

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE MORAL LAW: PARENT – CHILD RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

It is said that morals and its rules in society (ethics) were preceded by self-consciousness. Laws were consequently introduced having the same role, namely that of regulating human behaviour. We tried to focus our attention on morals and ethics in order to see what is their relationship with the law.

We were also concerned with the relationship between morals and religion, and morals and education. The latter aspect offered us a support to analyse the relationships children have both with their parents and teachers, and also focus our attention on punishment as seen nowadays. Our target has been that of seeing to what an extent these aspects actually reflect the concrete social reality in our country today.

Key Words: *morals, ethics, self-consciousness, parent-child relationship.*

JEL Classification: [J13, K36]

1. Some Preliminary Ideas

The interest towards human behaviour appeared quite early. It is possible that in written form we should find it later. The very moment the existence of social life became visible, the need to settle certain rules of behaviour which were meant to establish *discipline* among people must have appeared as well. This is how *laws* also came into existence.

For a long time, *self-consciousness*, the awareness of one's existence and consequently acquiring suitable moral behaviour was considered to belong to human beings only. Recent research has proved that animals also possess self-consciousness. They might also have moral norms of which we, human beings, have no idea or in our arrogance don't care about. At last, taking into consideration that *language* actually belongs only to human beings, moral rules were thought of as belonging to men only.¹ However, the moral rules were confirmed very early in history especially in sacred works. *The Holy Bible* is a good example, but there also are texts belonging to other religions.² For

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¹ See: Moral Norms www.scribub.com/profesor-scoala/.../NORMELE-MORALE-ETI CA 19 32 0 91615.php.

² Buddhism is both an Oriental philosophy and religion. It appeared in India, 6th century BC, being then expanded over a great part of Central and South-East Asia. Its basis are the teachings of Gautama Siddhartha (Buddha Shakyamuni), an Indian thinker (563 BC and 483 BC). (world religions.weebly.com/budismul.html). The Vinaya Piṭaka, for instance, is a Buddhist scripture including some moral laws.

Christianity, Moses and the *Ten Commandments* are of utmost importance. By means of the commandments, God the Almighty assigned a clean-cut behaviour to Christians.

Doubtlessly, morals, and human behaviour as such have undergone various changes in time. They obviously had impact upon both society as a whole, and each individual on the other hand. Nowadays, an outstanding aspect is the relations between children and parents, as they represent a very important starting point in forming good future human characters. Unfortunately, many times this remains but an ideal, the reality proving something entirely different. We tried to explain and understand to what an extent this relationship functions in society correctly.

1.1 Moral,³ Morality,⁴ Spiritual⁵ and Spirituality⁶

There obviously is a connection between the four terms. The connection might explain the relationship between *morality* and *religion*, but also a certain distance from *legality*. On the other hand, as far as the connection with religion is concerned, we say that there is a connection between *morality* and *spirituality*.

But what can we know of the *spiritual life* of our distant ancestors in Palaeolithic times? Archaeologists have found many objects that look as if they had spiritual meaning to those who created them. Fifteen thousand years ago, people in southern Europe took the trouble to crawl far back into the dark reaches of a cave to carve clay statuettes of bison that hardly anyone was ever likely to see. We do not know why they did this but certainly not merely to amuse themselves or to make “art for art's sake.” What about cave paintings that show hunters stalking (a urmări vânatului) animals? Were these works possibly designed to cast a spell over animal prey? One cave painting includes the picture of a man who looks to modern eyes like a priest or wizard. We do not really know if he was or not. The problem is that we know so little about the wider social or cultural contexts in which works like these were produced and used.

In order to help, anthropologists have studied the *spiritual beliefs* of small, relatively *isolated communities* that exist today. Scholars of Palaeolithic history base many of their ideas about early human thought and behaviour on such studies. In many of these communities, there may be no clear borderline between the human and spiritual worlds. One feature that seems to appear in all small-scale

³ **Moral** is defined as being concerned with or derived from the code of behaviour that is considered right or acceptable in a society (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/moral>).

⁴ **Morality** is concerned with principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/morality>).

⁵ **Spiritual** is relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

⁶ **Spirituality** is relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

communities is *animism*. This is the belief that the world is full of spirits and that to survive one must coexist and communicate with them. One must pray to them, bargain with them, and even try to ally with them in disputes with human or non-human enemies.⁷ But where does this belief come from? Who or what were, in fact, these spirits?

1.2 Morals and Religion

Chronologically the first and most obvious connection is that between morals and religion. We have already mentioned that the first moral rules are to be found in sacred texts. We generally admit that morals/ethics are meant to fulfil the human wish to do good.

But moral codes have been based on religious absolutes.⁸

But it also was the church, who somehow interpreted and limited the field. The Orthodox Church, for instance, admits two kinds of laws: 1) Divine laws and 2) Human laws. The divine laws comprise: 1) The Eternal Law; 2) The Natural Moral Law and 3) The Positive Moral Law given to man through the divine discovery of The Old and New Testament.⁹

What are the Human Laws? God also made His will known indirectly through Human Laws. These are divided into ecclesiastical¹⁰ and civil laws. Civil laws belong to the juridical.

Unfortunately, the priests tasted the savour of power little by little and assumed the role of leaders.

Even in Sumer, where gods are supposed to have landed first, every urban temple had its religious leaders, or priests, who had the job of pleasing the gods in endless rituals, festivals, and sacrifices. People dedicated all their labour to the service of the city's gods. Therefore, the priests claimed the right to command the population and economy, ruling the city as the top social class. Religious teachings supported the right of the city-state's rulers to accumulate wealth and wield power. Priests instructed ordinary people that, if they wished to receive the blessing of the gods, they should obey their rulers. The priests might try to dull people's willingness to protest against abuse and exploitation by threatening them

⁷ Key Theme 7: Spiritual Life and Moral Codes, in worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu.

⁸ The Free Dictionary by Farlex, wiki. Absolutes are universally valid principles.

⁹ **What is the Natural Moral Law?** According to Christian belief, the natural moral law engrafted by God in man's heart the very moment he was created. It can be discovered by natural human mind. **What is the benefit of this law?** By means of it, the human being is able to distinguish good from bad, virtue from sin, what should be done from what shouldn't naturally. We *instinctively know* whether what we are doing is good or not. It seems animals know it as well. In: www.crestinortodox.ro > Carti ortodoxe > Invatatura de credinta ortodoxa.

¹⁰ **What are the ecclesiastical laws?** They are the laws given by the church by the power received from its founder to guide the believers in His name or make them obey. In (Mathew 10, 40; Luke 10, 16; John 13, 20).

with the wrath of the gods or by promising them a better life in the afterworld if they remained obedient.¹¹

1.3. Morals and Ethics

The meaning of morals being settled, ethics came into being. And we wonder what is ethics in fact? The shortest and clear definition is that ethics is a philosophical theory of moral life. And again, what is morals? Although the question has been asked since antiquity, there still is no consensus among philosophical schools. Yet, it is a fact that most people associate moral ideas and morality *with certain norms of an individual's behaviour in society* (or the instinctive action we mentioned above of distinguishing between good and evil).¹²

At first sight, there is no contradiction. At a more careful reflection, meant to identify what the *specific of moral norms* actually is as compared with other types of normative regulations we see that, judging from common sense viewpoint, we get lost among many confusions and contradictions.¹³

1.4 Morals and Education

What we are talking about are actually not moral laws but moral norms.¹⁴ These actions being repeated for a longer period of time become *skills*. But these skills might be both good and evil. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that when making skills we should also have clear cut *models* and the skills – be they good or evil – should be consciously assumed. From this viewpoint morals/ethics comes close to *education*.

1.5 Morals and Laws

But things do not come to an end here. Even the church speaks, as mentioned before, about divine laws, but also accepts *the human laws*.¹⁵

From the church's viewpoint, *morality* was defined as being *the will to do good* as a system of ideas about right and wrong conduct, compared to *legality*

¹¹ **An eye for an eye? The morality of punishment**, by Christopher Townsend, in: www.jubilee-centre.org/an-eye-for-an-eye-the-morality-of-punishment.

¹² This is moral consciousness. **What is moral consciousness?** It is God's voice in the believer's soul, voice that guides him to fulfill the moral law. This voice is known by everybody, as it was born at the same time with man. It has a divine origin. Saint John Chrysostom says, "When God made man, he implanted in each the true judgement of good and evil, in other words the rule of consciousness (in www.crestinortodox.ro > Carti ortodoxe > Invatatura de credinta ortodoxa).

¹³ www.scritub.com/profesor-scoala/.../NORMELE-MORALE-ETICA1932091615.php.

¹⁴ The norm is a model of action that should be applied under certain circumstances. Each norm gives an abstract behavioral pattern, ideal for a specific action and leaves apart all accidental and nonsignificant aspects of the social context. *Idem*.

¹⁵ www.crestinortodox.ro > Carti ortodoxe > Invatatura de credinta ortodoxa. See p.4.

that was a casual act forced by law. The church itself used the distinction between *morality* and *legality* proving its position against the law.¹⁶

And it must have been the awareness of the self that eventually brought about the awareness of the necessity of morals. And that goes back in time somewhere close to the appearance of laws. Thus, the relationship between morals and laws is settled, although not all the laws are moral. Nevertheless, in spite of all said above, there seems to be some relationship between *law and morality*, or at least it seems there *ought to be* because we talk about *unfair* or *unjust laws*, laws that are *immoral*, laws that ought not to be obeyed or enforced; and we typically do not mean just that they are unconstitutional, but that they are counterproductive to their intended purpose or that they are bad or harmful or morally unfair or unjust laws.¹⁷

Ethical principles held primarily by the followers of Christianity have influenced the development of the *secular law*. As a result, *Christian moral law* and *secular law* overlap in many situations. For example, *murder*, *theft*, *prostitution*, and other *behaviours* labelled *immoral* are also *illegal*. Moral turpitude is a legal term used to describe a crime that demonstrates depravity in one's public and private life, contrary to what is accepted and customary. Passing laws is relatively easy¹⁸

2. Parent - Child Relationship

Has been minutely discus-sed, various answers have been given, and legal approaches/ decisions have been taken. Still, there are some aspects which might be of interest, such as:

1. What is the correct relationship between children and parents by boold?
2. To what an extent do parents really have **rights** upon their children?
Which are these?
3. What about the saying "I gave birth to you, I may kill you" ?
4. If a parent says something/warns them, should children obey?
5. To what an extent is a child free to choose whether he/she listens to what the parent said?
6. If a child does not obey. What should a parent do? Beat him? Persuade him?
7. What about saying "**No**, you're not allowed to do that!"

¹⁶ Also, the above brings to light that morality is not only relevant to the content of specific laws but it is also relevant to the proper way to make law and to consider differences of conscience by reasonable people. There needs to be some sort of understanding about what forms of disobedience may be acceptable when there is serious disagreement among the consciences of reasonable people (Townsend, Christopher, *op.cit.*).

¹⁷ Townsend, Christopher, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ *Idem.*

8. What about the parents who never say “No!” ?
9. If our ancestors behaved in a particular way and it proved to be helpful, why should we change it just because “times have changed”?
10. Why are parents sure that their children will live with them forever? Can parents be educated? How?

2.1. The Punishment.

The evolution of morality refers to the emergence of human moral behaviour. Specifically *punishing* individuals *aware of their breach of rules* would select *against the ability to be aware of it*. It seems worth mentioning that morality, ethics (the science of morality) included rather early what was called the *morality of punishment*.

This very fact enables us to focus our attention on punishment as well.¹⁹ But is punishment moral? Since antiquity, there have been many attempts of also introducing within legality the *reward* (for those who do good) besides the *punishment* (for those who do evil).²⁰

However, only punishment was legally accepted. Why? It might have been in order to strengthen obedience and defend power. It might also explain why any kind of leadership would rather have its own legislative staff. But the question remains why attention has particularly been focused on punishment from the very beginning.

1. Should children be punished? How?
2. Is punishment bad for a child’s education? Why?
3. If I am the parnt, and I want to do good to my child, why not punish him/her?

Conclusions

After having tried to show the most important features regarding the triangle morals – ethics – religion, and admitting the major part played by them upon society, and especially education, we finally reached some conclusions. As it usually happens, theory occupies most of the space. It is done thoroughly and carefully. When one tries to switch to practice, he/she suddenly realizes that all has a two-edged conclusion: a theoretical minute one, and a practical vague one. We must admit that the subject as such is a hard and painful one. We also strongly believe in the necessity of discussing this aspect again and again, mostly the part regarding parents-children relationships. And, finally, as a lot of space in our paper consists of mere questions, we also end by asking/ wondering: has anything in the relationship parents-children been ever changed?

¹⁹ Townsend, Christopher, *op.cit.*

²⁰ See Pythagoras, Plato, etc.

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