ETHOS AND EUDAIMONIA. ETHICS AS HAPPINESS

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Abstract:The present study aims at underlining the connection between ethos and eudaimonia, namely between ethics and happiness, appealing to Aristotle's philosophy and to Christian religion. The belief according to which the key to happiness is having an ethical behavior is a powerful motivation for being ethical, but it is not a simple persuasive strategy used to convince people of the necessity of the ethical dimension, it also resumes an anthropological deictic conception that places ethics at the centre of the human being's divine essence and spiritual growth. We have chosen Aristotle and Christianism because of the defining role played by love: in Aristotle's perspective, love of virtue is the main source of virtue and the connection between ethics and happiness. In Christianism, love is not only a virtue, but the most important of all and the source of all virtues. It is also the key of man's spiritual fulfilment. After discussing the two perspectives, we will analyse the possibility of love in an atheist vision of man.

Keywords: ethos, eudaimonia, Aristotle, nous, contemplation, virtue, Christ, communion of will, love

1. Introduction

The present paper presents the relation between ethos and eudaimonia (the Ancient Greek concepts of ethics and happiness) in the anthropological conceptions of Aristotle and Christian religion. The two perspectives do not present ethics as a form of human behaviour, but as the ultimate form of human behaviour. Ethics and happiness come together: ethic is viewed as the main component of happiness and happiness is not conceivable in the absence of the ethical. But the influence of ethics on happiness is not just a motivational strategy to determine an ethical behaviour. The human structure is as such that ethics is a part of human happiness. Moreover, ethics is an essential human component as it is the component that individualises man and relates him to god. The similarities between god and man come via the way of virtue. The most valued virtue is that of love (the love of virtue and of the virtuous for the Aristotelian perspective and the love of God and of the kin for Christians and, in both of them, the love of self) because it is the cause of all other virtues and it makes communion within community possible. Practically, without love there is no virtue and without virtue no happiness is possible, neither that of self, neither that of the community.

We will start with a presentation of Aristotle's perspective, that precedes chronologically that of Christianism, and continue with a presentation of the Christian ethics, that accepted many of Aristotle's writings. The purpose is not to identify the Aristotelian ideas embraced by Christianity, but to underlie the connection between happiness and ethics that both of them share, which we will sum up in the last part of the paper, when we ask the question about the validity of such perspectives in an atheist view.

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2. Aristotel's Nicomachean Ethics

Aristotle uses the concept of *eudaimonia* for describing the good life and the happy life. The etymological meaning of *eudaimonia* ("living in a way that is well-favored by a god" (Kraut, 2012)) is to be found in Aristotel's Nicomachean Ethics as the idea that the life of virtue (the good life) is similar to that of the gods.

Aristotle begins his book by distinguishing the activities that have an inner purpose from those who have an exterior finality and includes happiness and virtue in the first category. This distinction is important because it offers a first connection between virtue and happiness.

Aristotle connects "good" to the function or the finality of things. Good is the finality of an activity. The activities that are self-sufficient are pursuit for themselves, not for the sake of something else, that have no other finality outside themselves, and that are their own purpose, include happiness. Happiness is the finality of all things and is wanted for itself. Virtue is also wanted for itself, but it is also wanted for the sake of happiness (Aristotle, I. 7). Aristotle defines pleasure as "a state of soul" connected to the characteristics of being a lover of. Virtue is in itself a pleasant activity because the virtuous man (who loves virtue) takes pleasure within making virtuous act. Therefore, virtue is made and wanted for the sake of virtue itself. (Aristotle, I. 8).

The Aristotelian distinction is also known in motivational theories as the distinction between actions with an intrinsic motivation and actions with extrinsic motivation. For instance, one could have an intrinsic motivation for doing a good deed or an extrinsic one. Moreover, the definition of a good deed is connected to the notion of intrinsic motivation. "Good" can be named that activity done following no other finality that the deed itself. If something else is intended by doing a good deed (such as gratitude from the beneficiary of the good deed, social prestige or sin forgiveness), the action's moral value decreases. Furthermore, if the purpose is not achieved (for instance, the person does not gain gratitude for its deed), pleasure is not felt. On the other hand, if a good deed is the consequence of the love of good that one has, the reward (the pleasure) is in the good action itself. So, a good lover would take pleasure on its good deed. Therefore, pleasure is intrinsic in virtue (it belongs to its very nature).

But virtue is not just one of the many pleasant activities that man does, it is a specific human activity. Differentiating man from other life forms, Aristotle notices that in the case of man, his specific function is the activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and that is the activity of soul in accordance with virtue (Aristotle, I. 8.). By the fact that the activity specific to man is that of the soul, Aristotle refers to the activity of the human faculty *nous*, which means "intuitive understanding" (Kraut, 2012). In order to understand Aristotle's anthropological conception, we must first understand the concept of *nous*. Nous (mind, intellect, reason) is a human faculty described as exceptional among capacities of the soul. It is the part through which intuitive understanding and contemplation take place and it is also the faculty that differentiates man from other forms of life: "This capacity of soul thus has a special significance for Aristotle: in investigating mind, he is investigating what makes humans human" (Shields, 2011). *Nous* relates god to humans, because *nous* is the divine part of man. This faculty, says Aristotle, is "the divinest part of us", "the faculty the exercise of which, in its proper excellence, will be perfect happiness." (Aristotle, X.7, p.338). Happiness

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is a "gift of the gods to men" (Aristotle, I.9). This makes it, at the same time, a "sacred duty". God is happy and blessed. The activity specific to gods is that specific to *nous*, to reason, it is that of contemplation. Contemplation is self-sufficient and involves happiness. According to Aristotle, happiness is contemplation, because self-sufficiency is to be found most of all in contemplation.

In Aristotle's perspective, happiness is not a state of mind consisting of amusement, but happiness also involves pleasure. Happiness is not a feeling, it is a self-sufficient activity, it is wanted for itself, and not in virtue of something exterior to it. It is not a means to a purpose, it is its own purpose. Happiness is, therefore, that activity that is its own purpose (Aristotle, X.6). Each faculty involves a pleasure of its own and each activity involves a pleasure of its own. Pleasure "completes" the exercise of faculties, it is felt when perfection is achieved (as it is the case of music for the hearing). The pleasure specific to man is therefore the happiness that comes from the activity specific to man (Aristotle, X. 5): the activity of reason. Reason is what relates man with god, separating man from other life forms, individualising him (Aristotle, X. 7). The activity most akin to that of god and that brings the most amount of happiness possible to man is, therefore, that of reason: "If then reason be divine as compared with man, - the life which consists in the exercise of reason will also be divine in comparison with human life." (Aristotle, p.340) Man is not, like god, self-sufficient, but he can engage in the self-sufficient speculative activities of reason and achieve the highest degree of happiness possible. This kind of life would not only be a lifestyle similar to that of god, it would be the life proper to man, because it would perfect its specific faculties.

A clarification is required at this point with respect of the relation between happiness and virtue: Aristotle thinks not that happiness is virtue, but that it is virtuous activity. The happy life consists of "lifelong activities that actualize the virtues of the rational part of the soul" (Kraut, 2012). Man's welfare is a life in accordance with reason, optimised by man's spiritual virtues. This is what eudaimonia, the happiness, the "good life" is all about (Mureşan). The happy life is the life of virtue, because virtue is the merit of reason. Virtue is a means between two extremes, and it is up to the reason to find and clarify the mean. Leaving reasonably is a life-long project, because it is up to the practical wisdom to analyse and take the best decisions in the circumstances one meets.

The human welfare also implies the welfare of the city (of the society). With respect to the aspects that can influence the quality of the human life, such as the social and financial aspects, The Stagirite considers that these, too, are to be optimised through virtue. This is why Aristotle adds to the contemplative way of life that of the politics. The contemplative way of life is the first mode of eudaimonia and the political is the second one. Both of them are virtuous activities and compose happiness (Mureşan). The political philosophy of Aristotle completes his ethics. Moreover, some interpreters argue that "The Nicomachean Ethics" is just a pretext for Aristotle's political philosophy. We believe that his Politics was intended to offer the clarifications necessary for obtaining the necessary conditions for virtuous life to take place in. In other words, the life of reason in accordance with virtue also implies decision-making in the political sphere. At this level, the other factors that man depends on for optimising happiness lie.

Love plays a fundamental role in Aristotle's ethics. The love of virtue makes rejoicing in virtuous acts possible. It is the love of self that makes virtue possible (only a virtuous man

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displays love of the self, as a vicious man is a self-destructive man). Love of virtue finds joy from the company of virtuous peers. It is the love of virtue that makes friendship, family and community possible. Thus, in the absence of love, happiness is not imaginable. In Christian religion, too, love plays a fundamental role.

3. Christian Religion

In Christian Religion, man is the image of God by creation and call. Man is called upon communion with god: "The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator" (Vatican Council). Love is the heart of Christianity.

The example of the type of communion man is called upon is given by Christ, as Saint Maximus argues. The Holy Trinity is composed of only one divine nature and three persons: The Father, The Sun and the Holy Spirit. The three persons reveal their properties not in their nature, but in their relation to each other. The two natures of Christ (a divine and a human one), united by one person, is the example of the union of humanity and divinity through love. The mode of existence proper to the Sun through the hypostatic union is the mode of existence proper to his humanity, as well. The union of two modes of action is possible in a hypostatic union on the level of the person (and not of the nature). The Sun acts in identity with his Father's will, but in the way and manner specific to being a Sun. In the person of Christ, the divine and human acting and willing are in mutual correlation, because the human acts of Christ are imprinted with the mark of His Eternal Sonship. Thus, the human nature reaches its perfection: the perfection of love. Christ reveals through his acting the community of The Triune God. The Incarnation becomes, thus, the Revelation of the Trinity and love becomes the leading to the human nature to "its ultimate perfection": "In Christ, all human acting and willing have been restored to their originally intended communion with God's acting and willing" (Schönborn,1994).

The loving union of natures in Christ and of persons in The Trinity are the example of the type of union man is called upon. Imitatio Christi is an invitation to be what we were meant to be – the children of God – and an invitation to love and communion. The capacity of loving is commune to God and man and it is the basis for their communion. The coming of Christ is an act of love and an example of love. Love is, thus, the means through which man can exercise his similarity of God. Love is the main virtue of Christianity. It is the virtue through which all other virtues are possible (Catholic Catechism). Saint John Golden Mouth described love as the source of all virtues. The love of God and that of the Neighbour are fundamental commandments in Christianity. Christ explained the love of God as connected to that of the Neighbour, so the first commandment of loving God is completed with the commandment of loving the Neighbour as oneself (Catholic Catechism). This type of communion between the self and the other can only be understood through an anthropological conception that places love at the basis of man's creation. That who does not love the other, is incapable of loving oneself and incapable of being happy.

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Love ensures the intrinsic motivation for ethic. Love itself makes the one who loves happy, according to Saint John Golden Mouth. Love is also the only valid motivation. The motivation of doing good and being virtuous in order to ensure access to Eternal Life (to Paradise) is not a valid one. Happiness is obtainable only by achieve that perfection of the human nature indicated by Christ, meaning that only love is the key to eternal happiness. Happiness is love, meaning it is a way of relating to the others. The Italian expression for loving, ti voglio bene, offers the example of putting the other's welfare as a priority for one's will. Through love, a mystical transphere of happiness occurs, as when the loved one is happy, so is the one who loves, despite anything else. Self-sacrifice is, thus, empowered by love. The characteristics of love have been best described by Saint Paul in the First Letter to The Corinthians: "love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things; love never fails".

Love pertains to the paradox, but so do most Christian values, especially those contained by the blessings named by Christ. In Christianity, happiness is what the man was made for (Dumnea, 2003). The blessings refer the modes of happiness accessible to man during the lifetime. The term blessing was translated in some languages (Romanian, too) by the term "happiness". The first blessing (Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven) refers to a certain state of mind of peace and also to finding happiness by possessing inner riches. The second blessing (Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted) reveals the possibility of happiness within accepting sufferance as an occasion of perfecting oneself. The third one (Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth) refers not to the power deprivation, but to the endurance and non-violence, to the peaceful behaviour and to the possibility of loving even the one who is an enemy. The forth blessing (Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after justice; for they shall be filled) refers to the spiritual hunger of God. This blessing does not imply not leading a normal life, on the contrary, it implies receiving God's gifts and His holiness. The fifth one, (Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy) refers to the love of God and to that of our neighbour. One can not love God in the absence of the love of neighbour and the other way around. The sixth blessing (Blessed are the pure in heart ; for they shall see God) refers to the inner dimension, that of personal choice. The choice of ridding the way to salvation is the choice of the pure of heart. The way to God is not that of reason, it is that of the heart. The pure of heart need not wait the afterlife for contemplating God and being, therefore, happy. The seventh blessing (Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God) accentuates the importance of love and communion and offers the hope for such a communion between people. Love is the only thing setting apart good and evil. The eight blessing (Blessed are they which are persecuted for the sake of justice; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven) refers to the persecution endured in the name of justice and to the gift received by all those that continue having a just behaviour, despite their persecution. This is the case of the martyrs that described a state of happiness in the most unbelievable circumstances, even in those of physical pain (Dumnea, 2003).

None of the blessings are possible in the absence of love. The blessings indicate both individual happiness and social happiness. Not only man can perfect his similarity with God

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through virtue, but the entire society could be, as Saint Maximus indicated, shaped through love with the relational model of the Trinity (Schönborn, 1994). Saint John Golden Mouth invites us to imagine a world full of love, with no wrong, no war. It would be a Paradise way of life. Paradise is actually possible here, on Earth, since happiness is a matter of choice and behaviour.

4. Discussion

Both Aristotle and Christian Religion place at the centre of man's nature the ethical dimension. Happiness is an ideal, not in the sense that reality opposes it, but in the sense that it can be achieved and it should be achieved. Happiness is a project that man can undertake in order to fulfil its own potential and this project is of an ethical nature.

In the two perspectives we viewed, human essence was in fact a divine essence. The common bridge between man and god was that of love. The loving behaviour (towards self, towards the kin and towards god, all of which are synonyms) that man should display in order to achieve happiness is moulded by god's loving behaviour itself.

According to Aristotle, man's godhood consists of his possibility of being virtuous, because it is the divine part in a man (*nous*) that makes virtue possible. Happiness comes from exercising virtue. A reasonable and virtuous man would know how to live his life at its best. Of course, many obstacles are independent of a man's will. But a man may prove practical wisdom in relating to those problems. On the one hand, this means the use of man's divine faculty and, on the other hand, this means to experience happiness. Happiness is both a social and a private affair. A man's happiness is influenced on how many of his kin proof virtuous behaviour, starting with the political leaders. The more virtuous are the members of a community, the happier they may be, but this is not a *sine qua non* condition for happiness. It is not necessary that all people are virtuous for one to be happy, one's love of virtue is enough. Contemplation (the highest form of moral activity through which man can grasp the virtue and perfection of god) is a self-sufficient activity and, therefore, the bringer of happiness on its own. But it is true that virtuous behaviour increases the quality of life in a community. Thus, virtue is firstly a duty towards oneself to act 'as programmed' and be happy. The virtuous behaviour within a community is a consequence of one's virtue and the life within the community is a priceless occasion to exercise virtuous behaviour and achieve happiness. On the one hand, ethics is the way to achieve happiness and, on the other hand, happiness means having an ethical behaviour.

In Christian religion, man's resemblance to God is through the virtue of love. Only through love is happiness achievable during this life time. Man is created in God's Image and Resemblance and the divine part of man is love. Love is man's aptitude to commune with God and the others according to The Holy Trinity model. Man's behaviour as *Imitatio Christi* (God's living Icon) is the virtuous acts one should engage in, in order to achieve happiness. Happiness is possible despite all obstacles, since the reward of one's actions is an inner one. Happiness is possible here, on Earth. There is, of course, a heavenly reward awaiting the righteous (the virtuous) on the afterlife, but one's actions are of no ethical value if made in the hope of a gain, in this life or in the other. Love (of God, of the good and of virtue) is the key to happiness. It is the feeling experienced in contemplating God and also the feeling experienced in every virtuous act. The virtuous behaviour contributes to the prosperity of the

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community, which ultimately means that love is the key to experience the communion within the community. The ethical behaviour of someone is in fact the love of self (of the divine self). It is, ultimately, a love of God, a love which He shares.

This is the main difference between Aristotle and Christianism that interests the purpose of our paper. For Aristotle, exercising *nous* meant discovering the divine part within, being as close to godhood (and perfection) as possible. Although God is virtue, the love of virtue is 'the more important part' of the equation, as it means behaving like the god within. All love is mediated by virtue and is a love of virtue. God himself loves man only in relation to the extent man achieves virtue, meaning to the extent man makes good use of his divine gifts.

In Christianism, the love of God is the more important part of the equation. The Christian God is a God that responds one's love. He responds not only to those who love Him – to the virtuous – but also to the non-virtuous. God loves not the lack of virtue, the lack of love or the loss of the resemblance, but He loves despite all those things, despite reciprocity, God loves the being in an absolute manner. In fact, God loves man since he created him. The creation was an act of love and that love is endless. It is in fact man the one who may or may not love God. This unconditioned love of God is the authentic love, the archetype of love. God expects nothing in return for His love. It is this love of God (more than the love of virtue) that gives the power of enduring all obstacles. Ethically speaking, one could even fall in the temptation of trading with love. If love is the condition of virtuous behaviour (and this is the case for Aristotle and the Christians) it is so because love means treasuring the other, putting his own welfare first. The satisfaction comes not from the reciprocity of love, but form the welfare of the loved one. Similarly, the love of virtue allows one to achieve happiness from the fulfilling of virtue more than form the consequences of the virtuous acts. Loving the Christian God is easier because reciprocity exits. A Christian should be sensible enough not to love God because he is loved by God, but despite God's love. It is only then when man could find his inner resemblance to God: the capacity to love unconditionally, independently of virtue itself.

In both perspectives, individual happiness is a matter of godhood and fulfilment of potential, meaning becoming aware of the divine essence. Ethics is not a set of recommendations one could learn in order to achieve happiness, it is the behaviour of a person that experiences happiness in virtuous acts. Happiness may only come from engaging in those actions that are self rewarding and self sufficient. The key to happiness is love. In the Aristotelian perspective, it is the love of virtue that makes happiness possible. In Christianism, too, love is the source of all virtues. Virtue (and the love of virtue) is the divine part of man for Aristotle. Very similarly, for the Christians love offers a model of virtuous behaviour; love is the divine part of man.

Eudaimonia and *ethics* are synonymous in the above discussed perspectives, *via* a supposedly divine part of man. But what if there was no God? One could talk about an atheist ethics staring Aristotle. One's potential could still be achieved by developing one's superior faculties. With or without God, for man those faculties are still connected to the virtuous behaviour. One could still exercise *phronesis*. There is an old Rumanian saying 'a fi cumpătat'. This means to prove a sense of measure, to make sensible choices and to avoid excess in order to have a balanced life. If one does so, one is considered to be wise. This may

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very well sum up Aristotle's teachings in regard to the benefits of moderation. In his perspective, happiness is what man can experience here, on Earth. If god did not exist, one could still be interested in his own welfare and in that of all living things and call it 'putting reason and wisdom to good use.' In this case, being virtuous would have more to do with discovering and fulfilling one's potential, may those faculty be of divine nature or not.

But what would be the case of Christians? It undoubtedly seems contradictory to discuss about a Christian ethics in the absence of God. Maybe it would not seem this way anymore, if we were to analyse the Christian meaning of love. God's intention is not for man to be virtuous in order to offer him happiness as a reward. God desires that man be happy. It is true that man cannot be happy if he sins. The sinner punishes himself with unhappiness, because the punishment is within the crime: with every sin man loses his resemblance to God. Man can only be happy through love (of God, of self, of his kin – themselves divine creations). Suppose now that God does not exist. Would man have no chance to happiness? Could man not love anymore? Is man's love conditioned by their divine origins? The answer is that man should still be able to love. We described true love as being unconditioned. What would change if God did not exist? God would no longer be present to love man back. Since true love comes with no bound to reciprocity, with no quest of reward, it is faire to suppose that man could still love and could still be virtuous and happy. This could be another interpretation of Voltaire's famous saying "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him".

In conclusion, according to both Aristotle and the Christians, the condition for achieving happiness is authentic love. It is on this noble feeling that ethics as a loving course of action relies on, and this happens independently of a divine nature of man. If any relation to divinity is to be found here, it is the ideal of divine love. Only such a love would be strong enough to bring happiness to the one who experiences it. In the same time, cultivating selfless love would mean cultivating one's self and becoming a better self. This view is not atheist, but deictic. Doubting the existence of God has had in this paper the methodological value of testing one's capacity to love, in the absence of which there can be no ethics and no *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* means, etymologically, 'good spirit'. According to our perspective, *eudaimonia* means having the spirit of love.

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