

Responsibility Personal and Social: Foundations for Ethics (or Life) in a Global Age

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The Challenge

Modernity has been marked by a strong sense of individuals in competition, whether persons or nations. Institutions of the economic, political and legal order have been constructed on this basis. Modernity brought great new rational capabilities for the control of the objects of our material world and made possible new and at times surprising ways for the affirmation of human freedom. The “modernization process” not only broke through the natural barriers of high mountains and vast oceans that kept for so long peoples in isolation, and distanced from one another, but also exposed the cultures of the world to the anthropological revolution of Ancient Greece and Rome as well as the humanistic foundation of the Abrahamic traditions.

Paradoxically, the modern world is also the one that ideologically split apart into individualism and communism, liberalism and fascism. Most tragically, the world became increasingly interpreted in reductionist terms, being those of the modes of production and distribution of material goods or those of interpreting the whole of reality. The problem is that in the process the essential became more and more forgotten, namely, the innate and integral dignity of the human person, along with the forgetfulness of the very source that grants to the human being, as to being in general, a true sense of purpose and ultimate meaning. Contemporary fundamentalisms of all sorts only add to the danger inherent to such a split in the understanding of what the human being actually is. Needless to say that the world has already seen all the destructive consequences of any form of unbalance in the process of human self-understanding. Hence, the need for the human being to learn new praxiological approaches capable of sustaining a new paradigm in the human self-understanding, one that takes the human being not only as individual but also as a member of a community and, consequently, as a person intrinsically open to the transcendent dimension of being itself.

It is essential and urgent to discover what had been lost and how it now can be restored. Because what is in question is the proper value of modern civilization, any response must take into account the plurality associated with the human condition. It must consider what counts as knowledge in order to assure that the mind be adequately open to appreciate the issues that are of real ethical concern and perceive any relevant new insight coming out of the cultural constellations of humanity. It must also examine the proper constitution of the human person as such in order to recognize both the structural conditions as well as those left to the realm of creative imagination for human interaction and cooperation towards the goal of achieving a “better world” not only in human terms but also in terms of a more balanced and respectful interaction with nature. In other words, any response to the challenges presented by human

civilization at the present stage must take into account all that is relevant to a better and more authentic determination of human action. Indeed, it must reconsider our understanding of being, or of reality as such, so that we might become able to integrate all the new insights already available and so much required in order to overcome in a constructive way the present situation of global crisis.

Response

The global pressures now provide a renewed sense of the urgency to overcome all the excesses of a paradigm based on individualism, offering us the opportunity to begin thinking on a global scale and on more wholistic terms. This requires the cultivation of new capabilities to break beyond self-centeredness and incorporate a way of thinking based and understood in relational terms. The goal, therefore, is to foster an understanding of the human being for which the condition of being a member of a family and a community while at the same time being part of the global society is taken as an essential part of what the human being properly is. In other words, the issue is here the one pertaining to the construction of a new humanism, one that will draw us closer to an wholistic sense in human existence and thus shall be enabling of a new determination to authentically promote mutual understanding among persons and peoples, cultures and nations, religions and civilizations.

The seminar will explore possibilities for the renewal of the ethical life in our global age. In order to do so, two fundamental concepts, namely, responsibility and justice, are to be particularly emphasized so as to enable both a philosophical articulation and new forms of practical implementation of that sense of ethical order that not only makes us go deeper into the circumstances of our *Lebenswelt* but also offers us the opportunity to underscore the value of life and the importance of acting in ways that are ever more responsible and in accordance with justice.

The meta-ontological dimension of the notion of *responsibility* as part of a global commitment requires a further discovery of a new vision of what humanity is, particularly as much as we discover the ethical basis of any form of authentic human life. The concept of *justice* both in personal and social life will be articulated in relation to dignity and responsibility of the human being who is enriched existentially by the interi or realization of one's self-awareness in terms of responsibility so that human subjectivity as such will be properly understood in terms of a radical *proximity* to the other.

The seminar will investigate the problems associated with a renewal of the ethical life in our global age at both a personal and a social level in order to philosophically diagnose the causes of these same problems and, thus, explore reflexively possible suggestions in order to promote greater awareness to the possible resources already present in the different cultural settings provided by the cultural traditions of humankind.

In order to facilitate the conversation among the participants and to stimulate the personal reflection of each one of its members, the seminar will be structured in four distinct moments, whereby we shall give attention to the following stages in the development of the project:

1. The Principles of Responsibility (with Max Weber and Hans Jonas);
2. The Nature of Responsibility (with Emmanuel Levinas);
3. The Transition from Responsibility to Justice (with Paul Ricoeur);
4. The relevance of the cultural and the religious contexts for the clarification of issues related to the integration of a deeper sense of responsibility with the notion of a better justice (with contributions from Asian, African and Latin-American thought as well as the perspectives derived from the three monotheistic religions).

Application for Participation

Applications for participation in this seminar should be sent by email by April 1, 2011, to cua-rvp@cua.edu include

- (1) a vita describing one's education, professional positions and activities,
- (2) a list of the applicants' publications,
- (3) a letter stating your interest and involvement in this theme and the relation of participation in this seminar to your past and future work in philosophy and related studies, and
- (4) an abstract of a study(s) you might present as an integral part of the seminar.