

Our Best Ethics Are Deficient

Human dignity, human rights, humanity, social standards, organized and individual help: these are the paradigms of the best ethics of our time. They have been hard-fought through centuries, and we appreciate and advocate them as highly valuable achievements. However, their worldwide acceptance and implementation are wanting, and even in states recognized for their rule of law, behaviours and systems remain unchallenged that restrict humans to drastically lagging, up to unendurable conditions of life, or even rob them of their existence.

That is something that good ethics should actually not leave without response. That such evils can persist is due to a fundamental deficiency of our common humanistic ethics as it is focussed on the autonomy of man. This deficiency exists relative to a fundamental trait of our being, namely to advance life. Accordingly, the direction is clear into which our ethics is to be advanced.

For conceiving ethics, one is better familiar with the human Dasein (those aspects of our being that are independent of the contents of the world) and with the world. From the philosophy of being, we do not need more here than a small extract that can be presented in a few paragraphs. The point is that our Dasein is disposed in such a way that we continuously extend the possibilities of our life in the world, and that our life intrinsically includes the possibilities of our fellow humans.

The Fundamental Disposition of Dasein is, to Advance Life

In our Dasein, we proceed time-wise from moment to moment. In every moment we find ourselves in a situation; from previous experiences, we know our options to act in it, and what the results would be in the next moment; and on this base we decide and act. And then the next moment is present, and we are proven right or confronted with something unexpected. This experience is inescapable, and it influences what we know and can knowingly do. Our possibilities of life are thereby becoming a little confirmed or extended.

Over the many moments of our life we thus experience a vast increase of the possibilities of our life. That can easily be seen by looking back: we have started with

virtually zero knowledge and options to act, and today, we understand a giant, complex world and can conduct our life therein without ever becoming able to fully describe or exhaust our possibilities.

Our progress in advancing our life depends very much on our decisions from moment to moment, which in turn are determined by our stance. We can, as a matter of principle, act in such a way as works for all people of our culture, and then our possibilities of life grow "only" through the smaller or bigger surprises that fate is imposing on us. Or we can, as a matter of principle, act in ways that we have not previously tried, and then we gain new experiences, and our possibilities of life grow because we want it.

In the first place, this is true for ourselves. Of course, a number of people jointly command a greater potential for enhancement and expansion than individually. Our fellow humans account for the largest variable part of our world and are thus offering by far the greatest wealth of opportunities for extending our possibilities of life and for growing. Again, our experiences with our fellow humans are the richer, the stronger their possibilities of life are growing. The most productive approach to advance our life is to advance the life of our fellow humans.

If we do not advance the life of our fellow humans when and where we actually could do it, then our conscience signals guilt: that we fail at something that we owe to life. In other words: Advancing life is good, not to advance life is bad – or as a stance: evil.

References to Philosophy and Religion

These considerations are not new. In "Being and Time" Heidegger defines being-guilty as "being the cause of some not-being", and this means, that we have to enable being and to advance the possibilities of being.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims, by means of his "But I say unto you"-teachings, that we are to make peace with our brother, not to suppress women, not to resist evil, not to hit back, to see and treat the enemy as God's child, to accompany somebody two miles when asked for one, to give the overcoat in addition to the coat. The common denominator is, that the opposite behaviour does not advance life. This is certainly not about specific rules, not about ethics in particular cases; Jesus rather outlines a *Dasein stance* that is in sync with the fundamental disposition of *Dasein*, to advance life. This is also the direction of his Parable of the Talents.

Already the Old Testament has God say: "be fruitful and multiply" and "subdue it [the earth]", which means that our being in the world is disposed in such a way that we advance life, extend our world and explore new sub-worlds, and that ultimately we cannot elude this. The Tower of Babel is a depiction of the human trait, to pile up new possibilities of life on top the ones available, as if building towers – to such heights that the towers of individual people diverge and people do not understand each other

anymore. The tale of Kain and Abel says, firstly, that we are positively in charge to advance the life of our brother, and, secondly, that "God is saying it", that is: that it is fundamental for our being.

As we now know this, what are the consequences for our being-in-the-world?

Nothing can be deduced from it. From the intention to advance life it cannot be inferred which action or inaction would indeed advance life, because this depends upon how our world is, and, in the objective world: upon the commonly accepted facts and our knowledge of these facts.

We might possibly wish to develop ethics to end all ethics for advancing life, but we know from previous attempts, that ethics cannot be formulated in such a way that they cover all situations without detrimental side effects – what may advance here, may impair there –, and that ethics are notoriously falling back against the general progress of the world. The great lawgiver – like the universal genius – has long been left behind by the growth of the world. More than the general paradigm, to advance life, cannot possibly be conveyed to the world.

However, what can be done for the implementation of this paradigm in the world, is twofold:

- One can individually assume a Dasein stance to advance life, and then conceive what one would in this sense do and not do.
- One can from this Dasein stance, in a political process, carefully and circumspectly evolve ethics.

Considerations Regarding a Good Dasein Stance

That our life can be advanced only in a limited way or even not at all, if we do not advance the life of our fellow humans, that appears strange to us. Every man is the architect of his own fortune, thus we think, and we have to concede that to our fellow humans, and the same they have to concede to us as well.

Of course we do not keep to this rigour, when it comes to our relatives, friends, and selected other persons, that is: our in-group. We are even used to advance the life of strangers, when we act as coaches, service providers, helpers, donators, tax payers. The problem is not that we would not have the competence for it, but how we define our in-group.

In view of the basic disposition of Dasein, all people belong to our in-group. This does not mean that we would, for all of them, have to accomplish something that advances their life. That is not practicable in the world. But it imposes on us to be particularly careful, if our means to advance life are powerful, or if our behaviour has a price that others are to pay.

Action or inaction can fail, also if intended to advance life. Their result can be that life is impaired. If we want to have life advanced then there is no way other than to not only compensate but over-compensate the impairment. Nothing frees us from this obligation, neither a good intention nor a lack of awareness of the impairment. "Being the cause of some not-being" is totally objective, independent of our best intention and knowledge. We are liable.

In most cases, we have more options to advance life than we can possibly carry out. If we choose some of them, then we fail the others. In this sense we always become guilty. However guilt is not an instrument for pinning down humans, but a given of every Dasein. If we set out to advance life then we must not be stopped by guilt. Wallowing in guilt does not advance life. We must learn from guilt how to advance life better next time. Apart from that, we are forgiven.

This is also true for any guilt of others against ourselves. If we focus on the impairment that we are suffering, strive for retaliation, seek revenge, then this binds our capacity, and we are lacking it for advancing life. If we even take revenge "successfully", then we add to the impairment of life. If we really want to advance life, then we cannot but bear the impairments and, starting from the impaired condition, again advance life.

Autonomy sets a limit to advancing the life of others. We cannot against their will advance the life of others. If their life is stagnant, then it may even not be possible to motivate them to advance their life themselves. Of course, we must help fellow humans whose situation restricts their autonomy so much that they do no longer have any options of their own to advance their life, in particular, people who are seeking help.

To effectively advance life requires the corresponding skills. It requires knowledge and capabilities that we first have to learn and advance until we surely command them as our own possibilities of living. Advancing life is itself a possibility of life that has to be advanced. Much of it can obviously be copied and learnt from others, but there can also – like elsewhere – happen setbacks which must be overcome.

Considerations Regarding the Further Development of Ethics

Ethical rules cannot be derived from the fundamental traits of Dasein, because these are independent of the world, absolute. It is impossible to relate something with the Absolute. Specifically, texts in the world cannot be claimed as absolute, for example, as divine. Therefore such texts cannot be the basis for ethics.

Which action or inaction will advance life, that fully depends – as already said – upon the facts in the world, on its givens and on its future. For the development of ethical rules, we must therefore draw on the best, newest, relevant knowledge available. And the development requires a political process, because the actions and inactions, that are to be regulated, may have different effects on different groups of people concerned.

The prevalent ethics models completely fail to cover the advancement of life, and therefore give plenty of room for improvements. They have all been guided by the *Ten Commandments* which only prescribe that life must not be impaired. This is being carried forward in the *universal human rights*, the rules of which are equally constrained to not impair life. This is clearly insufficient. – That *human dignity* is seen as inviolable, has indeed the effect that the autonomy of humans is being preserved, but that, for the rest, they are being left to their own. The principle of human dignity leaves behaviour ethically unchallenged that impairs or violates people, even very many people. As an amendment to current ethics, it should therefore be required to pay attention to the humans who may be affected by any action or inaction, with a view to offer them options to advance their life and thus live their life in dignity. – Also the *love of thy neighbour* is a deficient principle, for its pragmatic limitation to the nearest humans determines the ethical facts in such a way, that already the second nearest humans, let alone more distant humans, are left unprotected. It must therefore become an additional standard that we consider ourselves in charge for all humans, the lives of which we can somehow affect, and that we think about advancing their lives.

Some supporting ideals and paradigms might help to promote improvements of our common ethics, for example, that people should coach each other locally and globally, or, that the powerful people are in danger of impairing their own lives at the expense of others.

Also, a better culture of guilt should be pursued. There is much room for strengthening and spreading the insight that guilt is inescapable, and that forgiving and bearing are absolutely necessary. If this would enable a more open dealing with guilt, then we all could better learn how life can be advanced with less undesirable side effects.

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At long sight, we need not be pessimistic, for our Dasein is fundamentally disposed towards advancing life, and because this does indeed work as can be seen from the advancements in the world, even if they are unevenly distributed. The question still remains, whether we want to continue patiently experiencing and witnessing impairments of life, or whether and how we could possibly expedite the advancement of possibilities of life for all people. The first and primary prerequisite to this end would be to establish the insight that the very meaning of Dasein is to advance life.

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