Paweł Czarnecki

CELE, ZADANIA I FUNKCJE ETYKI

[**słowa kluczowe:** etyka, historia etyki, moralność]

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest próba określenia definicji, funkcji i zadań etyki w różnych kontekstach mających wpływa na jej postrzeganie. Etyka jest najczęściej definiowana jako normatywna nauka o moralności, ale także jako zestaw teorii etycznych wynikających z różnych koncepcji filozoficznych. Przedmiotem badań etycznych jest moralnie i normatywnie oceniane zachowanie człowieka, pojmowanego jako kompozycja ciała i duszy. W artykule przedstawiono znaczenie pojęć: etyka i moralność, wskazano na różnice oraz podobieństwa, a także sklasyfikowano systemy etyczne.

* * *

GOALS, TASKS AND FUNCTIONS OF ETHICS

Reflection on ethics should be started by its definition – not because on the basis of that definition a definite program of ethical research could be construed, but because such a definition reveals a range of difficulties connected with defining the identity of ethics and delineating the borders dividing it from other disciplines. The choice of definition is not the most essential matter here: every definition introduces some new notions, which most often prove much less clear then the defined concept, and they lead to the above mentioned difficulties.

Ethics is sometimes defined as normative science about morality Such a definition inclines one to ask the question to what extent it is justified to define as science a field which does not deal with what is, but with what should be. There is indeed a discipline dealing exclusively with the description of morality in different societies, and such a discipline is sometimes defined as descriptive ethics, yet usually it is not included into the scope of ethics in philosophical sense, rather being treated as a part of sociology or anthropology. However, treating ethics as a normative science, we assume the existence of some difficult to define identity

between ethics and the rest of sciences, such as physics, biology, chemistry and so on. Assuming the existence of such an identity is not of course unjustified, one should nevertheless remember that it leads to a number of difficulties constituting the object of research of philosophy of science. The way of solving those difficulties can in turn not only affect the understanding of what ethics is, but also the understanding of the very science, into the scope of which we have included the concept of „normativity".

One can also propose a slightly different, „ontological" definition of ethics. According to this definition, apart from ethics in the sense of particular ethical theories, there is ethics in itself, in the sense of objective principles of action, which ethicists strive to discover. Such way of posing the matter does protect ethics form the charge of being unscientific, at the same time though it forces one to admit the existence of a definite entity (ethics in the sense of objective principles and statements), for which nothing speaks but the fact that so far nobody has succeeded in construing an ethical theory which would not be rejected by a deciding majority of ethicists (theories which have appeared in ethics for the last fifty or so years can in the best case convince only a narrow group of „supporters"). General lack of agreement among ethic thinkers does not seem to pose enough reason to accept the thesis about the existence of ethics in objective sense. From the fact that many cooks come up with different recipes to cook a duck and there is no common agreement among them as to which of the recipes is the best one, does not follow that there is such a thing as an objective roasted duck. Besides, also in some cookbooks one can encounter the concept of some recipes being discovered (for example, in ancient China) and not invented. There is thus a fear (indicated e. g. by Kant in his Kritik der reiner Vernunft) that some ethicists, like the metaphysics, use the term „science" wishing to make their field more noble, surround it with an aura of scientificity.

From ethics in the strict sense, understood as a set of ethical theories, one should differentiate various philosophical texts, sometimes using the word „ethics" in the title, which contain a systematic presentation of views on fundamental philosophical questions, whose main goal is to justify a certain ethical idea. An example of such work is „Ethics" by Spinoza. The work consists of five parts, treating consecutively on God, human soul, affects, the influence of the affects on the human being, and the liberating power of the mind. Spinoza's Ethics contains also criticism of traditional, philosophical concepts of God and man and the moral, theological and religious ideas resulting from those concepts. Spinoza's work does have an ethical character, as it strives to prove that human happiness depends on man's proper use of reason, and not on his chase after material goods,

or slavish succumbing to the affections. Some of ancient philosophical ideas have similar character: their ontological and epistemological thoughts serve the justification of certain ethical theses (e. g. epicureism).

The problem of the „scientificity" of ethics should be differentiated from the question of the usability of scientific methods in ethics, or the bonds between ethics and science. The question of methods used in ethics shall be discussed in further part of the text. Now I intend to deal with the problem of how ethics stands in relation to science. So, it seems to me that such bond not only exists, but in practical life it is a thing so common and obvious, that in fact the majority of moral problems which we encounter in real action could not be solved without referring – at a certain stage of reasoning – to some theses of science. An example of such a problem is the question about the acceptability of physical punishment in schools. There is no doubt that such a question is an ethical problem and actually it could be solved without observation and scientific theories. Practically, the prohibition of physical punishment is justified by its purposelessness and the harm it brings to the process of education, and the thesis that physical punishment is harmful is a thesis from the realm of psychology and it has been concluded from observation of facts.

There are also philosophers, who, following John Dewey or Charles S. Peirce are inclined to solve all ethical problems in the same way. In the example described above, the ethical principle which is a basis of referring to science could be for example the thesis: „one should bring up children in such a way that as adults they do not feel frustrated, and so that they could be good citizens". The proponents of this type of action think that every ethical principle can be justified referring to science. The principle: „Thou shalt not kill" is thus justified by the harm to society which would follow if killing was accepted, which in turn is stated as an empirical fact.

However, speaking about the relation between ethics and science, one in fact counterposes those two fields: ethics is this area of reflection, which only draws from science, at the some time transcending science. In fact, to recur to science at all, one must already have some ethical views, and particular problems which one wishes to solve by help of science would not be problems if, prior to them, we would not have definite views.

What is in fact at stake in the dispute about the scientificity of ethics is not really the acceptability of using tenets of science in reasoning, but the objective character of reality being the object of ethics. „Objective" does not mean „existing" here, but „existing regardless of anybody's opinion". In this sense, a work of literature is not an object existing objectively, as it does not make sense to con-

sider it as an entity outside of anybody' mind, and most of literature critics and theoreticians consent with the thesis that there is no single real interpretation of a work of literature. Opinions which are interpretations of a work of literature cannot be viewed within categories of truth and falsehood; it is even possible to consider mutually contradictory interpretations as revealing and equally valuable – treating them as equivalent „approximations", raising the degree in which the work is comprehensible.

However, regardless whether we treat ethics as one of sciences or as a discipline of philosophy, placing philosophy itself apart from science (just like mathematics is conceived as a discipline outside of science, although nobody can question its importance for science), there is no doubt that ethics do have an object, and the way of understanding ethics shall depend on the way we define this object.

Generally, the subject of ethics, just like of other humanist sciences, is man – and man is a compositum consisting of body and soul (no matter how we conceive the way they are bound together). It does not seem possible to consequently refuse to admit that not everything in man is material, even though certainly it is possible to ignore the existence in man a non-material sphere of spirit (the psyche) and to act in such a way as if man consisted exclusively of matter. Such an approach not always is condemnable, sometimes it is even necessary (e. g. in psychiatry, when man is treated as an object for his or her own good), in ethics however any form of reductionism does not seem acceptable. Such ethics, which would try to treat man exclusively as an object, as a being conditioned only by his biological aspects would become a branch of biology and its recommendations could in equal measure be used in relation to man as to any other species participating in the struggle for survival.

The problem comes up, however, when one tries to determine, on which level of man's functioning we begin to deal with questions of moral nature. Sometimes one can encounter a thesis saying that moral problems spring up only when man starts to act, and the effects of this action influence other people. This stance could be called a reductionist attitude, because it situates all the moral sphere of man only at the level of social relations. As long as an individual does not enter relations with other people his or her actions do not undergo judgment in ethical categories. A literary example of this kind of situation is the situation of Robinson Cruzoe on his desert island in the novel by Daniel Defoe. The proponents of the social dimensions of ethical problems argue that Robinson on the desert island does not need ethics and all his actions, also those directed onto himself, are extra-ethical actions. The opponents of this attitude point to the fact that Robinson did in fact face a whole range of ethical problems, including the most serious

ones. He had, for example, to decide whether he had a right to commit suicide, or whether he should still have hope of being rescued or if he should rather come to terms with his fate; he had to fight to keep his dignity etc.

What seems more justified is the view that ethical problems begin on the level of the individual – although an action undergoing moral judgment is predominantly directed onto someone, this someone can be also one's own person. For the opposite thesis one can argue that an action whose target is the agent himself is evaluated differently from an action directed onto other people. For example, if dividing some good the subject does it to his own disadvantage, then such action is judged noble: if he does it to the disadvantage of others – then it is condemned. Every man has a right to put himself in danger – within reasonable limits – doing dangerous sports, however it is not allowed to put others in danger in the same way.

Quite apart from the question whether moral problems appear already at the level of an individual or only at the level of society, one cannot deny that not entire man and not all the areas of his functioning constitute an object of interest of ethics. That is why it is useful here to call upon the Tomist philosophy and to indicate the material and the formal subject of ethics. As we know, the material subject of a given science is the class of objects, which which the given science deals and which it studies. The way in which the science studies those objects is its formal subject. On the other hand, the formal subject of a science can be with regard to its contents or its methodology. The formal content object is a certain aspect of the material subject, which a given science finds especially important to itself and which it studies. The formal methodological subject is the way in which a given science studies its object. When you apply it to ethics it means that its material subject matter is man's action, the formal content subject – the sphere of morality distinguished in this action, whereas its formal methodological subject – the way in which ethics consider the issues of morality. Inasmuch the material subject and the formal content subject of ethics do not bring about any doubts and do not provoke controversy among ethic thinkers, the argument concerns mostly the way of understanding the formal methodological subject of ethics. To this problem I shall return in the further part of this work.

In philosophic writing, one usually distinguishes between the concepts of „ethics" and „morality", however this distinction sometimes becomes blurred when the adjectives are used: „ethical" and „moral". For example Kierkegaard, describing the subsequent stages of man's spiritual development, speaks about ethical stance, which however does not consist in carrying out the rulet of some specific ethics, but in living within categories of good and evil (as opposed to life oriented onto striving after pleasure and avoiding displeasure).

Although there is only one ethics, practically this discipline falls apart into a range of specialist fields, out of which each deals with problems connected with a specific kind of man's action. So, we have first of all various professional ethics, such as business ethics, journalists' ethics, doctors' ethics, soldiers' ethics and so on. Ethicists active in those particular fields do not try to seek and justify general norms of action, but only norms whose range of validity is delimited to situations connected with performing particular professions. It does not mean that those most general norms are ignored and that professional ethics can be maintained with no regard to the consequences of those general norms. The rules obtaining in particular areas of professional activity must in an obvious way result form the most general rules of action, and when after closer study it turns out that they ensue from norms which are impossible to justify, then they have to be rejected.

Living by different professional ethics, one most often silently assumes the importance of most basic norms, after which one investigates into what particular norms spring out of them for situations typical for particular professions. Most often the basic problem is understanding the sense of those norms in specific kinds of action. For example, one can maintain that the rule according to which one is not supposed to lie if saying the truth does not bring more evil than the lie itself, does not always obtain to business and during negotiations it is acceptable to say untruth within a certain extent, because such behaviour is considered acceptable by both the sides of negotiations. Another example is soldiers' ethics, in which the rule „thou shalt not kill" is abolished for action in battlefield.

With regard to the formal content subject, normative ethics can be divided into axiology, that is, science of values, and deontology, that is, science of moral duty. One should also mention descriptive ethics, concerned with describing and explaining moral norms and values binding in specific communities in different historical epochs. Descriptive ethics has the same material and formal content subjects as normative ethics: insofar that normative ethics attempts to investigate what is good and what is evil, as well as to discover the most basic premises lying at the basis of moral judgment, descriptive ethics is satisfied with the registration of facts. It does not mean, however, that descriptive ethics is useless for ethics practiced as a strictly philosophical discipline – quite the contrary. Every modern ethical theory must for example face moral relativism, which directly refers to the facts stated by descriptive ethics. As I have mentioned before, the material subject of ethics is morality understood as a certain kind of human activity. Apart from morality, there are also other areas of human action and this involves the problem of distinguishing what is moral (in the sense of „belonging

to the sphere of morality") from whatever is not possible to be considered within categories of morality.

Some problems are brought about by the very name „morality". In colloquial language this name has an evaluating character – what is „moral" is usually understood as „morally good", „deserving approval", „worth spreading" etc. that is as „morally good", and the very word „moral" is understood as the antonym of the word „immoral". The popular way of understanding the concept of „morality" is therefore far from the way of understanding proposed by some ethic thinkers. For example, I. Lazari-Pawłowska understands by „morality" this sphere of human activity which is possible to be thought of by means of the concepts of „good" and „evil", counterposing the name „morality" to those areas of activity, which cannot possibly be described by means of the mentioned concepts. The author thus separates the phenomena which are moral from the phenomena which are extra-moral, and „moral" can with equal probability mean „morally good" or „morally bad" here.

There are also authors who want to reserve the concept of „morality" for those phenomena, which deserve appreciation and positive judgment. Cz. Znamierowski proposes for example, that apart from the term "morality", reserved for phenomena commonly understood as morally good, we should use also a neutral name, and such a name could be the word „ethos". According to the author, by „ethos" one should understand „jointly: the attitude of man towards other people, the judgments, norms, actions and acts of abstaining springing therefrom". In the so understood ethos, there could co-exist „favourable and also unfavourable feelings towards other people".

The most important problem, however, seems to be the formulation of an adequate definition of morality, that is, delineating the borders between morality and extra-moral areas of human activity. An adequate definition does not mean here a definition possible to be accepted by all, that is some single, „true" definition of morality. Most of authors would probably agree that there are many possible „adequate" definitions, out of which each conceives of morality in some of its aspects, becoming an „adequate" definition for the needs of this or other scientific discipline.

The problem does not consist, however, in the question, which of the definitions should be consider the most proper one, but in the question whether it is possible to build any definition taking into account all the phenomena possible to be classified as moral phenomena. The opinions of ethic thinkers are divergent in this respect. The view that such a definition is altogether impossible is for example expressed by M. Ossowska. The author is of the opinion that the problem with

defining the concept of ethics resembles the problems we have with defining the concept of culture. Different authors maintain – says M. Osowska – that if the culture of some society should encompass the beliefs of its members as well as its characteristic ceramics or way of building houses, then one cannot formulate any adequate theories concerning a class of phenomena formed in this way." In spite of the impossibility of formulating a definition of morality, it is, according to the author, necessary to distinguish the sphere of moral phenomena from the extra-moral phenomena, because – just like a theory of culture without the concept of culture – reflection on the actions of man, in which we would do away with the concept of morality, would not be possible at all.

Some ethicists consider moral only such norms, whose justification does not require referring to extra-moral reality. The difficulty here consists in the fact, that norms popularly counted as moral norms can be justified in a way which causes them to stop being moral norms. For example, the norm „do not lie" is justified by the proposition that lying is evil, which proposition is either treated as one which does not require further justification or as a proposition derived from other proposition, which need not be justified. This norm can, however, be justified also by pointing to practical, negative consequences of lying and then should be considered a rule of praxeology, derived for example from a more general rule: „act in such a way that you live long and well".

The only solution of that problem seems to be to consider certain norms as moral norms in an axiological way. The norm „do not lie" we shall then consider a moral norm either as an axiom, or or on the basis of analysis of axiological assumptions, from which it ensues and which we had accepted as axioms before. The norms „do not lie", „do not steal", „do not kill" remain moral norms regardless of justification referring to extra-moral sphere. In other words, these norms are then treated at the same time as moral norms and praxeological, legal or customary norms. One should emphasize that considering a certain norm as a moral norm must have a non-relative (axiomatic) character. From the fact that a given norm is accepted, does not follow that it is accepted as a moral norm; considering industriousness, thriftiness, initiative, conscientiousness etc. as moral virtues and the acceptance of norms which they involve does not mean that we are dealing with morality. Those norms can be accepted also because they serve the realization of certain practical goals. From this point of view bourgeois morality (especially in the version proposed by B. Franklin) is only to a slight degree morality in the sense described above. A close enough concept linking with morality, which many make a point of distinguishing from the former, is justice. According to this distinction, there are rules defining just action, whose violation by an in-

dividual, a group or an institution entitles (everybody or only specific individuals) to use sanctions forcing one to abide by the rules. The violation of the rules of morality, however, does not entitle anybody to use force, and an individual can force himself or herself to abide by the rules only by the force of one's own decision and basing on accepted values. One can therefore speak of morality in a narrower sense, that is, about norms whose violation does not entitle to use sanctions, and about morality in a broader sense, encompassing morality understood in narrower sense as well as norms the respecting of which is enforced by use of force.

From the formal point of view, morality can be defined as a set of commandments and bans in the form of imperatives of the type „do not kill!", „do not steal!", „respect the elders!" etc., whereas the goal of ethics is not creating norms, but seeking philosophical premises, on the basis of which one could create those norms in a rational way.

Ethics is not therefore identical with morality, it is also not identical with those disciplines of science which do take morality as they subject, but treat morality as an empirical fact. Those disciplines deal with issues like: how people carry out moral norms in practice, what motives lie at the basis of their action, how the morality accepted by an individual depends on his or her participation in a specific social group etc. In other words, the subject of ethics is not the actual action of man, but defining the goals, values and norms which human action should be governed by.

Although not every human action counts into the sphere of moral phenomena, one should not forget that actually every action can undergo moral judgment. As M. Osowska notices, „one can praise or criticize the way one behaves at work, how he treats his colleagues, how a woman runs her household, how she behaves in a queue, in a shop, how people spend their money, how they raise their children, how they allow their dog to treat the neighbour's cat". It means also, that there are no actions which in themselves would belong to the sphere of morality, that is, always and in every society would be evaluated within the categories of good and evil.

Speaking of morality is sensible provided that we know what morality we mean. In fact we are always dealing not with one, but many moralities, in which one can differentiate completely different sets of directives and moral values. Those differences are noticeable between different cultures (it is hard, for example, to compare Buddhist morality with the morality of primitive peoples, although one could sometimes find some similarities, like e. g. inclination to an ascetic way of living), as well as between particular social classes and groups within one society.

Still another way of distinguishing between ethics and morality is proposed by J. Hołówka. In his opinion, morality is always someone's morality, it is therefore inextricably bound with beliefs, prejudices, thoughts, decisions or experiences of specific individuals and practically it is never the same – every individual professes one, unique morality. In other words, according to J. Hołówka, morality is a set of personal, conscious or unconscious rules, which guide a man in his actions. Also philosophers have a morality of their own, in accordance with which they act in life. The morality of one philosopher is not, however, identical with the ethics which he or she propagates. Ethics is „independent on anybody's opinion or view concerning moral norms and values. It does not come from facts and it cannot be reduced to facts. (#) It is a certain theoretical creation, in a certain sense ideal. It consists of norms and values; that is as if thoughts of authoritative, necessary, absolute and irrevocable character." Ethics can be compared to mathematics, which also is an ideal set of sentences of a certain type. Analogously, the morality professed by a philosopher can be compared to the practical skills of counting and solving mathematical tasks. Everybody knows that some outstanding mathematicians (for example Poincare) possessed those skills in a very slight degree, being of the opinion that they have nothing to do with authentic mathematics.

A completely different way of understanding ethics is one proposed by J. Bocheński. The author writes: „... among the most important questions that I was able to ask myself are those two: what do I want in life? And: how should I act in order to get it? These are basic ethical questions to me. I know well, that other people imagine ethics differently. I do not want to argue with them. All that I am saying is, that to me, those, and not other, questions seem important." J. Bocheński therefore understands ethics in a way principally opposite to the way presented by J. Hołówka: not as an objectively existing, independent of anybody's beliefs system of ethical rules and their justifications, but one's own, personal beliefs about what one should strive after in life and how to act to achieve those goals.

If we now look at ethical systems created in more or less distant past and at those which are disputed now, we shall notice that the tendency to understand ethics as a personal set of beliefs prevails in philosophy up to the end of the 19th C., whereas in modern philosophy, probably not without the effect of progress in natural sciences, one can see the concern that an ethical theory should be in the biggest degree possible independent from personal beliefs and ontological or epistemological assumptions, impossible to justify rationally.

In ethics, apart from questions concerning ethical norms, there are also questions about the status of ethical theories, which sometimes come into the very focus of ethical thinkers' interest (in the post-war period, in Great Britain and

USA, the analytically spirited ethics was dominated by meta-ethical reflection). Meta-ethics professed as a separate branch of philosophical reflection is quite a young discipline, but meta-ethical reflection appears already at the very birth of ethics. Such reflection was practiced e. g. by Aristotle, who studied everyday language with regard to the use of the noun „good", similarly to today's English and American metaethicians.

Also within the scope of meta-ethics one can distinguish many different theories concerning for example the meaning of the word „good" in different ethical theories. To the best known and most disputed belong: emotivism, naturalism and relativism.

According to the proponents of emotivism, all the ethical tenets do not have any sense in the literal sense of the word, as they do not speak about facts, merely expressing the emotional state of the person speaking. The norm „thou shalt not kill" simply expresses negative attitude to killing, professed by the person who accepts that norm. The opponents of emotivism point to its dangerous consequences in case it became a universally accepted theory, they also notice that it implies an impossibility of ethical dispute, which is contrary to facts.

Naturalism bases on the assumption that ethical judgments follow from facts discovered by science (or from sentences which describe those facts) – an example of a naturalist theory is utilitarianism. Anti-naturalists argue that it is impossible to deduce sentences concerning values out of sentences describing facts without assuming some other premise, and giving this premise is impossible. One also points to the fact (G. E. Moore) that out of the statement: „this action will bring the biggest benefit to the biggest number of people" does not follow the sentence „this action is morally right". In other words, one can on one hand realize, that a given action will bring happiness to the biggest number of people, and on the other wonder if it is morally right.

Finally, relativism assumes that all the ideas regarding what is right and what is wrong are accepted by particular societies in a definite time and there are no systems of norms which would be universally accepted. In other words, all moral judgment is relative. The proponents of emotivism also usually assume that the norms valid in one society should not be imposed onto other societies. The opponents of relativism think that relativists fall into a contradiction, saying that all the moral norms depend on the society, at the same time acknowledging the rule according to which one should not impose one's own norms onto other societies – which rule is thought to obtain universally. Some opponents of relativism notice that there is no way to settle precisely what society is and where the borders lie which divide different societies one from another. One points also to the fact that

a proponent of relativism cannot criticize norms which are valid in his own society by use of ethical arguments: if most of the members of a given society accepts some judgment it means this judgment is true within this given society.

One of the goals of meta-ethics is therefore the classification of ethical theories. Those theories can be classified according to various criteria. For example, Rudolf Carnap has classified ethical theories taking into account the range of validity of the moral norms which they encompass, the source of those norms and also the way human actions are evaluated. With regard to the range of validity, ethical theories have been divided into objectivist theories (norms have a universal character) and subjectivist theories (norms are a subjective creation of particular people). With regard to the source of their origin, Carnap divides theories into: naturalist (where one attempts to deduce the norms from the propositions of empirical sciences), anti-naturalist (the source of the norms is extra-empirical reality, for example God, or human reason) and emotivist (norms are an expression of human emotions). With regard to the way of evaluating human behaviour, the theories are divided into emotivist (what matters is the motives of action), effectivist (what matters is the effect of action) and nominalist (good and evil are treated as primary, primeval notions that are not defined; the evaluation of an action does not depend on intention or results of action but on its accordance with moral norms valid within a given system).

According to W. Sade, all the ethical systems consist of four principal elements. They contain – first of all – a list of values, sometimes also their hierarchy, secondly, a set of rules for action, defining what should be done in order to achieve what is considered good (values), thirdly, specific examples for action, that is: examples of people, who, living by rules of a given system have achieved the desired goals (the author uses the expression „lives of saints" and „lives of sinners", portraying the lives of those who did not abide by the commandments of the system), and, fourthly, a certain image of the world, that is: tenets concerning the nature of man, God, the essence of things etc.

It is rather impossible to disagree with this opinion, it seems however, that what W. Sady says calls for certain completion. First of all, certainly it is not true, that all the ethical systems contain all the components of the four elements distinguished by the author in the same degree. Particular systems differ especially with regard of the proportion of what the author calls „the image of the world": some systems (e.g. epicureism) contain a whole, elaborate ontology and theory of cognition serving the justification of ethical tenets, but there are also such systems in which the „image of the world" is not expressed explicitly, and its reconstruction requires separate research and revealing the hidden premises.

Besides, W. Sady does not attempt to settle what an ideal ethical system should look like with regard to those four elements. The expression „image of the world" is basically a metaphysical one, and as it is well known, philosophers who practice philosophy in analytical spirit opt for ruling all metaphysical concept out of philosophy. One can thus pose a thesis that – at least from the point of view of particular currents in philosophy – an ideal ethical system should not contain any image of the world at all (of course, then there is a question whether one could speak about an ethical system at all).

Ethical theories can be classified also with regard to the way they are justified. Then we can distinguish theories of natural law (the justification for moral norms is sought in nature understood as a kind of law-giver), utilitarian theories (moral norms are obeyed due to their usefulness to society, which should also guarantee their durability), legal-positivist theories (moral norms cannot be justified by referring to nature or to usefulness or to any other criterion, and so the difference between morality and legality disappears) etc.

Now I shall briefly characterize the most important ethical theories, to attempt next to answer the question about the sense of ethical reflection in a situation, when none of the theories formulated for the two and a half thousand years of the existence of European philosophy seems satisfying. Due to the special character of Christian ethics, I shall devote the most space to this ethics.

The pioneer of European ethical reflection is thought to be Socrates, as he was the first to analyze human action within ethical categories in a systematic way. Socrates thought that a sufficient condition for good conduct is the knowledge about what good is, that is the capability to properly recognize good. One should bear in mind though, that Socrates understood knowledge about good in a particular way: such knowledge is not just intellectual understanding of what good is, but also, or perhaps first of all, some kind of inner sensitivity and the inclination to prefer good things and actions to bad ones.

Socrates' ethical views are usually called ethical intellectualism, although this name does not seem entirely right, considering that by the knowledge of moral good Socrates meant much more than purely intellectual understanding. The accusation of Socrates by Aristotle, later repeated by many philosophers, according to which knowledge itself is not enough to fulfill morally good deeds does not really seem apt.

The knowledge of good Socrates probably understood in such a way as we usually conceive the knowledge of what beauty is. Understanding that some thing is beautiful is not the same with possessing the information that it is beautiful but it is rather a kind of internal opening to the value which this thing possesses. Si-

milarly to an esthete who, having possessed the knowledge about what beauty is, as if automatically strives to surround himself with beautiful things and to avoid ugliness, so a man possessing the knowledge about what moral good is, thanks to this very knowledge chooses good and avoids evil.

Socrates' lasting merit for philosophy is turning attention to a kind of moral intuition, which seems to make ethics independent from any reference to absolute or any other moral authority. The question why one should choose good and avoid evil, Socrates answered that at the basis of this kind of choice there is the concern about one's own soul, saying even that it is better to experience evil than to do it. Understanding what Socrates meant by this concern about one's own soul seems equally problematic as settling in what way he understood the knowledge about good – most probably also here he meant rather some kind of intuitive insight than only knowing that man should first of all take care of his own soul.

Plato's theory in some way connected with Socrates' conception. Reconstructing this philosopher's views one should remember that the notion „good" appears in his work in two meanings: firstly, it means an objectively existing idea, standing at the top of hierarchy of ideal beings, secondly – it means memory, that is remembering the world of ideas. In other words, in Plato's ethic, every thing which allows man to remember the world of ideas is good, and every thing which turns him away from the world of ideas and turns his attention to the passing world of material things – evil.

Plato took from Socrates the conviction that the knowledge of what is good suffices to do good, and evil springs from ignorance. Knowledge of good Plato understood in a different way from Socrates – for Plato, knowledge about good is equivalent with the knowledge of the idea of good. The most important obligation of a philosopher, who has possessed the knowledge of the idea of good is to pass this knowledge to people, in order to help them regain the knowledge of the world of ideas.

From those views, Plato drew practical conclusions which he formulated in his theory of state. An ideal state should be governed by those who have gained the knowledge of the world of ideas, that is – philosophers. Plato postulated also dividing people into groups reflecting their intellectual predisposition at the very onset of their education. He was of the opinion that only the most talented people should have access to philosophical education – for the rest he suggested to leave other, less noble occupations.

A systematic presentation of ethical views is first found in the work of Aristotle. This philosopher worked out his ethical theory in an equal measure basing on his theory of being as on his practical observations, rejecting Socrates' intellectu-

alism and the views of Plato. For Aristotle the most important goal to which man can strive in his life is perfecting one's own soul, thanks to which one can achieve happiness (eudaimonia). People are not born perfect, but thanks to practicing virtues they can achieve this moral perfection which secures them happiness. Because every man is different and every soul is different, also good has an individual character: what is good for one person, need not be good for another. What is common for all people (including sages

philosophers) is a natural conflict between desires of the body and reasons given to man by the reasoning part of his soul. That is why virtue to Aristotle is not something one can possess for good, permanently, and which one cannot lose. It is rather a permanent practice of different virtues and overcoming bodily desires.

Man should not, however, try to totally overcome his natural desires and deny their existence, as body and soul constitute a harmonious whole, and desires are the means by which the body communicates his needs to the soul. The best solution, according to Aristotle, is the golden mean. Man should not totally ignore his natural needs, on the other hand he should not totally succumb to them. Satisfying desires to an optimal degree, one should at the same time cultivate virtues which allow to master those desires: common sense, strong willpower, courage etc.

To Epicur, similarly to all the Greek ethicists, the most important goal of human life is happiness, and the goal of ethical reflection – helping man to achieve happiness. Epicur understood happiness as lack of suffering, thinking, that man by nature is destined to experience happiness. Apart from lack of suffering, there are also external stimuli evoking pleasure. Thus Epicur divides pleasures into positive, evoked by external causes, and negative, to experience which it is enough to be in the state of peace, untouched by any needs. External causes can be divided into physical and spiritual ones. There are no differences in quality between pleasures, although Epicur puts more weight onto spiritual pleasures than physical pleasures. The proper means of achieving pleasure – positive as well as negative – are virtue and reason. Stoicism, just like epicureism, is an ethical theory which derives its tenets straight from the theory of being. The stoics thought that the world is governed by a non-personal force, called pneuma, which by its very nature strives after a definite goal and nothing and nobody is capable to stop it in its striving. Because it is not possible to counteract the strivings of the pneuma, there is no point in rebelling against what destiny brings. One can indeed to some degree change the course of events, but such a change costs so much effort and has such negative impact on man, that it is better to succumb to the course of events than fight one's own destiny.

Letting go of the wish to change the world after one's own needs requires undertaking a range of preparations aiming at achieving the state of virtue. The stoics understood virtue differently from Aristotle. To them, virtue was a certain general predisposition of a complete character: who once possessed virtue, became a sage and could not lose it. Virtue so understood is for the stoics identical with moral good – a sage, who has possessed virtue, at the same time becomes a good man, achieving the state of happiness. The proper moral reality is thus virtue, and all the external events which happen to man in life are not subject to moral judgment. In other words, no events, regardless whether in everyday sense they are beneficial to one or not, are in fact either good or bad and one should meet them with indifference.

The reason why most people find certain things good or bad are the inborn drives of man, that's why a wise man who has possessed the state of virtue first had to get rid of his drives. The stoics called this state apatia. The wise man remaining in the apatia state does fulfill his duties as other people do, but he does not try to shape the surrounding world in such a way that it fulfills his own needs, limiting himself to the acceptation of what life brings.

The way of understanding morality in western culture has been dominated by the ethics of Christianity, which indirectly also affects the atheist ethical systems. Just like most of ethical systems based on religion, also Christian ethics is based on various prohibitions and commandments. Its basis are the ten commandments contained in the Bible and the New Testament commandment: „love thy neighbour". Christian ethics has a heteronomous character, that is, moral norms are to be obeyed not only due to a subjective belief that they are right, but because they come from God.

A novelty which Christianity brought to ethics is the faith in Christ and the moral norms taught by him. The proper foundation of Christian ethics lies therefore in the teachings of Christ and even if this ethics has drawn a lot from the heritage of the antiquity, taking some of the pagan philosophers as example for Christians, with the appearance of Christianity history of ethics enters a new epoch. Although the Middle Ages ascribed to philosophy an auxiliary function to theology, it is Christian ethical reflection which proved to be the most influential discipline shaping European spirituality, and it was Christian ethical reflection that was decisive for European identity.

Looking at Christian ethics from today's perspective one often notices the conflict between this ethics and moral reality of Christians. Looking at today's life of most of Christians, one can get an impression that only in minimal degree is this life filled with concern about the good entrusted to a Christian and mee-

ting the demands that Christianity poses before him, this concern being replaced by striving after material well being. This situation inclines one to ask about a compromise between authentic principles of Christian life and the practice of everyday living. Even though Christianity understood as religion has a more or less institutionalized character, ethics does not yield to institutionalization and thus to a much larger extent it can yield to all kinds of „compromise". Another reaction to this state of affairs can be specific „amplification" of ethics which in practice means understanding the dictates of ethics in such a way that they are even harder to fulfill.

One way or another, what is characteristic for Christian ethics is the discrepancy between the goal after which one should strive in his or her moral development and his or her limited capability. In this ethics one a priori assumes the impossibility of attaining moral perfection – the wise man, who has possessed virtue in the ancient Greek understanding and thanks to this virtue has attained the state of bliss, from the point of view of Christian philosophy does not exist. Going through stage after stage of moral development one can indeed attain a level to which only few can aspire, yet there always is a possibility of being still more perfect. It is sometimes thought that it is this characteristic trait of Christian ethics that decides about the basic difference between European culture and other cultures.

Christian ethics – based, again, just like most ethical systems, on religion – faces some serious difficulties, out of which three seem the most important. This ethics assumes, first, the existence of God, which for many people is impossible to accept. Moreover, it assumes that the ultimate source of morality is God, which engenders a difficulty found already by Plato in his dialogue Eutiphron, consisting in the fact that it is impossible to determine whether something is good because it is good or whether it is good because God wills it to be good. In the first case we would be dealing with autonomy of morality from God, which would mean that God is not omnipotent, whereas in the second case we would have to say that if good wanted for example that murder was a morally good deed, then it would become morally good. The biggest problem lies in the fact that the only source whence we can learn what God wills is the text of the Bible, allowing for many – often contradictory – interpretations.

1. This last difficulty is basically avoided by the ethics of particular Christian confessions, for example Protestant or Catholic ethics. These ethics are strictly bound with the doctrines of their respective churches, and the moral principles are contained in respective texts. In the case of Catholic ethics the documents from which the believers learn about moral norms and the ways they should be

respected are for example collections of sobor and papal declarations, synodal declarations, declarations of Roman congregations, pastoral encyclics, priests' letters, instructions of church offices, the Catechism and respective theological handbooks.

In the case of Catholic ethics it proves problematic to separate it from moral theology and to set the right range of research both for ethics and for theology. The border between those two disciplines is not easy to draw and it seems that in many cases it is rather blurred and the differences boil down rather to a different placing of emphasis than to any principal separateness of problematics. Both moral theology and theological ethics remain in close connection and both strive after self-definition and clear definition of their own status.

The problem of the specific of ethics and its borders in the framework of Christian faith has become a subject for discussion run for over thirty years in the frames of the Philosophical Week on the Catholic University of Lublin. One of the members of the discussions was the then Cracow metropolita, cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who defined ethics as a science which takes for its subject morality in its normative aspect, aiming at final justification of moral norms. Speaking about moral theology, Karol Wojtyła differentiated positive moral theology, that is a field whose purpose is the exegesis of the teaching of Christian moral principles present in the Revelation, and speculative moral theology, which he called „theological ethics sensu stricto". The purpose of this last discipline is, according to K. Wojtyła, interpreting Christian morality contained in the Revelation „by means of a certain philosophical system".

T. Styczeń, also a participant of the discussion, remarked that it is unacceptable to draw a border between moral theology and ethics on the principle of „regionalisation" that is drawing for every of those disciplines a specific area of research and enumerating the problems with which each of them should deal. According to T. Styczeń it is more suitable to set apart the above mentioned disciplines on methodological basis: moral theology, basing on the truth contained in the Revelation, provides motivation and justification for the ethical norms formulated by ethics regardless of Revelation.

A different division, based on other criteria, is proposed by W. Giertych. According to this author, one should differentiate between philosophical ethics, theological ethics and moral theology. W. Giertych seeks justification for such a division in the Summa theologica by Thomas Aquinas, in the Catechism and in the encyclic Veritatis splendor. The differences between these three fields should lie in different ways of dealing with the same subject, that is morality. Philosophical ethics is about finding ultimate justification of moral norms basing on reason

alone; theological ethics tries to justify those very norms looking at them through the Revelation; finally, moral theology remains theology, that is, science about God, however it studies „the presence of God through the grace of his manifesting in Christian action." In other words, moral theology studies the way in which in human action in practice the presence of God's grace is realized. Justifying ethical norms does not belong to tasks of moral theology, from which it does not follow that this field does not see the existence of the norms or that it leaves it outside the scope of its interest. It is different from philosophical and theological ethics first of all in that it treats also the norms themselves as a manifestation of God's presence and His action.

The basic task of moral theology proves to be „expounding all the program of man's transformation by the power of God's supernatural gift". It means practically that moral theology – departing from the assumption that it is true that our body is „a temple of the Holy Spirit" (Corinthians 6, 19) – attempts to show in what way the working of the Holy Spirit manifests in our experience of sexuality, physical pain, aging etc. It follows that the task of theology is not exhausted in the apology of grace alone, but it reaches much deeper, requires the cooperation of the mind in the cognitive process. The result of this cooperation (which, however, should remain a common effect of two equivalent cognitive faculties and it cannot take the form of striving to rationally verify the tenets of faith) is deeper, more versatile understanding of the tenets of faith, grasping reciprocal relations between them or their hierarchy, which in turn leads to a better understanding of the implications of the aforesaid truths for human actions.

Christian ethics has not actually been questioned until the time of the Enlightenment, when a number of attempts was undertaken to build a lay ethical theory, that is one which would not call upon God. This lay character of Enlightenment ethics does not mean, however, that the philosophers of that epoch managed to tear ethics apart from any form of Absolute; usually they would put nature in the place of God and refer to nature in the way in which one used to call on God, at the same time fighting with religion. Here one can mention philosophers such as: Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Holbach, Helvetius and others.

A theory which was entirely independent from Christian ethics was created by Immanuel Kant. He came to the conviction that it is impossible to justify moral norms basing on any authority, including the authority of God: „Although it sounds suspicious, there is nothing wayward in saying that every man creates God for himself, why, according to his moral notions – he even must create such a God, in order to venerate in him the God who created him. In whatever way, because in order for such being as God (#) to wish to appear to someone, this someone must

first of all judge if he has a right to consider such being a deity and to venerate it as deity." It means that every time when we are dealing with an authority imposing on us certain norms of action, the responsibility whether we acknowledge this authority and whether we accept those norms falls on ourselves.

Kant develops then a detailed ethical theory and, basing on it, a theory of the state and peace between nations. He starts first of all from the assumption that in the moral judgment of a deed what matters are the motives and not the consequences – on which the agent has no influence. However, not every motive of action causes us to deal with action which is subject to moral judgment. Only the deeds done out of a feeling of duty are subject to such judgment, and not ones springing from pity or compassion. In other words, at the roots of every moral action there should lie the maxim: „act in such and such a way, because it is your duty". According to Kant, such maxims have a categorical character, that is, they are absolutely binding and should be realized regardless of possible consequences. Opposite to categorical duties Kant places hypothetical duties, taking the form of a sentence „act in such and such a way, if you want to achieve or avoid this and that". All the categorical duties can be generalized and reduced to the formula: „act in such a way that you could wish the principle of your action to be respected by all people". This rule is known as Kant's categorical imperative.

Schopenhauer, in spite of what Kant thought, was of the opinion that man has a direct access to objective reality, and this access he gains by plunging into his own self. Plunging into oneself one can gain the access to the sense of one's own will, dominated, however, by various primitive drives over which one has no control and which sometimes cause his actions to be irrational. According to Schopenhauer, the only thing that one can do in such situation is to analyze those drives and master them, so that he can control the strivings of his will. He arrived at those conclusions regardless of the inspiration that he sought in Buddhism, however in practice his ethics differs very little from the ethics of compassion, self-denial and transgressing oneself which is recommended by Buddhism. The main difference between his philosophy and Buddhism lies in the fact that Schopenhauer arrived at his conclusions without referring to the assumptions lying at the bases of Buddhism, and his views he formulated within the Western philosophical categories.

Friedrich Nietzsche, basing on his own epistemology, built an original ethical theory, at the same time subjecting Christian morality to shattering criticism. In his opinion, only the belief in God and the supernatural world described in the Bible explain and justify the existence of commonly accepted values. In practice, it turns out that religion and readiness to subordinate mundane life to its com-

mands have long since been rejected by western societies, so there is no cause for which one should still accept traditional values. Those values should be rejected and replaced by new ones.

An ethical theory which takes into account the consequences of actions is utilitarianism. According to this theory, every thing which contributes to the increase in general happiness is good, which means that on undertaking any action one should consider whether that will contribute to increasing the sum total of happiness or not. This rule is called the principle of usefulness. According to the proponents of utilitarianism, in every conditions it is possible to calculate what action with the greatest probability shall contribute to the increase in the general sum of happiness (or at least the decrease in the sum of unhappiness).

The main difficulty of utilitarianism lies in the impossibility of comparing different kinds of pleasure and deciding what kinds of pleasure have advantage over what kinds of displeasure. One of the fathers of utilitarianism, Jeremy Betham, thought that it is possible to compare different kinds of pleasure because pleasure is nothing else but a mental state, which is basically the same regardless of the cause which evokes it. Betham thought that pleasures can be compared, taking into account such features as intensity, duration, their capability to evoke other pleasures and so on.

A division of pleasures into higher and lower pleasures was done by John S. Mill. Higher pleasures are, in his opinion, of intellectual nature, and everyone who has experienced them but once, shall for obvious reason prefer them to lower pleasures, mainly bodily ones. Mill thus evaluated pleasures not for the quantity, but for the quality.

The theory sketched above is called utilitarianism of actions. Some philosophers, seeing the difficulties connected with the utilitarianism of actions, propose modified versions of utilitarianism – utilitarianism of principles and negative utilitarianism. Utilitarianism of principles does not submit every deed separately for moral judgment, but it ponders on what general principles bring the biggest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people. Proponents of negative utilitarianism think that the purpose of action should not be increasing the total sum of happiness, but decreasing the total amount of unhappiness.

For Marxism, the greatest value is man, understood however not as an individual or, like e. g. by H. Spencer, as human life, but as a specific type of social relations. In other words, man is for Marxism the highest value provided he is a particle of society, which is characterized by a range of specific features, described by Marxists. Morality is here a form of social relations, and its form is decided

by the class structure of a given society and by historical conditions, in which his development took place.

What seems the most characteristic for ethical thought nowadays is the recognition of the vastness and multi-aspectedness of human ethical experience and, following that – increasing specialization in the field of ethics. Various, heterogeneous ethical ideas coming into being within particular philosophical streams spring rather from the will to understand and explain problems which man faces in the modern world, than from the desire to build a positive and if one may say so – activist ethics. For example, existentialists found the subject of philosophy to be the unique human existence, defining man as a being doomed to loneliness and lack of a feeling of any sense of existence – ethics here follows from a specific notion of man. One does not give it any positive goals or make it try and find means which would provide an individual or society with happiness and luck. It is only stated that certain obligations come from a certain state of affairs. In postmodern ethics one emphasizes the lack of any stable points of support for moral decisions, the multiplicity of values and heterogeneity of moral principles, at the same time questioning the possibility of constructing any ethics in traditional sense of the word.

The impact of particular ethical systems is, of course, different, and often one encounters the situation, when a bigger influence onto the moral awareness of a given society is exerted by ethical views of people who have nothing to do with philosophy. A perfect example of this kind of impact are the ethical views of B. Franklin, which are certainly very modern and novel in the context of morality accepted in his times, which, however, were not expounded in a systematic way or connected with the whole of Franklin's philosophical reflection – because Franklin simply didn't have any. His views, expressed in the form of laconic aphorisms, became a part of colloquial English, this way working much stronger than many an ethical theory expressed in philosophical parlance, accessible for relatively few.

It is also worth differentiating between an ethical theory or system, and something which one can call moralizing and which boils down to admonishing others how they should act in their lives. In most of the classical ethical works one can find on one hand systematic exposition of ethical views and a range of advice and hints of purely persuasive character on the other.

I have devoted so much space to the characteristic of particular ethical theories to show that also from today's point of view they can seem convincing and sensible. For example, the ethics created by Kant, who himself was a deeply believing Christian, is all the time very convincing and attractive for atheists. Many

people, however with no philosophical reflection, applies in their lives the principles of hedonism or Christian morality, and politicians, deciding the matters of the state, are often led by the commendations of utilitarianism. However it would be hard to defend the thesis that in ethics we are facing the same kind of progress as in natural sciences, there is no doubt that due to the effort of many a generation of philosophers some progress has finally happened – even if its only merit is to realize that it the construction of one ethical theory which would encompass the entirety of moral phenomena is impossible.

In fact, as it has been noticed by T. Nagel, our life often faces conflicts between many different values, out of which each has an essentially different character and there is no way of comparing one value with another, reducing one to another or finding a third value to which those two could be reduced. Situations in which every choice seems to be equally right mean that for many evaluative judgments, which, however, must be formulated in order to undertake any action at all (even if the choice means abstaining from action) it is impossible to find any sufficient reasons, even though such reasons are necessary so that it can be at all possible to speak about any evaluative judgment at all.

The views expounded by T. Nagel are worth a closer look, as it seems to some degree they can be an answer to the accusation of the lack of logical cohesion charged against modern ethical discussions by A. MacIntyre. According to A. MacIntyre, „in our culture there is no rational way of achieving moral agreement". A proof of this thesis is for MacIntyre the character of modern ethical debates, in which one simply exchanges arguments, without any criterion enabling for evaluation of their validity. If, for example, discussing moral aspects of a just war one says that moral evil caused by war prevails over the good that one can gain by the war, and this argument is answered that only a constant readiness to wage a war is an efficient way of frightening the enemy and preventing war, then there is no way of deciding which of the parties is right. These and many other arguments which are very important to contemporary societies are marked by what in McIntyre's opinion is a conceptual incommensurability. The arguments base on certain premises and they contain no logical error, yet there is no way of gauging the value of premises lying at the basis of one of those arguments from the point of view of the premises lying at the basis of another.

T. Nagel, in turn, divided the values between which there occurs a conflict, into five groups: duties towards other people (e.g. the duties of a doctor for a patient, duties one has in relation to one's own family, friends – people with which one has personal relations), limitations to one's freedom springing from rights of other people (e. g. the right of personal inviolability), generally understood

usefulness, conceived in an utilitarian way (thus, the necessity to take into account the results of an action for people not directly related to the acting subject), „perfect" values (e.g. the autonomous value of a work of art) as well as „devotion" to one's own projects or undertakings (the value lying in tasks whose realization we have already started).

Each of the values belonging to those five groups is a value from an entirely different point of view. Duties towards people who are our employees or members of our family we fulfill because of personal bonds between us and those people, but the situation changes when we take the decision being led by the others' right for freedom. With those people we are not tied by any personal bond, at the most we meet them by chance when we undertake our action. We judge situation from yet another perspective when we are led by the usefulness of a given action. Many people for example protest against the police breaking the rights of arrested people even though it is known that some of them have committed serious crimes. In situations of this kind we protest, guided by a conviction that it is more beneficial to respect the rights of all people than break the rights of individuals who have committed crimes. In certain situations it can turn out, however, that the value we ascribe to some work of art or the undertakings which we are carrying out at the moment prevails over the value which fulfilling the duties towards our own family has for us.

Pondering over this kind of situations, T. Nagel comes to the conclusion that the cause of the problem is the fact that the values belonging to those five groups spring from entirely different and mutually incomparable sources, and not from one source which seems to be the idea of the fathers of traditional ethical systems. This fact in turn inclines the author to formulate a conclusion concerning human nature: however man does feel a need to have a simple and universal method allowing him to solve different kinds of moral conflicts, at the same time he has an ability to look at the world from completely different points of view, and every of those points of view inclines him to see himself burdened by completely different demands. In practical action in a great majority of cases an efficient tool to properly solve this type of conflicts is common sense, already spoken about by Aristotle – other tools, according to T. Nagel, we do not possess.

Apart from the fact that the typology proposed by T. Nagel seems to be incomplete, as many people are in their actions guided by values which do not fall into any of those categories (like for example striving after pleasure and avoiding suffering, but also values springing from special respect to the sphere of the sacrum), it is difficult to agree that in our moral choices we are inevitably bound to be led by common sense and nothing else. The perspective of gaining one, univer-

sal method and the possibility of construing one, all-encompassing ethical theory does seem dubious, but it does not mean that we are constricted to common sense. Even the very possibility of differentiating situations in which a moral conflict comes about is a hint and support in decision taking. Even if the goal of ethical reflection should be only to indicate the source of difficulty and explaining the nature of the conflict, this goal would provide sufficient justification for the sense of studying ethical problems.

One sometimes accuses ethics of the same fault as one accuses all philosophy – that starting from ancient Greece it has practically done no progress and one still discusses the same problems which were discussed twenty-five centuries ago. Some ethicists answer that this accusation is groundless and false and progress in ethics is simply a fact. „If anybody doubts that – says R. Brandt – he should compare some of the major works of our century (...) with a description of early systems of philosophy of ethics given by Diogenes Laertios or even with the greatest individual achievement in this field, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. The progress, consisting in deepening analyses, elimination of confusion, differentiating separate issues and making the problems more precise is great, not to say giant."

The progress in the field of the language of ethics is, however, not the kind of progress which the above mentioned critics mean. When we speak about progress in natural sciences, one does not usually mean a growth of scientific work written with more and more sophisticated language, but first of all, a progress in the sphere of results which those sciences yield. Besides, as we had mentioned above, the hitherto ethical theories usually are not rejected en masse, and their influence becomes visible by decision-taking (e. g. utilitarianism seems to be a theory which is applied, and thus taken to be true, in governing states). Whereas progress in natural sciences consists in rejecting previous theories and replacing them with others – it is not possible to plan a flight to the Moon using one of ancient physical theories, even though one can live quite well following the commendations of Epicureism or Aristotle's ethics. Drawing analogies between progress in ethics and progress in natural sciences seems thus to be a misunderstanding.

Many people occupy themselves with ethics without any regard to its practical consequences, starting from an assumption that ethical problems are worth dealing with for their own sake. According to the division of values presented by T. Nagel, people ascribe to ethics autonomous value, of the same kind they ascribe to works of art or scientific discoveries (regardless of their practical usefulness). Still, one should think that in the question about the sensibility of ethics there is the desire to find such an answer that would not be exhausted in the statement

that ethic is worth practicing in the same sense as it is worth climbing mountain peaks or practicing astrology. Many people still believe in the sense of astrology and they are ready to ascribe to it certain value; some time ago, people had the same attitude towards alchemy, still it does not follow that objectively speaking, practicing those disciplines is sensible and that it is not a pure waste of time.

If ethics really had no demands to fulfill, of the kind lying outside of ethics itself, then certainly it would not arouse interest of anyone apart from a small handful of specialists. Yet, the questions over which ethical thinkers ponder, are universally considered the most important one can ever ask. Even if those problems remain the same ever since philosophy came into existence, still every man, every generation and every epoch views them from their own point of view and seeks an optimal solution for themselves.

Tracing the development of ethical ideas from antiquity till modern times one inevitably gets the impression of a certain continuity: new theories are shaped in opposition to what was created earlier, but at the same time they draw profusely at the views which had already been meticulously formulated before, most frequently constituting a greater or lesser modification of earlier ideas. The impression of continuity obliterates the apparently obvious fact that those views were shaped under so diverse conditions that without much exaggeration one can say, especially from today's perspective, about different worlds that do not merge or overlap and in which those apparently so similar ethical systems were created. The political system of ancient Athens of the times of Socrates and Plato, a system based on slavery, in no way resembled the system based on feudal dependency, which in turn has no affinity with the epoch of technological progress and optimistic belief in science which characterized the 19th C. In other words, social and economical conditions in which philosophers created their systems living in different historical epochs are so distant from one another that it seems justified to ask to what extent it is lawful to seek similarities between particular ethical theories which are distant from one another in time, (which seems to be one of philosophy historians' favourite occupations), and at the same time neglecting differences between them. In other words, it seems that moral problems which people encounter in particular historical epochs and with which the authors of ethical theories struggle, differ from one another much more than it is commonly thought. If it be so, then for ethics it means not only differences between the meaning of identically sounding concepts (the fact that Aristotle praised slavery and St. Thomas Aquinas held a not very flattering opinion about intellectual capabilities of women one usually treats as nothing more but colourful anecdote), but first of all the necessity to start ethical reflection in every historical epoch

in a large measure anew. In ancient Athens, where probably there lived more than fifty thousand free citizens (although the estimates are quite varied), a free citizen had other duties towards other citizens than an inhabitant of modern city towards its other inhabitants. It follows that with the emergence of new outer conditions and new type of relations between people (or e. g. between people and animals) ethics faces new tasks with which it has never before had to struggle.

Sometimes it is thought that all debates in ethics require previous agreement as to what should be considered an absolute value. In other words, such discussions require using concepts signifying values out of which most are relative values. Using concepts which signify relative values involves the necessity of defining some absolute value (or absolute values). Following George E. Moore, one can assume that an absolute value is anything that we desire for its own sake, whereas a relative value is everything we desire for the sake of absolute values. Acknowledging this view as right would, however, mean reducing ethics to a secondary role; it would become a discipline on the border of logic and praxeology, advising what should be done and what values to choose in order to achieve things to which we ascribe absolute value.

There are philosophers who would be inclined to agree with this kind of view on ethics, thinking that the decision about what is an absolute value is an arbitrary decision, that it depends on personal preferences and is an individual matter of every man (even if the choice is made by a philosopher, he does it only as an individual, and not as a philosopher), still most of ethicists ascribe to ethics tasks which are much more momentous and difficult than mere advisory functions. Even if those ethicists in practice abstain from attempts to singlehandedly create moral values (what Nietzsche recommended), they see their proper vocation both in the critique of ethical systems and views proposed by other philosophers, and in the reconstruction and critical analysis of values which modern societies – often unconsciously – consider absolute.

References

1 Bocheński J. (1995); *Podręcznik mądrości tego świata*, in: Ibidem, Dzieła zebrane, Kraków
2 Bocheński J. (1995); *De virtute militari*, in: Ibidem, Dzieła zebrane, Kraków
3 Brandt R. (1996); *Etyka. Zagadnienia etyki normatywnej i metaetyki*, Warszawa
4 Domański J. (1997); *Z dawnych rozważań o marności i pogardzie świata oraz nędzy i godności człowieka*, Warszawa
5 (1995); *Filozofia. Podstawowe pytania*, edited by M. Martensa and H. Schnädelbach, Warszawa
6 Kant I. (1993); *Religia w obrębie samego rozumu*, Kraków
7 Kmecova J. (2013); *Rozvoj v kontexte personalizmu sociálneho učenia Cirkvi*, in: Bezpieczeństwo człowieka a religia, Uniwersytet Przyrodniczno-Humanistyczny w Siedlcach, Siedlce
8 Kmecova J. (2013); *Personalistický kontext sociálnej náuky Cirkvi v sociálnej práci*, in: R. Soltes, P. Dancak, D. Hruska, Disputationes Quodlibetales, Personalistické inšpirácie vo filozofickom a náboženskom diskurze, Prešovská univerzita v Prešove, Gréckokatolícka teologická fakulta, Katedra filozofie a religionistiky, Prešov
9 Kopania J. (2002); *Etyczny wymiar cielesności*, Kraków
10 Lazari-Pawłowska I. (1966); *O pojęciu moralności*, in: „Etyka" 1966, nr 1
11 Mis A. (2002); *Filozofia współczesna. Główne nurty*, Warszawa 12 Nadler A. (2002); Spinoza, Warszawa, p. 258
13 Nagel T. (1997); *Pytania ostateczne*, Warszawa
14 Probucka D. (1999); *Utylitaryzm*, Częstochowa
15 Ossowska M. (1985); *Moralność mieszczańska*, Wrocław
16 Ossowska M. (1985); *Normy moralne. Próba systematyzacji*, Warszawa
17 Ossowska M. (1966); *Pojęcie moralności*, in: „Etyka" 1966, nr 1
18 Sady W. (1995); *Kryteria racjonalności systemów etycznych*, in: Między logiką a etyką. Studia z logiki, ontologii, epistemologii, metodologii, semiotyki i etyki. Prace ofiarowane Profesorowi Leonowi Kojowi, ed. by J. Paśniczka et al., Lublin
19 Ślipko T. (2002); *Zarys etyki ogólnej*, Kraków
20 Warburton N. (1999); *Filozofia od podstaw*, Warszawa
21 Wojtyła K. (1967); *Etyka a teologia moralna*, in: „Znak" nr 159.
22 Znamierowski Cz. (1964); *Rozważania wstępne do nauki o moralności i prawie*, Warszawa