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Between philosophical heights and practical necessities
Some remarks on the idea of applied ethics[*]

Abstract

For many people the expression "applied ethics" sounds like a pleonasm. They tend to claim that ethics by its very nature is about practical matters. It deals with human actions and their motivations and there is no need to create an additional discipline with special practical bias. However, at least since the 1970s, there has been a growing movement of applied ethics which resulted not only in the increase of enrolment to the academic courses but also in the demand for consulting services in this field. And yet the question still remains to what extent applied ethics inherits philosophical tradition and style of thinking. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the applied ethics is a continuation of philosophical inquiry in the way adjusted well to the demands of the pluralistic and democratic societies.

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1. Introductory remarks

When I first heard about "practical ethics" (another term for "applied ethics"), the phrase sounded more like a pleonasm. After all, the field of ethics has always been about practical matters since its norms deal with the ways people behave and they regulate the choices of people, while the application of a specific norm is based on the "work" of practical reason. Many years have passed since then and today, I am ready to support the claim that the idea of applied ethics is a valid *ethical* reflection. The word "ethics" should be emphasized here as it is specifically about ethical reflection, and not about any reflection that uses the word in its name but has hardly anything to do with ethics. For example, an "ethics committee" can be in reality about control, dispute resolution or regulatory functions within an organization.

In fact, the word "ethics" is frequently understood as a set of rules governing quite simple and not necessarily ethical activities of a public official or a civil servant. It is a common knowledge that an official should not accept gifts from an inquirer, especially gifts whose value would indicate specific intentions of the one who offers them. However, if officials succumb to these temptations, a workplace and a point of contact with a customer could be designed in a way that prevents the secret exchange of anything and ensures the supervision of third parties, including other customers who are waiting to be served.

In the face of such a use of the word "ethics," it is hardly surprising that philosophers underline the fact that ethics is already practical in nature, i.e. it refers to human actions, and if we put a lot of emphasis upon its applicability, it may raise suspicions that it is not about applying or following, but about adapting or "bending" ethical principles to current needs and for other unspecified purposes.

And so, one may wonder: Who is right—a philosopher or a practical ethicist? The following deliberations will be devoted to answering this very question.

2. Ethics and morality

To give an account of the doubts about the possibility of "applying ethics," one must shift away from the common identification of ethics with morality or even deny it (in everyday life, "ethical" and "moral" are given the same meaning, just like "unethical" and "immoral," and "morality" and "ethics"). Both disciplines seek to answer the most important questions that can appear in our life: How to live and what should be done. Yet, the field of ethics lacks narrow perspectives of morality (Annas, 1992, p. 329). It is not somebody's way of thinking or a worldview, but an impersonal project of human obligations, in the scope of which a definite distinction between good and evil is made. Morality, on the other hand, is about the principles that an individual adopts from a group and later considers them his or her own. Ethics is an ideal standard, whereas morality corre-

sponds to specific principles of particular people and groups. Ethics is universally applicable, whether a given community complies with it or not. No opinion poll can validate or refute it. Morality can go wrong, ethics—never (Hausman & McPherson, 1996, p. 4; cf. Hołówka, 1996, pp. xiii–xiv).

If someone acts in a certain way and it is a routine action, this person can be subject to moral judgments of other people (or his or her own) only from the perspective of time. Nevertheless, if before undertaking an action this person asks himself or herself what I should do, or whether I should do what others tell me to do, this question is believed to be of a special kind as it reveals to us the nature of ethics. The question is not what others would do being in my shoes. Public opinion polls are useless since the real question is whether *I* should do it. My reasoning must become a kind of independent argumentation, grounded in the belief that some answers are more righteous and more adequate than others and there is always a possibility of arriving at better answers. It would be irrational to give up on something that is more righteous and choose less-righteous actions. Therefore, I assume the rational nature of these questions and of all moral argumentation in general (Hausman & McPherson, 1996, p. 5).

This conversation with yourself constitutes a form of dialogue in which different points of view are considered and other people are, as it were, represented, and we ourselves try to grasp other people's perspectives as well as to see the potential effects of our actions on others.[1] But if it boils down to the question "what are people going to say?" the ethical character of this internal argument is lost and it turns into developing a strategy of adapting to the expectations of others. It could be compared to marketers' purpose in doing polls. Ethics, however, does not consist in providing other people with what they want.

One can obviously claim that such an argumentation is a purely philosophical invention since people act in a routine manner and there is no room for seeking the right path. Yet, the fact that people most often act basing on the collectively shared social norm does not dismiss the possibility of real ethical argumentation. In truly complex matters, the routine fails or even does not exist. Hausman and McPherson put forward an example of a female student who is considering the termination of her pregnancy. It is not a question of legality: the fact that abortion is legal does not mean that it should be done by her without further deliberations. It is not a matter of support for abortion expressed in percentage, which can be read in various surveys. It is she who must overcome her own doubts. And her doubts are a testimony to various arguments that she is considering—and thus, she gets involved in an ethical argumentation with herself (Hausman & McPherson, 1996, p. 4).

The social nature of these considerations stems also from the fact that the arguments that we invoke during a conversation with ourselves were most often already presented by other people in the past and, moreover, they fall into place. If the girl studied philosophy, she would probably be able to attribute them to partic-

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[1] In reference to G.H. Mead and M. Bachtin, the dialogical character of human life was discussed by Charles Taylor (2003, originally published in 1991 under the title "The Malaise of Modernity"). Cf. Werhane, 1999, p. 38.

ular ethical theories (but this skill is not, in any way, the prerequisite for engaging in an internal dialogue). In an attempt to support our judgments, we always refer (usually implicitly) to a more universal theory. If our judgment were to do with people's actions, these theories would be of ethical and normative character. Citing these is neither accidental nor random. It is not an ordinary "reference" or so-called theorizing either (her dilemmas are not theoretical considerations over the planned content of her master's thesis), but it is rather about advocating them. According to Stephen Darwall, it is committing ourselves to the existence of certain theories that were not fully recalled but which provide justification whenever we form an ethical judgment.

> This is because of an important feature of ethical concepts and properties that we might call their reason- or warrant-dependence. When, for example, I judge that something is good, I say, not just that I value it, but that there is reason to value it—that valuing it is warranted, an attitude one ought to have. As a logical matter, however, this can be true only if something has *other* properties: the reasons for valuing it. And such reasons cannot simply consist in the property that it is good, since that is itself the property of there being such reasons. Unlike, say, the property of yellowness, which might attach to something all by itself, as it were, ethical properties require, by their very nature, completion by further properties that are their reasons or grounds. (Darwall, 2003, pp. 18–19)

Hence, each ethical valuation means committing oneself to the normative structure of thought, which allows to associate certain life events with specific values in a permanent way, provided specific conditions are met. Ethical consideration cannot do without normative structures. The quality of our reasoning reflects the quality of the theory that we—willingly or not—refer to (Darwall, 2003, p. 18).

Morality is concrete in the sense that it is attributed to specific groups of people—these people and not the others act in this particular way. Ethics is abstract because it is detached from the actions of people around us. In this way, ethics can contradict morality.

3. Can ethics be applied?

As stated above, ethical argumentation coincides with the life dilemmas, meaning it takes place in practical and specific circumstances, and thus we can speak of "applying" certain concepts. However, the idea of applied ethics is not only about the literal meaning of the term "apply." It is about something more. For this reason, philosophers are concerned that—as already mentioned—behind the application lies the "adjustment" of arguments to the requirements of the moment, which is something that runs against the nature of the argumentation that would be rational and detached from all the pressures of life.

I believe such concerns are unfounded. It can even be argued that the move-ment of applied ethics emerged due to the weakness of ethics itself, among other things, since there is no single normative structure that would allow people to methodically arrive at the best decisions. Different normative ethics created throughout the history offer different recommendations. Traditionally, utilitarian-ism and Kantism are mentioned as two sources of opposing recommendations. But real life needs possibly unambiguous decisions. It is mostly not about extremely dramatic choices. The discussions about unemployed foreigners in the United Kingdom (staying there and seeking work legally, as it is the case of Poles) may serve as an example. The authorities of London made a pledge that if foreigners decide to return home, they will have expenses covered. The officials must have been caught in a dilemma, wondering about the ethical side of this procedure: wouldn't it be a restriction of their freedom to make these people leave (the legal right to work also implies "the right to fail" or having no job); is it proper to do it with the money of a British taxpayer? The latter argument can be refuted with another: if they stayed in London, wouldn't they succumb to the temptations of the underworld and wouldn't a British taxpayer incur more expenses due to possible crimes and legal processes than 50 pounds for their bus home?

The rivalry between normative ethics means that some kind of relativism appears in the discussions. Since representatives of different schools formulate different recommendations from their ethical systems, we deal with a multitude of perspectives, which contradicts the rational ideals of ethics. (Unless the ideal of rationality is placed at the level of discussion, and not of final principles). Ethics, in this way, becomes "somebody's" and starts to resemble morality. And yet, the idea and the ideal of impartial moral arbitration are still present in the philosophy and thoughts of many people. Numerous philosophical works have been de-voted to this ideal, for example, the *qualified attitude method* of Richard Brandt (1959, pp. 244–252) or the idea of the *original position* of John Rawls (1971, pp. 17–21).

This begs further questions: is it necessary to build yet another system of normative ethics? Is it to be built by one person or many people? Is it supposed to be a finished work, or should it take the form of principles that are set in an open discussion? The formulation of ethical norms is always based on certain premises and they can be of diverse nature. Thus, the validity of what is formed should be controlled at all stages. And again, should it be done by one person in a single treaty, or by participants in a discussion? In fact, philosophers have already at-tempted to build systems of normative ethics aspiring to be a comprehensive, coherent and universal set of beliefs, but eventually, they solely enriched a sort of repertoire of arguments and justifications that is still being used by ethicists and everyone interested in the ethical argumentation.[2] Significant treaties are rare (Brandt's in 1959, Rawls' in 1971, Habermas' in 1984–1989), but debates on

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[2] About completeness, consistency and generality of normative ethical proposals, cf. Brandt (1959, pp. 7, 16–26). It was Alasdair MacIntyre (1998, p. 199) who wrote about "the impossibility of funda-mental innovation" in ethics after Hegel.

ethics are more and more frequent and, so to speak, increasingly public and demo-cratic. Even though they will not result in the creation of one system of normative ethics, it cannot be avoided that people constantly recall ethical arguments.

The debate over emerging practical issues has resulted in the creation of several applied ethical principles. Hence, we are not left with the choice only between nihilism or naive relativism (everyone has their own morality) and usurpation (my system and my reasoning have universal value). It is manifested in the creation of the so-called applied ethics (practical ethics)—the reflection that was brought to life as a result of practical problems. Tom L. Beauchamp enumerates types of such problems: abortion, euthanasia, the protection of human and animal subjects in scientific research, racism, sexism, affirmative action, the acceptable risk in the workplace, the legal enforcement of ethical norms, civil disobedience, unjust wars and the private data protection (2003, p. 1). The list of these topics is much longer and still open. And although since ancient times philosophers pondered on similar issues (of course, within their cognitive horizon—they had no idea about cloning, but they already knew a lot about wars), the term "applied ethics" came into use in the 1970s.

Still, it is not known whether applied ethics was created as a result of considering philosophical issues that were being proposed by philosophers over the centuries, as it is sometimes said. Most probably, it owes its existence to the issues addressed by representatives of various professions, activists of various organizations, journalists and ordinary citizens, who were united in the protest against the shocking phenomena of the modern world regarding, for instance, women's rights, consumers' safety, environmental protection, treatment of prisoners, use of animals in medical research, etc. Thus, the unrest that sparked the movement of applied ethics was preoccupying both, philosophers and non-philosophers in an equal degree. "At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s the student movement and the New Left challenged the established society. There were heated discussions over topics such as the Vietnam War, social injustice, poverty in the third world, inequality between men and women and the maltreatment of animals. Many philosophers were engaged in the discussions. From this perspective the rise of applied ethics can be seen as a philosophical response to a new social situation" (Collste, 2007, pp. 24–25; cf. Singer, 2006, pp. 3–4).

Philosophers are inclined to believe that applied ethics is about applying general theories to solve practical problems. But how to apply the Kantian principle of treating others not just as a means to an end but also as an end in itself in a situation which takes place in an organization that must adhere to strict security measures and absolute hierarchical subordination? We would need concrete instances of situations in which the problem arises as well as the knowledge about the organization itself, its history, current mission and the patterns of excellence in this organizational context (Beauchamp, 2003, p. 2).

Therefore, it would be more convenient to assume that applied ethics consists in making *any* use of philosophical concepts to deal with the problems that occur within the scope of various professions and relate to their characteristics, and especially those caused by the development of technology and the possibilities it

offers today (Beauchamp, 2003, p. 3). At this point, one may voice serious doubts. Because it is not about "any" use, but about practical solutions to certain issues. The emphasis should not be put on referring to philosophical concepts, but on producing practical outcomes.

Let us adopt the possibly most general description of applied ethics as a reflection that is about the implementation of philosophical accomplishments to resolve practical matters, keeping in mind how things work in practice, without the sense of superiority of a philosopher who "knows better," yet with the awareness that this type of ethics always goes beyond its own limitations and resorts to higher reasons. Certainly, such a description is far from perfect. The most important thing, however, is that nowadays no one questions that applied ethics exists or whether it is necessary. One researcher asserts that the contemporary ethical reflection is dominated by, on the one hand, applied ethics and, on the other hand, by "theoretical considerations explaining or justifying (as well as criticizing) one of the highest principles of the practical sphere" (Kaniowski, 1999, pp. 6–7). He lists, among others, Apel's and Habermas' discourse principle, Rawls' principle of justice and the utilitarian principle of utility. As mentioned before, their existence makes it possible for applied ethics to go beyond its own limits in search of the validation of its judgments.

4. Philosophical characteristics of applied ethics

Applied ethics has some important features that I would like to present. These correspond to (often implicitly) certain philosophical traditions (the first one can be associated with the thesis about "the end of philosophy"), and I shall point to them as well. Moreover, I would like to note that it also concerns business ethics, one of the branches of applied ethics that I am personally most interested in. Business ethics is one of the most dynamically developing disciplines for two reasons: the central role of the economy in developed countries and the attention given to its impact on a consumer, along with the influence it has on the media, mass culture and the people's lifestyle.

4.1. The role of practical necessities

Applied ethics is not the reflection monopolized by philosophers, but it is available to anyone interested in the subject matter. First of all, it concerns the practitioners (doctors, researchers, entrepreneurs) as they are struggling with problems that are not easily resolved. Then, there are stakeholders of the activity who are controlling the course of action because they are, directly or indirectly, affected by its outcomes (e.g. journalists or human rights activists who consider themselves directly threatened).

Peter Singer in *Practical Ethics* (1999, p. 2) maintains: "ethics is not an ideal system that is noble in theory but no good in practice. The reverse of this is closer to the truth: an ethical judgment that is no good in practice must suffer from a theoretical defect as well, for the whole point of ethical judgments is to guide practice."[3]

Even if philosophical arguments are used, the very concept of a philosopher being the specialist in ethics does not imply his or her privilege in any form. A philosopher is simply a person who is able to navigate through certain traditions of thought more effectively, and for this reason, his or her help is very useful and sometimes even indispensable. Still, all of this happens on equal terms like in, for instance, discussions on media ethics, in which practical experience and fine reputation matter more than the knowledge of ethical concepts.

4.2. Openness to new facts

Applied ethics is open to learning new facts. If the basis of the entire applied ethics movement was formed by, for example, new possibilities of technology and medicine that allow for various genetic manipulations, the contemporary reflection on the righteousness (in the ethical sense) of certain activities cannot be oblivious to the results of new research and new practical possibilities in this field. In my opinion, the moral evaluation of interference in man's innate genetic code cannot disregard the emerging facts and dependencies, because the effects they produce might eliminate the negative consequences of previous interference in nature, expand our knowledge on the subject, or shed light on events from the past.

Historically, the new possibilities emerging in the medical sciences not only created an opportunity for ethical reflection, but were also a chance for its revival. Göran Collste recalls the well-known statement of Stephen Toulmin who was to say that "medicine saved the life of ethics." It is worth quoting Collste (2007, pp. 23–24) in this context. "In the 1960s ethics was in decline. Most moral philosophers worked with conceptual and epistemological questions. Not many were engaged in normative ethics and even fewer bothered to analyse moral problem in the real world. As a consequence academic ethics was by many considered as one of those peculiar philosophical subjects. In the beginning of the 1970s the situation changed."[4]

The openness to new facts and the necessity to take all circumstances into account is what makes applied ethics, in a way, situational and contextual. It does not necessarily indicate any relationship with situation ethics in the understanding of the Christian thought after the Second World War. Nevertheless, pursuant to the principle *circumstances alter cases*, the situational element in applied ethics is always present and must be acknowledged (Gustafson, 1992, p. 1153). Another issue is the emerging problem of ethical naturalism, the influence that facts have on values (on which I will not be able to elaborate here); yet, with this understand-

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[3] First published in 1979, Singer's *Practical Ethics* has become a classic introduction to applied ethics.
[4] The author also points to the ground-breaking character of the work by Beauchamp and Childress (1977).

ing of ethics, the allegation of naturalism loses its strength, because—like in pragmatism—a certain kind of relationship between facts and values is assumed, which results from the growing appreciation of the practical side (cf. for example Kurtz, 1990, p. 33 et seqq.).

4.3. Modern casuistry

Applied ethics is casuistic, but in a good way. In essence, the point is to always consider given circumstances and not to apply the "rigid" rules automatically. Various ethical concepts are usually being combined since practice is character-ized by "different" type of complexity than the theory. It would be difficult to act on the basis of just one complete theory of good and evil (Bedau, 1992, p. 127). The casuistic character of business ethics is also manifested in, for instance, the frequent use of cases in didactics. It is due to a conviction that thanks to case stud-ies we learn how to solve practical dilemmas, along with all the richness and am-biguity of specific situations. Frequently, students deal with real events and have a chance to compare their own solutions with what occurred in reality. This way, they learn to make the right decisions (Beauchamp & Bowie, 1988, p. 50).

The casuistic method of course involves some level of risk. Immersing one-self in the situation can dull one's moral sensitivity, while the excess of detail can lead to the lack of judgment or even of action. What is more, situationism or con-textualism can make it easier to validate dubious solutions, which was brought to attention by Aniela Dylus (1997, p. 73 et seqq.). I believe that bad-faith specula-tions can happen any time, yet applied ethics, and especially business ethics, are destined for a bottom-up ordering in its analysis—from concrete to abstract. Per-haps we should recognize "new casuistry" that emerged in the 1970s together with business ethics (in legal sciences and law teaching—even earlier) and whose in-tentions were and are very ambitious. It is not just about studying cases that reflect the real complexity of the situation, so as to accustom students to the ambiguity that awaits them in their "real" life. It is about something more. As Richard B. Miller (1996, p. 7) writes, "I hope to strengthen our appreciation of casuistry by using its tools to address a variety of debates in our public and intellectual life—debates about war, politics, sexuality, medicine, women in society, and the study of religion."

4.4. Social nature of applied ethics

Miller, quoted above, mentioned the debates in public life about the topics which could be easily found in textbooks on applied ethics. In this sense applied ethics is of social nature since it addresses the questions crucial for a peaceful coexistence of individuals in a public sphere. It is also a relatively new phenomenon which was recognized as a separate field in the 1970s. Applied ethics belongs to the third stage of the development of modern moral philosophy, according to J. B. Schneewind who has commented on the history of moral thought and divided the whole process into three periods. The first stage represents the historical tran-

sition from the understanding of morality as something designed and decreed independently on human valuations to an idea that morality was part and parcel of human nature and a crucial evidence of human autonomy. Historically the beginning of this period was marked by the publication of the Montaigne's *Essays* toward the end of the 16th century and its most prominent works by Kant, Reid and Bentham became available at the end of the 18th century. The second stage, which lasted until the 1960s–1970s, offered a further elaboration of the picture of an individual as the self-governing being. During the third stage "the attention of moral philosophers has begun to shift away from the problem of the autonomous individual toward new issues concerning public morality" (Schneewind, 2000, pp. 147–158).

At first sight, this claim may sound like a rejection of the so-called Enlightenment project or like a criticism of today's urban, anonymous, pluralistic societies. It is true that a revival of the virtue ethics, mostly due to the intellectual efforts of Alasdair MacIntyre, is a conspicuous stance in today's public debates. Applied ethics however has nothing to do with a communitarian proposal to return to the pre-modern sense of unity based on common moral life and teleological understanding of human nature. On the contrary, it is based on a liberal picture of human nature but at the same time tries to solve the problems generated within a society composed of self-interested individuals. When I say that applied ethics is of social character, I mean that it deals less with the problems of moral autonomy of an isolated individual (although it has already embraced that liberal picture of a human being), and more with the issues that arise from cooperation between individuals within a public sphere, from specialized functions of members of professions characterized by their self-imposed duties or from ambitions of quasi-professions aspiring to a social role of special importance (e.g. managers embracing the doctrine of corporate social responsibility).

The problem of cooperation and of public goods is always linked with the phenomenon of defection in the game-theoretic sense, free-riding and the so-called social traps. This is a consequence of the atomization or individualistic nature of modern Western societies and the resulting challenge which can be summarized by a question: how to achieve unforced, voluntary cooperation of self-centered individuals, in other words—a spontaneous cooperation to mutual advantage.

4.5. The significance of rhetoric

Applied ethics is linked to a particular type of "application." In a social situation, i.e. with the involvement or entanglement of many parties and a frequent conflict of interest, it is impossible to automatically apply certain general rules (as if following a recipe). Even within a hierarchically-structured organization, individuals cannot be treated completely instrumentally. Therefore, the search for solutions involves having debates, convincing others, seeking best possible paths together. The "application" of general rules in a pluralistic world consists in putting forward

arguments, justifying the choice of given concepts. The choices made in solitude are also of such a dialogical character, just as the identity of an individual: various reasons might be colliding in an individual conscience as well.

And then, it should not come as a surprise that in the past casuistry was associated with teaching and using rhetoric, making arguments and counterarguments, perfecting the art of persuasion (Bedau, 1992, p. 127). It is particularly evident in the field of law. In the 20th century, Hans Blumenberg was defending the validity of rhetoric. Without going into much detail about his concept, we may say that he stressed the fact that when it comes to discussing morality, the definite evidence is not possible. Definite certainty does not exist either. If so, we can only produce arguments and try to convince others of the righteousness of our claims. Rhetoric is not something inferior to philosophy (including moral philosophy), as the latter does not grant us access to the absolute truth anymore (an even if it did, nowadays it would be, as a matter of fact, an instance of certain argumentation and persuasion) Rhetoric is not something one can choose instead of a simple proof that makes us believe we uncover the truth. It gains in importance because the absolute certainty is not possible. That is why the contemporary philosophy has no reason to reject the consensus (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 436).

4.6. Values are created in practice

In reality, applied ethics does not bring something ethereal back down to earth. It rather specifies something that, in the past, came out in practice. Stephen Darwall argues that applied ethics is not as "applied" as the term would suggest. Mathematical theories are produced independently of experience and only later are "applied" to solve practical problems. Ethical theories are developed during the process of reflection on the surrounding world, which is full of surprising and intriguing events. It means that practical dilemmas provide a context within which normative concepts are formulated (Darwall, 2003, p. 18).

Hence, applying ethics involves, in fact, "applying" the concepts that grew out of their past use, which means referencing to past events and their past interpretations, through—it should be stressed—the hermeneutic work. These ideas also exist in the American pragmatism, as exemplified by the views of Richard Rorty on going back to past valuations and applying these in new situations, inspired by John Dewey's work. It is not so much about referring to the so-called existing values, as about "extracting" them from previous contexts and reading them in the light of new circumstances.

> The pragmatist view of what opponents of pragmatism call "firm moral principles" is that such principles are abbreviations of past practices—ways of summing up the habits of the ancestors whom we most admire. For example, Mill's greater-happiness principle and Kant's categorical imperative are ways of reminding ourselves of certain social customs: those of certain part of the Christian West, parts of the culture which has been, at least in words if not in deeds, more egalitarian than any other. The Christian doctrine that all members of the species are brothers and sisters is the religious way of saying what Mill and Kant said in

secular terms: that considerations of family membership, sex, race, religious creed, and the like should not prevent us from trying to do unto others as we would have them do to us—should not prevent us from thinking of them as people like ourselves, deserving the respect which we ourselves hope to enjoy. (Rorty, 1996, pp. 44–45)

It is not a coincidence that certain issues and certain names still reappear as part of meta-ethical reflections on applied ethics (e.g. John Dewey). Pragmatism, which blurs the line between theory and practice, facts and values, ethics and meta-ethics, is said to be the seed from which applied ethics grew, and for a reason (Putnam, 1992, p. 1005). Thus, the above-mentioned features of applied ethics form a whole: situationism, casuistry, rhetoric, ethical concepts rooted in practice, their reinterpretation while solving moral dilemmas, a democratic way of achieving a consensus.

5. Conclusions

If there was just one ethical system in force, applying it would not be necessary. It would include the mechanism of automatic application: people brought up in a culture in which values are not put into question and are precisely specified would not have a problem answering to doubts like "how should I act?" Everyone faced with the same situation would come up with the same answer. But clearly, that is not the case in the modern world. Moral argumentation refers to different normative systems and the recommendations derived from them may differ. On a day to day basis, it is not that important because people are able to use their practical wisdom, as described by Aristotle. From time to time, however, the reality surprises them. Someone may make a claim that, for instance, it is immoral not to sort the waste. The surprise of the majority often sparks a public debate and a gradual change of daily habits. In a similar manner, people used to be confused when animal rights activist expressed their concern about the fate of mice that had been customarily subjected to numerous scientific experiments.

From the point of view of social sciences, pluralization of contemporary societies is a fact, while the phenomenon of questioning the views that we got accustomed to over the years is a common thing. The absolute and certainty disappeared. What remains is the discussion and negotiation on specific solutions. It can be also claimed that pluralism does not kill the moral sense, but on the contrary—opportunities to reflect critically on one's own values can sharpen this sense. Rather it is a fixed, traditional conceptual framework which may dismiss ethics as a reflection based on dialogue and the necessity to justify the validity of one's own arguments.

And therefore, there is no reduction of ethics to morality, of abstract and impersonal reasons to the ways of living of particular communities. Owing to democratization and debate, there is a need to go beyond widely held social norms and justify our own reasons. In a pluralistic world, argumentation becomes a ne-

cessity of life. Morality remains in the sphere of everyday choices; ethics is about going beyond a daily routine. The more problematic the world grows, the more problematic *Lebenswelt* becomes. Discussions within the framework of applied ethics, including the ethics of press, television and online journalism, reveal that people are in need of ethical considerations. Professionals in their field need to bear the pressure of public opinion and want to know how they should act. Doctors ask if they have the right to refuse a procedure which is condemned by part of society, and scientists—whether there is a limit to medical experiments and scientific research.

Today's public debates and discussions within communities show that the application of ethics is not an ad hoc adaptation, nor simple bending the rules. It does not degrade philosophy but rather makes it an indispensable element of democratic order. If I were to respond to the question from the beginning of this article: "Who is right—a philosopher or practical ethicist?", I would have to admit that the question is no longer valid. After all, practical or applied ethics is a mode of existence of philosophy in the world full of developments which even philosophers have never expected, but, first of all, in the world of many urgent human problems that need to be addressed.

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