, expression of a continual tension of the spiritual powers, is defined by some scholars as a succession of *levels*, concept that expresses and promotes, as definition for morality, the dimension of verticality, the qualitative meaning of the moral coming into being/formation of man, communities and institutions, etc., meaning that is shaped by the ascendant trajectory of this process of formation, that of transcendence through virtue or in virtue.

The actions of the contemporary ethics, as well as those of the psycho-pedagogical, are very successful in clarifying a series of aspects concerning the problems of the levels of morality. This was, it is considered that the superior levels represent the result/product of a gradual and elaborate inner formation/crystallization, the outcome of a gradual effort that, step by step, undergoes changes, and the climax brings about a qualitative change.

The research of the moral life structured on levels is completed, by Ivan Gobryⁱ, a French philosopher, author of “The levels of moral life”. The structure of the paper is centered upon a triadic organization of the levels; this kind of organization is common to other researchers in the field (Le Senne, Dupréel, Freud, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Habermas).

The author supports his theories by presenting “series of ethical levels” that he finds in the ancient and modern philosophers alike Platon and Plotin, Aristotel, as well as Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Schopenhauer, Le Senne or Jankélévitch. Starting from the diversity of these theories and as a result of a new series of analyses and verifications, the author reaches the hypothesis that the moral life is structured on three levels: the infra-moral life, the moral life, the supra-moral life.

Gorby considers that man is moral by nature. The moral sense derives from a “primary, embryo level.” The moral construction/formation is not a result of a mere novelty; it develops together with the moral aspect/psyches, and the structuring of the personality, that is a long and restless process, “is unquestionably accomplished in a direct progressive line and with a perpetual

collaboration of its elements”ⁱⁱ; some elements are to be found in the infra-moral level. The heritage, the hereditary moral “baggage” seems to be a feature of the infra-moral level.

Considered to be a pre-conscious level that precedes the actual moral life, the infra-moral is the sum of all impulses, tendencies and basic feelings out of which the structural elements of the moral life descend.

Scientists and philosophers underwent research on the stage or primary level that precedes morals, each of them using different terms for their definition. However, different terminology defines slight different concepts. For example, the stage or the beginnings of the *inborn morality* (the stage or the moment of the “rightful revenge, of the talon law – “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”- identified by philosophers like Socrates and Plato) is imagined/pictured by them not only as a stage, but also as a growth at rational level by means of obeying some restrictive rules that are defined by the saying “one wrong does not repair another”. The Christian religion preaches the obedience of the new moral rule as natural respect-(for example Jesus Christ about the mercy Samaritan- in the Gospel after Luca, The Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans).

On the other hand, E. Durkheim goes further by saying that in revenge, that causes sorrow to the agent of the crime”, this pain is not a useless cruelty. It is the sign that show that collective feelings stay collective...and that “through the passionate punishment (revenge) the wrong society suffered through the crime is repaired. This is the reason why it is right to say that every criminal should suffer at the full extent of his murder”ⁱⁱⁱ, words that seem to suggest that vengeance (its laws) brought about (it is true, at a sensitive level) definitions of justice, that will eventually develop, in superior stages, and will abandon (purify) the cruel passions, turning at a rational level into superior signified values supported by rules of moral essence.

The ethnologists mention the stable or inborn elements of moral consciousness and the variable ones; the first “consists of the original disposition God has put into the human soul when He created it and that gave him the natural ability to distinguish right from wrong”, and the others consist of the experience man acquires from different/various factors- background, time.^{iv} However, Jesus recommended his apostles to be educators/teachers of the new

teachings, fishermen of souls, otherwise said devoted and well aware creators of it(education).

The ethological literature (at K. Lorenz for example) we find even the concept of “animal moral”, with a pre-moral sense, meaning that precisely that it designates group behaviors that are likely to be transmitted hereditary, especially at some superior animals. This way, the researcher that laid the foundation of human etology, Eibl-Eibesfeldt, sees mercy as an inborn feeling; however nowadays etiologists go further by considering obedience, loyalty, respect and altruism as inborn feelings too.

Emphasizing the importance of the inborn feelings, Lorenz, as well as other philosophers like Rousseau state that, if man had been guided by rational morals he would have been failed long ago. He would have failed or he would have delayed his formation as a moral human being.

The infra-moral life is defined as being “all this latent spiritual life present even before we become moral human beings. It is neither amoral, nor immoral; it is not moral yet, but it is ready to support the success of a new moral life”.^v The primary signs of the moral life are to be found at the infra-moral level and the moral life is searching for its routes in this “Of the human soul”, which is characterized by purity and natural touch; it can be sad that they represent the foundation of human normality and the orientation towards sincerity as natural characteristic or call.

As mentioned before, the infra-moral is born and shaped along an evolutionary process that promises to achieve features like the possibility of human formation as a moral being by means of moral education and moral charge, the latter belonging to childhood, and the family providing the means and background of human formation.

Authors like René Le Senne^{vi}and Eugéne Dupréel^{vii} admit and insist to explain a primary level of morality. But, whereas Le Senne structures the inferior level of morality through instincts, “primary irreflective” feelings (detailed through courage, innocence, chastity, and mercy), the first level at E. Dupreel is established through the unconditioned attachment to the group. In opposition to this group, Gobry suggests that the important elements of this level can be used in the educational process and reaches the conclusion that the infra-moral elements help make the transition to the future constructed level of morality.

Therefore, even if some authors consider that the primary elements do not belong to a level of evolution towards ethics and morality, we consider that those who are supposed to involve in the process of moral formation must take into account the fact that the instincts, the tendencies, the basic feelings have to be suffer influences and transformations in order to gradually acquire superior significance through moral education.

Considering that both the instincts as well as the feelings(in their diversity) that are referred to in the research of Le Senne as well as of other authors, represent a truth about a *de factum* reality of child behavioral life, they can be included in the process of the educational-moral transformations, creating the sense of order.

Taking into consideration the principles imposed by this level, it seems that C.G.Jung's statement that "God us made us all equal from the moral point of view"- can be contested if we were to analyze the differences that impose themselves even from the beginning in regards to the dominants that influence one way or another the formation of the moral personality. The accent must be laid on the sharp observation that "in his moral behavior man does not bring only proofs of humanity/charity, he also brings his basic instincts, his selfishness, his reactions, his different temperamental dominants, oriented towards good or bad"^{viii}, education being the factor that accomplishes the order, the maintenance and the coordination of these elements in a differentiated manner.

Supporting the same idea, the Romanian teacher Ion Găvănescul states that "we have to admit that the human nature does not display the same features combined in the same proportions and manner in all humans. The variety ranges from the moral hero to the moral monster. And the great variety of stages from this hierarchy of moral values can be explained through the two causes: education and different organization.

Găvănescul mentions a series of instincts like that of imitation, of combative spirit or that of domination, that of sympathy, of "reward, of compensation, that consists of retribution"^{ix}, the instinct of curiosity, of playing, of honor or that of emulation, stating that "there is no instinct above the mentioned (...) that is not used in education as means of influence, one way or another."^x

We believe that, alongside with those, the orientations towards sympathy, compassion, love, altruism are elements that represent landmarks of the formation and auto-formation of the moral image

of personality, the accent being laid on support, open-mindedness and development; at the opposite side, but as important as the first, there are the preoccupation for the softening, the annihilation and domination of the primary impulses, of selfish and aggressive gestures that would lead to behaviors that are not in accordance with ethics.

Highly praised in Kantian philosophy, these structures of the primary level send their ideas in the empiric plan, sensitive or preponderant sensitive, (of an evolution of the human behavior). Imm Kant did not include these sensitive elements in a morality level, on the contrary, he excludes them. On the other hand, Ivan Gobry, admits or reaches the idea that the infra-moral elements enable the passage to a future level of morality. These ideas that are born out of his theory can be used like an important argument that the primary level has to be considered and supported in its future evolutions at the moral education level as well.

But, although some authors consider that the primary elements do not belong to a level of evolution to ethics and morality, the moral teacher must take into consideration that the instincts, the tendencies, the primary feelings must suffer transformations and influences in order to gradually acquire the superior significance through moral education.

The primary level represents a scientific tool for us, which justifies on clearer basis the need for moral education centered on these basic elements. The necessity of a primary level of moral life imposed itself in the sense that the educator/teacher, especially that within a family, has to be prepared to favor the development/growth of this primary level with the sole purpose of cultivating and helping it grow into a form of higher affectivity called moral affectivity. We believe that we are dealing with the essential background of human formation of the child (that has to be integrated in the family and in the boardrooms as well) in which it should dominate the moral affectivity the moral formation of the child depends on.

This educational background must be representative for the beginning of this newly formed life, which developed out of primary resources- as love, human touch, understanding, and control of the spontaneous reactions of the child. We also believe that, at the level of the primary manifestations/reactions the familial former has to initiate and guide the evolution of the child through a regime/range

of stimulations and interdiction, through the gradual formation of the sense of measure and order.

Here, the attention is focused on the child that has to learn the positive behavior of the moral educator/teacher, has to learn how to feel, and understand.

Because the moves of the child are a natural feature, sometimes wild/savage, they are difficult to control, or be kept in hand by the adult, but the educator, especially the familial one, has to use both oral and non-verbal communication suitable to the primary level of morality and we are mentioning here gesture communication, mimics and pantomimes as a complementation to verbal communication, vital to the human formation of the child.

Verbal communication must be insistently used also as an intelligible method, because it gives birth to speech and reasoning, that are dimensions and essential features of man, as well as because the moral features are formed in the moral communication field. The child learns not only to enlarge his horizon of knowledge, but also that of the example that is the closest to the moral standards.

Of course, this is the point where an important problem occurs: taking into consideration the contributions that define the primary level of the future moral affective behavior, in general, the pedagogical literature was and still is working in this direction.

One problem that can emerge and needs all the attention is to what extent the future moral educator will be able to work effectively and decisively with the help of moral education, controlling/getting hold of a initiative towards morality of these primary behaviors (impulses, instincts, purposes, feelings); to what extent the spontaneous reactions that come from within ourselves can be controlled or guided for the purpose of valuing morality by the educator.

From this point of view we believe that there are more chances to be valued. They could be the following:

a. if we take into consideration that this primary level is not included but after a certain age of the human being in the official educational institutions, from our perspective, the educational factor that imposes as essential is the family. The role of the family in the moral formation of children before they attend institutionalized education is more important than it is considered nowadays. However, we ask ourselves if we can consider it able to

provide as much moral education as it can give. We think that there is much to be done in this respect, beginning with a program of national competence, continuing with the creation of some resources for the family to use as educational factor and the actual training of the family: specialized literature, accessible and suggestive, mass-media guidance and training for parents and other educators.

b. if we provide a formative background suitable to the features displayed by children in the first part of their life, background that is supposed to provide a combination of movements, imitative activities, friendly gestures.

c. This background must work like a system oriented towards the formation of the child, of his individuality and personality. It has to be maintained through relationships of love, affection, attachment between the members of the family. The family must be stimulated to follow some *skills and habitudes*, even traditions regulated by permissions and interdictions, through the requirements of the active behavior, through the use of imitations and initiatives.

d. An important role in the moral communication of children is played by specific communication. Facial communication (studied by E. Levinas), communication through gestures, mimics, and pantomimes, which transmit formative-affective messages that teach the children to learn human behavior; these are the things parents should be taught. In this process of training the parents for the family life, the most important role is played by language education, which is essential to the moral and intellectual formation, but at the same time by the most appropriate raw models.

The conclusion is that the transfer from the primary level of the moral behavior formation must favor the formative and moral chances in practical pedagogy.

To acknowledge these priorities would be a first decisive step of the moral educator in his journey to moral accomplishment; nevertheless, the wide range of elements, aspects, actions that he is dealing with and that he is supposed to select and synchronize, requires a special and specific training.

We consequently believe that the preservation of the human inner harmony is vital, this process requiring, on one hand, a great deal of knowledge from the part of the subjects involved in the formative process, which involves a great deal of concern/preoccupation for

the initiation in the self-discovery act, and on the other hand the use of infra-moral elements, of the moral “sense”, for the sole purpose of the discovery and enhancement of the human features inside man’s self.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Ivan Gobry– *Les niveaux de la vie morale, Valeurs morale, etc*
ⁱⁱ Ivan Gobry– *Les niveaux de la vie morale*1967,,PUF, Paris, p.34 ;
ⁱⁱⁱ E. Durkheim, 2001, *Diviziunea muncii sociale*, Editura Albatros, București, p.216;
^{iv} I. Zăgrea, 2002, *Morala creștină*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, p. 64;
^v *ibidem*;
^{vi} R. Le Senne, 1967, *Traité de morale générale*, P.U.F., Paris,;
^{vii} E. Dupréel, 1967, *Traité de Morale*, Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles;
^{viii} M. Călin, 2003, *Teoria și metateoria acțiunii educative*, Editura Aramis, Bucuești, p. 63;
^{ix} I. Găvănescul, 1995, *Texte pedagogice alese*, Editura Spiru Haret, Iași, p.111;
^x *idem*, pp.89-90;