Acta Bioethica 2023; 29(2): 147-163

RELIGIOUS MORALITY, SECULAR MORALITY AND THE SEARCH FOR MORAL RELATIVISM IN THE WEST

Gilvana de Jesus do Vale Campos[1], Alessandre Gomes de Lima[2], Stela Marcos de Almeida Neves Barbas[3]

Abstract: This work aims to characterize religious and secular moralities in the West from a critical-diachronic point of view, seeking to identify spaces that cover moral relativism in solving complex bioethics issues. Concerns such as the destination of surplus embryos, for instance, usually raise polarized positionings without consensual solutions. With the presuppositions introduced on western culture through several events, mainly the principle of laicity, the view of morality widened. This work is reflexive, meta-ethical, with an interdisciplinary approach. It is a national and international literature review regarding the main points on religious and secular morality. We concluded that the present moral overview certainly includes moral relativism based on essential morality, one which can be represented by moral strangers and moral friends.

Keywords: moral codes, religious morality, secular morality.

Moral religiosa, moral laica y la búsqueda del relativismo moral en Occidente

Resumen: Este trabajo pretende caracterizar las moralidades religiosa y laica en Occidente desde un punto de vista crítico-diacrónico, buscando identificar espacios que abarquen el relativismo moral en la resolución de cuestiones complejas de bioética. Preocupaciones como el destino de los embriones sobrantes, por ejemplo, suelen suscitar posiciones polarizadas, sin soluciones consensuadas. Con los presupuestos introducidos en la cultura occidental a través de diversos acontecimientos, principalmente el principio de laicidad, se amplió la visión de la moral. Este trabajo es reflexivo, meta-ético, con abordaje interdisciplinario. Se trata de una revisión bibliográfica nacional e internacional sobre los principales puntos de la moral religiosa y laica. Concluimos que el panorama moral actual ciertamente incluye el relativismo moral basado en la moralidad esencial, que puede ser representada por extraños morales y amigos morales.

Palabras clave: códigos morales, moral religiosa, moral secular

Moralidade religiosa, moralidade secular e a busca por um relativismo moral no Ocidente

Resumo: Esse trabalha objetiva caracterizar moralidades religiosas e secular no Ocidente desde um ponto de vista crítico-diacrônico, buscando identificar espaços que cubram o relativismo moral ao solucionar temas bioéticos complexos. Preocupações tais como a destinação de embriões excedentes, por exemplo, habitualmente levantam posicionamentos polarizados sem soluções consensuais. Com os pressupostos introduzidos na cultura ocidental através de diversos acontecimentos, principalmente o princípio da laicidade, a visão da moralidade foi ampliada. Esse trabalho é reflexivo, meta-ético, com uma abordagem interdisciplinar. É uma revisão da literatura nacional e internacional a respeito dos pontos principais sobre a moralidade religiosa e secular. Nós concluímos que a atual visão geral da moral certamente inclui o relativismo moral baseado na moralidade essencial, que pode ser representada por estranhos morais e amigos morais.

Palavras chave: códigos morais, moralidade religiosa, moralidade secular

[1] National Association of Occupational Medicine. Brazilian Association of Forensic Medicine and Medical Expertise. Subsecretariat for Occupational Safety and Health (SUBSAUDE-DF). Lawyer and Post-Graduate in Public Law. PhD student in Bioethics at the Faculty of Medicine of Porto (Portugal) in partnership with the Federal Council of Medicine, gilvalecampos@hotmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9074-4203.

[2] Universidade Federal do Acre, Brasil. Centro Universitário Uninorte, Brasil, alessandregomes@hotmail.com, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2030-1586.

[3] Autonomous University of Lisbon (UAL). Law Faculty of the University of Coimbra. Doctoral Program of Porto School of Medicine in partnership with with the Brazilian Federal Council of Medicine, Portugal, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8488-3669.

Introduction

The debate over what is from nature and what is a result of social conventions in humankind's life is old and involves, to a large extent, the understanding of *physis* and *nomos*, which meanings were used in different ways through classical antiquity, including an idea of an opposition between them*(1)*. The *physis* was acknowledged as the "nature, human nature. . . . a source of values and, therefore, in itself, somehow prescriptive." And through *nomos*, "people believed in gods and recognized a distinction between things that are right and things that are wrong. . . .*Nomos* would be the law, the convention or the usual"*(2:189-191)*.

From the perspective of this "opposition", the sophists investigated the morality as to its origin: would it be a subject of nature (*physis*) or convention (*nomos*)?*(1)*. It is still occasionally questioned if: is the moral born with humankind or is it acquired? Does it integrate their mental/emotional structure, or do humans become aware of themselves as moral beings through learning?*(3)*.

The interest in the subject is broad and some of the answers, more formally or not, are denotative of how it has been understood over time: "The moral is acquired as a result of habit, whence its name came to be through a small modification of this same word [habit]"*(4:27)*. "The moral (…) has influence over actions and affections, it follows that [it] alone cannot be derived from reason because the reason alone (…) can never have such influence. The moral awakens passions and either produces or prevents actions. Reason, by itself, is entirely powerless in this regard"*(5:497)*. "The moral is something historical and psychological, not the attribute of some innate essence of humankind as the categorical imperative"*(3:8)*. The moral is compared to language, which is also regarded as both innate and acquired. Innate are the inner mechanisms of one's processing or the field to its development. Acquired are the unfolding of one's assimilation on a process of construction, reform and adaptation, demolition and retouching ever continuous*(6)*.

With its *physis* alongside the *nomos*, humankind discovers themselves and builds themselves while interacting with the world. That happens due to their perception ability, which is broader and more valuable than the five senses. The perception organizes the "raw data of the hetero-consciousness", modifies the cognitive structure gradually, and develops self-consciousness. In the organization, in face of the multiform of the outside of one's body, their perceptive relation highlights itself through reciprocity with living objects: "I act on the living world, and the living world acts on me; I affect the world's ways of living, and the world affects my way of living, being, and staying in life"*(7:2)*. Cognitively, one involves themselves in this outside culture whose symbols are representations set up by intelligence. Such involvement activates the brain and generates internal stimuli that produces diverse and complex answers to facts. In the self-consciousness, a field of reflexivity, evaluations are elaborated and personal decisions that lead to actions are made*(7)*. The self-consciousness is the human way to represent the dual aspect that constitutes their nature, simultaneously, individual and social*(8)*.

When it comes to shared life, it is possible to recognize a social structure within it. Society only sets itself when it enters the individual consciousness, shaping them*(10)*. All of it is justified because society is only constituted when it permeates the individual consciences, shaping them. Therefore, from a conservative point of view, it is possible to argue that some of the various mental states of an individual, principally the most essential ones, have a "social origin". Here is the whole that constitutes the part, being impossible to explain the whole "without explaining the part", even as an aftereffect*(10)*.

The continuity of social structure, like that of organizational structure, does not fall apart with the changes in units (or individuals). It is possible due to the process of social living, represented by the interactions between individuals and groups alongside their activities. So much so that some can exclude themselves from social life for any reason just as others can enter it, but the structure remains. Thus, life in society can be perceived as the "functioning of social structure", which contributes to the respective continuity through recurring functions and activities, such as punishment of crimes, for instance*(9)*.

In the relationship between the individual and this structure, their intelligence and actions are presented differently: respectively, on one hand there is conceptual thoughts and selfish desires that are directed only to oneself; on the other hand, there are moral actions with impersonal purpose, recognized "through the signal that all rules of behavior to which one obeys, are probably universalizing"*(10:36)*. The moral is one of the maintaining functions of the social structure and a regulating force of behavior by means of codes. Whenever a behavioral problem arises, its judgment is made in the light of the prescriptions regulated in the moral code embraced by the society in which it occurs. It is the case of problems that are related to the Bioethics field and that also bring to light the discussion between moral and morality.

The objective of this work is to characterize the religious and secular moralities in the West from a critical-diachronic point of view, seeking to identify spaces that cover moral relativism in solving complex bioethics issues, such as the destination of supernumerary embryos. It is a meta-ethical study in which morality evaluations can focus on other means, according to the problem's nature and its social implications, many of which arise polarized positionings. To Durkheim*(11)*, morality rules set a "fundamental notion" that applies to specific conditions of life and can be diversified according to the situation and the circumstances that involve it. Aristotle*(4:53)* explains that "the exercise of virtue concerns the means" or finding a path that reaches the most appropriate solution without losing sight of the guiding principle. The proposed criticality does not refer to the deconstruction of images or moral prescriptions but rather the examination of the founding conditions of occidental morality. According to Silva*(12)*, practical considerations must have moral objectivity as its central point and always require illuminating references in areas that involve human life.

Methodologically, it was made a literature review with an interdisciplinary approach, given that this theme is common to a plurality of disciplines (Bioethics, Anthropology, Theology, Philosophy, Psychology, and Sociology). With the approximation of the respective contents, one escapes from the "casual abbreviation" of the moral aspects of the problem, usually limited to the view of their environment, class, and beliefs*(13)*. The disciplines were sorted by intersection practice, that is, when there is no "central discipline" that uses "elements of other disciplines in its favor, but rather problems that, having its origin in a discipline [bioethical problems], radiate to others"*(14:9)*. Relevant authors and classical texts of each area were consulted at a national and international level and amongst them, the inspiring text of the philosopher and historian Antonio Ferreira Paim.

Humankind: the individual, the collective and the moral building

The moral is something constituent of society, the result of evaluations about the acceptance and disapproval of customs reflected in actions. It is a necessary institution, for it is impossible to have life in society without leading rules of behavior to be followed by its members*(15)*, which are its fundamental units. Since the human being becomes historical insofar as self-produces, the moral also permeates this process, becoming equally historical*(16)*.

The moral emerged with the change from ways of living in nature to a life of social living. Over the centuries, factors such as work and its social division, the increase of productivity, and the emergence of private property allowed the rise of new organizations of the production activities and, with them, the rise of other relationships. In this broad context of culture, with the historical and social progress and its resulting change in the production methods, with the preponderance of the labor relationships and the collective sense in culture, the moral became essential to ensure the correspondence between the individual behavior and the collective interests. If on one hand the historical and social progress was neither free nor conscious, on the other hand, the moral progress must be evaluated regarding the criteria: an extension to situations without a solution yet, contribution to the consciousness related to individual and group behavior, and the level of harmonization between personal and collective interests*(16)*.

Two observational focuses of moral emerge from this: as an institution and as behaviors resul-

ted from it. The first one lies on the normative, ideal plan and forms the set of values, principles, and requirements valid for a given society; it is the moral as a code. The second one lies on the fact-based plan and represents the behaviors that materialize these principles and prescriptions in social relationships; it is the morality*(17)*. In fact, the moral is often referred to as ethic due to their shared axiological basis. However, the moral distinguishes itself form ethic as a study of "morality within its essence, as an individual and social venture (…) Unlike the practic-moral problems, the ethical ones are characterized by their generality"*(16:10-17)*.

From the pragmatic point of view, rules are established as borders between what one must do and what one must not do. They form the "founding roots of human expression" in its finiteness and do not restrict to codes; "they transcend the scope of human life on the individual dimension, demarcating in time the spaces and forms of relationships between the members of a group"*(18:110)* and the search for solutions to morally complex problems that extrapolates those codes.

On the individual dimension and in the fact-based plan, the moral has an important function in the formation of humans, especially in the development of the notion of justice, concern with one another, and observation of cultural norms that lead the social behavior*(19)*. Therefore, works about the moral and its development cover multiples areas and associations.

The researches of Kohlberg*(20)*, for instance, associated the moral to cognition, having as its central point the idea that the development provides changes in the cognitive structures. The moral of an individual develops through stages just like their cognition: on the first and second stages, pre-conventional, their judgment over what is right or wrong relies only on one's interests; on the third and fourth stages, their moral actions rely on conventional social norms; on the fifth and sixth stages, their actions rely on moral principles of universal value, especially equality and reciprocity. Moral principles are more important than social norms.

Psychology researches, for its part, have been using moral judgments to evaluate the relationship between cognitive and emotional processes and decision-making in morally complex topics. Affirmative answers to complex and difficult-to-solve problems may be considered functional, that is, as having some usefulness to the majority. They can be viewed according to the utilitarian principle of Stuart Mill's moral philosophy. In parallel, negative answers may be considered non-utilitarian upon evaluation of an action's characteristics instead of its effects. They can be associated with Kant's principle of deontology*(19)*.

Under Mill's philosophy, according to his utilitarianism (scope of positive answers), "every properly raised human being shows that, in varying degrees, both genuine private affections and a sincere interest for the public good are possible"*(21:198)*. However, to have a correspondence between individual interest and collective interest it is necessary that the social and legal instruments stimulate the harmony between them and that opinion and education seek to create in each individual an indissociable bond between one's happiness and the collective good. Mill explains that human actions have a purpose, an interest, which must be explicitly identified and the first thing to be pursued. The rules that regulate these actions must be based on what is aimed to be achieved, obeying its character. The actions will be good if aimed to the largest number of people and seek their well-being*(21)*. In summary, the individual absorbs values from the environment in which they live and act according to them, reflecting their morality. However, when their values are not in accordance to a specific situation, moral problems set and personal moral judgment arises. The individual reflects about the acquired values and sorts them in another hierarchy, enabling the development of different reasonings about norms and imposed moral explanations*(20)*.

About the Kantian deontology (scope of negative answers), its principle relies on the notion of rational individual and the motivation of moral attitude. The actions must attend to what is morally necessary, avoiding deductions based on empirical demonstrations. They must not depend on how its effects will be perceived nor on whether its legitimacy will be confirmed or not*(22)*. Kant highlights moral's metaphysics, which investiga-

tes the principles of pure desire and not the actions and the conditions of the desire in general. The moral's metaphysic is essential not only to the investigation of practical principles which rule the reasons for acting and are found, *a priori*, on the individual judgment. They are also essential because the moral principles themselves are subjected to corruption if "the thread and the supreme norm of a correct judgment" are lacking to the guidance of the action (Kant, 1785/2002: 5). It is not enough that an action follows the moral rule; it also needs to be performed because of this rule at the risk of becoming only contingent and precarious. "The non-moral field produces legal actions, but also produces, more frequently, actions against the rule"*(23:6)*.

Based on both Mill's utilitarianism and Kant's deontology, we concluded that the "conscious self" is not indifferent to any perception because ever since "the first stages of development (…) all contents archived have nuances between the absolute positive or negative"*(7:2)*. We also concluded that between the normative and the empirical, both fact-based, it is possible to inquire behavior proposals based solely on studies about normative morals, set on beliefs or codes relative to a given culture*(24)*.

The justification of moral principles must be made based on reason, whose exercise regards the ends and its respective questions, in addition to the phenomena classifications and the explanations based on beliefs and norms previously established. Examining the core of principles can assure fairer and more adequate moral judgments*(24)*.

The problem with moral judgment is not on the formulation of judgment itself but on the elements that ground it*(15)*. Moral judgments often focus on the notions of good or bad, which implies a value judgment*(3)*. In the relationship between good/bad, Nietzsche*(25)* criticizes the association between the concept of good (and of bad) to moral genealogy, explaining that the concept meaning of evaluating actions had grown apart from its origin. At first, non-selfish actions were judged good by their beneficiaries. Afterwards, this recognition was forgotten and these same actions, for they have always been perceived as good, began to be considered as good within themselves, in a judgment that came from its doers, greater in power and thought. "There we have 'the utility,' 'the oblivion,' 'the habit,' and, lastly, 'the error,' everything serving as a basis to an evaluation"*(25:18-19)*. The habit (repetition) makes many actions or ways of acting acquire "a consistency which precipitates and isolate them from particular events that reflect them. . . .They not only are on us but also, as a product of repeated experiences, obtain, from repetition. . . .a kind of rise and authority"*(11:19)*.

The codes of behavior have an important role in the acquisition of moral habits. Knowing from its origins to its systematization is essential to visualize the basis and conditions of its creation and comprehend its evolution and what it represents as the final result of the individual and social moral life.

Moral Codes: development and prospects

The effort to set norms that could contribute to the survival of the human groups in a cohesive manner was "unimaginable", as the codification of customs was a late event in humankind's evolution. Before the written codes, the transmission and maintenance of knowledge and customs were widely made through oral tradition*(15:158)* in societies without any written language.

The societies without a written language are characterized by having been numerous and considered the customs as a normative source. All that was lived traditionally became a rule and should be followed by everyone. According to Lima*(26)*, these societies held just the memory as a resource to retain and transmit the representation of what was important to them. Amid dramatization and multiples narratives, the spoken messages were emitted and received at the same time and in the same place. Both emitter and receiver lived in the same historical-political-geographic context, sharing semantical meanings and significances alike.

In these societies, the moral and juridical rules were part of religion in a highly tangled way, so much that it was hard to dissociate one from the other*(27)*. The solely oral system of transmission of these customs remained in force until writing arrived in its multiple forms. When these socie-

ties started to count with symbols to express their ideas and norms—like the Sumerian's cuneiform script (around 3.000 B.C.)—these norms and ideas were adopted by people of different linguistic families and different semantics. Between 4,000 and 2,000 B.C., due to the social, technical and political advancements in different parts of the world, writing came into being with Phoenician's alphabet representation and Greek supplementation*(28)*. As a result, there was the creation of comprehensive legal systems and norms – known as codes: Urukagina Code, from 2,380 to 2,360 b.C.; The Code of Ur-Nammu, from 2,050 b.C.; Laws of Eshnunna, from 1,930 b.C. and some others, which had influences amongst one another. The Ur-Nammu code, for instance, influenced the Laws of Eshnunna, and them both influenced the Hammurabi Code (from 1,790 b.C.), that is one of the most well-knowns in present days. Wolkmer summarizes: "In ancient societies, boths codes and laws were expressions of the divine will, disclosed through the imposition of a legislator – administrators, who had dynastic privileges and a legitimacy guaranteed by the priestly house" (29:4). Hammurabi's Code mystical model of elaboration "can also be ascertained in the Old Testament"*(18:109)*.

This notions lead us to reflect on the origin of written moral codes, in regard to the costumes that would arise in each society and the ones that were adopted when the oral form of transmission was replaced by the written one. The influences amidst the codes may have led to choices, amplification or overlapping of the rules of conduct that commenced to guide societies by means of written codes. There is also the semantic matter, which leads to different interpretations of the norms according to the linguistic branch each society has and without the appropriate diachronic perspective. Durkheim*(10)* explains that concepts are represented by refined feelings and words and address a "plurality of men". But since the particular vocabulary and grammar represent a collectivity of those who adopt it, usually the images suggested by them are not likely to find correspondence outside this community.

These aspects can represent part of the difficulties in reassembling the course of morality, especially when there are no religious references, according to Paim*(15)*. Science materials, such as anthropology (about the human especies and heredity) and archeology (about languages et cetera), work as evidence about peoples' past and can be as important as writing in this retrieval. However, one of the most difficult aspects is to identify "where to start the story (…) There are deep continuities between western mythification of remote populations and that of distant ancestors"*(30:15)*.

As literate societies succeeded each other, they distanced themselves from the illiterate ones, also because they recognized the necessity of maintaining rules of conduct for their intergenerational reproduction. They have established the understanding that it was not enough for mankind to know about wrong and right and decide how to act. It was necessary to establish limits and punishments to coordinate the relations between them. It was necessary to develop codes "to improve the relationship between the individuals of collectivity"*(18:109)*.

Simultaneously, the characteristics of morality and its principles acquired different directions and features from East to West. The first one developed more theorizations than the second, which facilitated a clearer observation of theoretical problems. The second one has had the determination of Judeo-Christian Morality as its final historical destination. In the West, as a rule, morality is composed of "a basic nucleus" which hs been enriched since the appearance of the Decalogue: the ideal human being*(15)*.

Theoretically, morality represents a set of rules of conduct that applies to a specific period. From the praxis perspective, morality can be understood as an "agreement between the conscience, a judge, and established precepts"*(15:163)*, but it does not imply the possibility of another morality being developed. From a sociological point of view, morality is important for religious reasons as well as for convention. Religious reasons are explained by the holy, and convention, which concerns traditions, represents whether they are approved or not by the closest social circles. Traditions are developed from the behavioural regularity and by the lack of consideration regarding them, and they are kept and ratified by tradition*(15)*.

Religious Morality in the West

The homo religiosus

The encyclical letter *Fides et ratio(31:5)* from John Paul II about the relationship between faith and reason, asserts that "Man seeks, by nature, for the truth. And this seeking does not concern only the achievement of partial truths, whether physic or scientific; it does not only seek for true goodness in each of their decisions. But their seeking leads to a superior truth, a truth that is able to explain the meaning of life; it is, therefore, something that can reach no other thing but the resolute (…) The ability and decision to trust their own being and existence to somebody else implies, undoubtedly, one of the most anthropologically meaningful and expressive acts".

From this perspective, in regard to the general seeking for truth, knowledge is the main way through which humankind tries to understand reality and build it in their minds, using images and ideas. Since reality is made up by different structures and levels, knowledge will be acquired, cognitively, in different forms and by different degrees, through diversed experiences. For instance: scientific knowledge provides a rational perspective of facts, and an objective and careful analysis of its causes; it is systematized. Philosophical knowledge aims to identify meaning in an implied reality, not perceptible through senses and beyond experience; it is systematized. Theological knowledge has God as the focus and perceives beings to the divine light; it is systematized. And popular or empirical knowledge comes from experience, it encompasses everyone and is not systematized*(32)*. As for the particular search of a truth that explains the meaning of life, which leads to the resolute, we infer that the theological and empirical knowledges are responsible for the creation and establishment of the religious man, as well as the representations they absorb or embrace. That happens, respectively, due to its foundation and the ancient way in which knowledge is transmitted.

In their being in the world as a human organism, an individual's condition per se is characterized by a "congenital instability", and their relation with the world is not previously established as well. This makes their existence a persistent search for balance in face of the inherent instability and cultural imperative of stability. "They produce language and therefrom [create] a series of symbols that pervade every single aspect of their life"*(33:19)*. From there arises the notion of sacred, which is understood as something different from mankind and perceived by them as an "immensely powerful reality". Even though it is different from them, it refers and relates to them in a distinct manner from the one that is developed with other phenomena. The sacred guides their reality, establishing a certain order to their life and bestowing it with purpose. The sacred can be expressed in different ways, but it is possible to notice some cross-cultural uniformities*(33)*. According to Eliade*(34)*, sacredness revelations are quintessential to address a remote religious past as well as to resist the historical innovations.

Theoretically, it can be understood as a category *a priori* from the human experience, which is to say, it is placed in the human spirit as its primary origin and it is prompted from that experience. It has a specific element that goes beyond rationality (the unmentionable) and a conceptual designation (the unspeakable). In general, the term "sacred" is seen as an essentially moral and completely good attribute, but, in its etymological meaning, *heilig* (sacred/holy) means "saint" and, in many languages, it was learnt as "something else". Since it is an entirely *sui generis* category, it cannot be strictly defined as primary and fundamental datum*(35)*. "Saint (or sacred/holy) is an explanatory and evaluative category that comes from, and presents itself, *exclusively* in the religious scope (…) as its basis and medulla", explain Borau*(36:35)*, from Comunidade Ecumênica Horeb - Barcelona (Spain). (*emphasis added*).

Sacred/Holy can only be explained by the feeling provided by the psyche, which can be "proposed" from descriptions of similar or opposite feelings or by means of symbolic terms. There is a primary feeling, related to a certain object, which arouses a "feeling of creature" –of nullity before what is above it–, as if the second one was a reflection of the first*(35)*. Matos*(37)* explains that the empirical knowledge comes from the censorial experiences, because there's a subjective ability already.

Not only mankind is "naturally religious", but the relationships develop from religion's interference. Society's culture works as the interlocutor of these relationships through values, symbolisms and norms that are socially shared*(32)*. Society is a construction, and religion takes a prominent position in it*(33)*. As a system of traditional and systematized symbols, religion contributes to the development of religious individual attitudes. Every culture, at any level and in different degrees, at different times and geographical spaces, have kept forms of religion and were strongly affected by them (32). The religious belief and experience of sacred are not exclusive to primitive religions, nor to the exotic ones. According to Christianism, this experience presents itself in different forms, both in the individual and collective spheres, and fosters twists and "institutional simplifications"*(38)*. According to Turner*(39:185)* "the holy canopies provide a *nomos* to the communities, a feeling of order, a chain of significances where specific moral norms are intertwined by the cosmos' fabric itself".

To sum up, mankind wanted to evolve from the natural level that they were at, striving to reach a religious ideal of humanity in which it is possible to identify the multiple ethics that evolved societies have developed over the centuries. Regardless of the historical period and its context, this individual, the *homo religiosus*, is the one from traditional societies, the one that is maintained by religious values and beliefs. It believes in the existence of an "absolute reality", in the holy origin of life and in the idea that their existence, being a religious one, enables them to fulfill their potentialities. "Embraces a specific way of existing in the world, and, besides the great amount of historic-religious forms, this specific way is always recognizable"*(34:97)*. Great part of the attitudes they have taken in archaic societies have contributed to the individual becoming what it is today and has not disappeared entirely. There are lots of historical ways of being religious, and all of them are recognizable.

From this point of view, *homo religiosus* would not accept any level of moral relativism in the seek for resolution to complex moral questions, supported by Christian theology that not only sponsored (and still sponsors) human cultural composition, but also transposed to the Judeo-Christian code the Jewish notions of God, the Creator and Father or Jesus, and their wisdom*(40)*.

The Judeo-Christian Code

Many codes contemplating diverse cultural traditions arose, and among them the Judeo-Christian code. Moses presented the Decalogue of God's Law, which served as the basis for the first moment of building the Christian morality, an essential dimension to human life, side-by-side with religion. The fundamental text is Deuteronomy, one of Moses' five books that compose the Old Testament, the Torah for the Jews. The way in which Deuteronomy is known was only passed along in the 5th century BC. In Christian tradition, one important text is the Sermon on the Mount, part of the first gospel in the New Testament*(15)*.

The second moment of building of the Judeo-Christian morality was that of the Greek intervention. In the Jewish tradition, based on the Old Testament, the moral was represented by normatives dictated directly by the deities. The Greeks, on the other hand, had an autonomous idea about one's moral conduct, worrying about the limits of the areas in one's life. They called ethics the concepts of morality*(15)* and philosophers gave their contributions in this sense. Aristotle*(4)*, for example, defined ethics as the "science of praxis" and virtue as an achievement, not an obligation. Humans' actions should be analyzed based on its principles, means and purposes.

Christianism brought closer these traditions previously known as Jewish and Greek. Christian preachings were based on the notion of the ideal person, represented by the ideas of perfection (responsibility, love of neighbor, and others) that made mankind virtuous. Despite some of these ideas being present also among the Greek, they were centered on mankind as citizens, verifying what made them stand out. The approaching of these traditions demanded a theoretical construction that eliminated chiefly the autonomy of the moral and the naturalistic and hedonistic aspects of the Greek tradition. Moral should completely submit to religious principles, linked to the ideal of the human person or ideal person or virtuous

person. Reaching virtue was essential to the salvation after death*(15)*.

The Christian theology that based the Judeo-Christian code has its origins directly linked to Jewish and Christian testimonial texts from many sources: Christian reworks/modifications in Jewish texts or "deuterocanonical books"; Christian apocryphal texts with a sort of Judeo-Christian syncretism of evangelical knowledge; works that described "the life of the Judeo-Christian Church in worship, in morals, in ascesis, in catechetical teaching"*(40:88)*; testimonies concerning the Judeo-Christian Church, such as the Epistle of Barnabas; letters from Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome and, to a lesser extent, some oral traditions considered presbyters. This theology also made the link between the Christian testament in formation and the Greek theology, which had pagan contrapositions to Christianity. "The historic circumstance of Christian theologists. . . .having their schools in the vicinity of the Hellenistic philosophers created conditions for a more accurate elaboration of Christian theology from the point of view of the reciprocal implication between biblical faith and Greek reason"*(40:89)*.

From the theoretical point of view, the Judeo-Christian code is objective, while moral is subjective, and these conditions produce tension for the human existance. The objective condition constitutes the precepts that apply to everyone, and the subjective condition represents the adoption of these concepts as law and their personal coercion*(15)*. Coercion is explained as an obstacle to the realization of will. If the use of personal freedom goes against the freedom established by the universal law, coercion will oppose the former in backing of the latter*(22)*. The continuous coercion ends up going unnoticed, meaning that, little by little, the habit (of what was coerced) was installed, rendering inefficient the inner tendency*(11)*. The ideal of the human person is the basic core for both conditions, and its vision may diverge only regarding the ways of fundamentation, that is, if the ideal will limit itself to the Christian revelations or if rational features can be added to it. Eventual negation of the morality relative to these conditions does not mean disregarding the ideal of the human person, as their benefits are relatively known*(15)*.

The human person ideal that serves as a "prototype" in the Code was not immediately formulated, having evolved in different moments, such as: the presentation of the Decalogue of Moses and the human person in the image and likeness of God; Middle Ages and the concept of the person based on Greek rationality; end of the 18th century*(15)* and the notion of the human person centered on the social ethics, on the idea of Kant's second formulation, summarized in "act as to treat humanity, in your own person and everyone else's person, always at the same time as an end and never as only a means"*(23:18)*.

The notion of the ideal of the human person was object of formulations by various cultures in different periods of time*(15)*. Theoretically and philosophically, this expression on itself harbors an analysis of its meanings. The word "ideal" represents something faraway from the objective reality, a "singular thing that can be or is absolutely determined by the idea" (Kant, 1981/2001:498). The ideal does not have a "creator force", but does have a "practical force", arising from the principles that regulate and on which resides the notion of perfection of some actions*(41)*. On "human person", its concept is debated since the Ancient Greeks, who did not understand its universal nature. One of the ideas is the one that the human person is a being integrated by body and psychism, conscious and with the power to self-determine, but is not limited to this set. One is capable of overcoming oneself and transcending. The idea understood by religions, on the other hand, comes from Christianity, derived from the biblical declaration that God created men in his image and likeness. However, the Christian Church "already accepts as integrating factors of the person the psychic and cultural data that they acquire after birth"*(42:221)*.

The notions that currently configure the ideal of the human person are not all originated from the Judeo-Christian code. Do not derive from senses nor experience and do not contribute to organizing the experience of sciences, being composed only of ideals. But the discussions in this sense should only go on if to revive the archetype created by the tradition in light of the current times and social transformations. Paim*(15)* concludes that the ideal of the human person, fueled on

the Western culture, did not change as time passed and in fact extended its original notion from Christian to citizen.

Precisely because of this great basis, the Judeo-Christian moral code can be considered a non-rational creation. But it "hoards a rational interpretation, because it is not constituted in a simple element of faith"*(15:133)*. This interpretation is not meant to diminish its substance, but to understand it as a way for the secular aspect of society to recover elements of the Western culture that remain in it.

The preponderance of the ideas of the Judeo-Christian code and its influence in the moral life of the West has suffered much criticism. The centrality of the ideal of the human person, preserved in the code, ended up mistakenly associating, maybe in the perspective of good and evil, the notion of poverty to the ideal of moral. "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"*(15:137)* was a popular saying in the Christian tradition. Bayle*(43)*, quoted by Primo*(44)*, defended morality separated from religion. He stated that historical facts could prove that human evilness has always been side by side with belief in divinity and if there had not been "virtuous atheists" there were also not "depraved atheists". These verifications ended up deconstructing ideas of moral associated with religion, crystallized in time and space.

But the reality is that the Judeo-Christian code was the basis for the biggest part of the relations permeated by morality, although moral is not restricted to the ideal of the human person it has its focus on*(15)*. Reaffirming this, Serrão*(7)* explains that the Decalogue presented by Moses and other "repositories of written values" exemplify the values of morality in the external symbolic culture since the ancient times from nowadays.

Linking the theoretical aspects raised and the historical basis described, we can infer that one important element to the preservation of the strength of the Judeo-Christian code can be the repetition of the conducts. Durkheim*(11)* explains that the "collective habit" is not something *immanent* to the repeated acts, but instead something expressed in a determined way by formulations (such as the oral tradition) and education, also being fixed by writings (the codes). He justifies that repetition happens because the human conscience does not perceive all the peculiarities of social life with enough force as to understand the reality of each fact. Therefore, instead of analyzing the facts, the things, there is only the analysis of the ideology that coats them. On this 'horizon of understanding", Turner*(39)* explains that scholars of the value load implicit in observation and information collection have concluded that the barrier lies in the distinction between the "is", as things really are, and the "should", "as things should be". This distinctive line is usually not distinguished by the followers of the most religious morality.

But parallel to the validity of the Judeo-Christian code and the possibility of other interpretations of it, events occurred over the centuries, and the respective values brought forth another view of morality. Such values were understood as secular.

Secular morality in the west

***Presuppositions to the understanding of* homo saecularis**

A review of history or the world shows that it the phenomenon of secularization is not rare in itself, but rather, the knowledge that one has of it*(45)*. According to Weber*(46)*, quoted by Swatos and Christiano*(47)*, he stated that, since the 16th century, a process occurred in the West that resulted from the gradual understanding of social spheres that facts could be explained by experiences in the world and the applicability of reason. The rationalization of actions or "specific form of social change" made it possible for the emergence of the "modern world".

Some basic events motivated other views of life in general and, as a consequence, brought a new perspective of morality. Some of them were: religious reform and the emergence of Protestantism, distinguishing religious life from moral life*(15)*; replacement of monarchist liberalism by republican and socialist alternatives of material, positivist and laicizing bases, with defense of the opposition between science and religion; foundation of the secular state with republican bases, guaran-

teeing freedom of religion and conscience, among others; emergence of scientific methods and theories, with demystification of some religious explanations; emergence of knowledge and discoveries, based on rationality and experiment*(48)*.

The changes promoted by these events contributed to the search for the distinction also gradual between the centuries and the institutional religious dogmatics*(49)* that until then is watched. This broad movement became known as secularization which, from this point of view, can be understood as "a gradual distinction between the century and the dogmatic and institutional objectivations of the religious as church"*(49:21)* the basic idea was that "the world would have its own causal link". And its consequence (more immediate) was to leave aside explanations that had as reference the forces external to this world*(47)* the reduction of the ascendancy of the institutionalized religious powers over social life has resulted in a different way of understanding and judging the things of the world, forms this more autonomous and emancipated in the face of religious issues*(48)*.

Secularism, which mainly marked the separation between religion and the State, played an important role in the new worldview. This principle promoted, in parallel, a set of beliefs, internalizing values and socializing expectations and ideas. This can perhaps be called "secular faith", based on the need for "reproduction of the social contract and justification of the historical role of the nation"*(49:143)*, that is, of the natural freedom of Man and of a pact of association with society, not of submission.

Theoretically, several assumptions that seek to explain secularization as a mark of modernity have influence of Judeo-Christian theology on the basis of movements of "departure from religion". This is because the idea of creation, far from the divine origin, potentiated the process of desacralizing the facts of life. The insertion of the rationality of capitalism and the consequent promotion of the structure of society and its way of life also focused on individual and collective consciences in relation to religious traditions*(48)*. An example of this is that, in effect, doctors, economists, psychologists, and other professionals have become more in demand to assist in solving the world's problems than ministers, priests, and other religious authorities*(47)*.

The concept of secularization is much discussed and controversial, but its approach is important to scale the process. In the English sense, secularization means the generations, the epoch or the span of a century. It arrived in the 19th century associated with the search for a more just world order and a moral program that would analyze human problems without religious or sacred explanations*(50)*. In the social perspective, Berger (33) defines secularization as a process by which areas of society and sectors of culture have escaped the dominance of religious institutions and their symbols.

The concept is also inconclusive as to whether it is an ideology, a process or a theory, respectively because it has served ideological functions, because it is not inevitable and because there are no criteria that can support empirical investigations*(51)*. Berger*(45)* disagrees with a "theory of secularization" because the central idea that modernization causes a religious decline in the individual and social context is mistaken, which does not correspond to what is observed in the changes brought about by modern events.

Shiner*(50)* analyzed and summarized some concepts of secularization and its empirical effects, allowing a view of the respective changes: 1. "decline of the religion" or loss of prestige and influence of religion before society. In this case, from secularization would remain a society without religion; 2. "conformity with this world", in which society transferred its former attention to the religious to the interest in the things of the world. With this, society would become completely involved with the current pragmatic activities, and religious groups would not distinguish themselves at all; 3. disaffection of society from the religious order, that is, society undertook an autonomous way of knowing reality and limited religion to private life. Thus, the character of religion would be solely internal and would not influence collective actions or institutions; 4. transposition of beliefs in religion to institutions of human creation, that is, institutions and social arrangements have become something disassocia-

ted from religion. In this case, religion would be an anthropologized process, and society would perform all the institutional functions before religious; 5. desacralization of the world, that is, the world was losing its natural and sacred character and became the object and cause of manipulation and exploitation. Then there would be the total rationality of society in relation to the world, and supernatural phenomena would have no place in it; 6. "movement of a sacred society to a secular one" or change of society in multiple variables and at different stages. With this, decisions would be made on the basis of utilitarian and rational aspects, and there would be "complete acceptance of the changes"*(50:217)*.

Swatos and Christiano*(47)* justify that there is no doubt that the separation of state and church was sufficient, in much of the West, for people to develop the ability to live without religious interference. They could choose between different religions without harming their civilian life. The transcendental could not be compatible with the whole humanity as before, but what was real in fact would remain, always facing interpretation. Existential problems are eternal and their solutions go beyond rational vision. The authors define secularization as a part of the healthy cycle of growth of humanity and the development of religious vision.

As far as secularization and morality are concerned, just as the thesis of secularization of the modern world is not universal, so the assertion of moral decay in highly secularized countries is not true. The misconception may be due to the fact that partial loss of faith, or a change in the view of religious domination, is mistaken as a cause of abuse and crime. Therefore, one must understand what faith really is and examine the relationship between religion and morality. This one cannot be an echo of that one*(52)*.

This understanding is what best suits the objective of this work, arguing that secularization was a non-universal, non-unidirectional, non-unitary and, necessarily, non-anti-religious process*(53)*. The association of its elements with religion is due in part to the fact that "anti-religion often paradoxically involves elements normally based on religion"*(54:54)*.

From what was described, we cannot conclude that the secular world is profane, nor that the view of the *homo saecularis* is that of an irreligious man. Respectively, what can be called profane is the abolition of memories and religious behaviors in relation to some rituals. And irreligious men, despite their probable existence in archaic societies, it is in modern European societies that they are most fully identified. The irreligious is only fully constituted if it is all demystified, if it desecrates itself and the world is desacralized. He "recognizes himself as the only subject and agent of history and rejects every call to transcendence"*(34:97)*. Yet the *homo saecularis* it has the secularity characterized by its ability to decide on its fate with freedom. And this capacity was achieved due to ideas arising from rationalism and religious and political confrontations that brought other nuances to traditional values*(48)*.

The irreligious man would certainly not need to resort to moral relativism to solve complex moral/bioethical problems, because for him, according to Eliade*(34:89)*, all situations "mean nothing more than what the concrete act shows". Yet the *homo saecular* could rely on moral relativism, needing to distinguish the values of its individual consciousness and the common interest as social utility. "There is a pluralism of different versions of modernity, with different delineations of the coexistence of religion and secularity, which must be administered politically"*(55 cited by 56:78)*

Social morality and morality of consensus

Unlike the ontological way, its invariable foundation of being and duty-being (mainly from the religious point of view) and the perspective directed to moral principles, there is the pragmatic way, whose positioning always aims to identify practical solutions to concrete complex problems; it always seeks the most convenient and harmonious solution to such problems*(12)*.

In the case of morality separate from religion, its pragmatic path, on one hand, may have indications from the other interpretation of the Bible in the Renaissance, which had quite significant adherents in Europe. The new interpretation shattered the religious tradition of Christian morality, which virtually prevailed in the West, and led to

the emergence of Protestantism. With the Reformation, by disassociating the earthly course from eternal salvation, mankind of that time should only fulfill the moral precepts with no view to salvation through them*(15)*. On the other hand, the separation may have been reinforced by the introduction of secularism, as a principle of social and broad moral philosophy and consisting of a complex set of commitments and ideas that include neutrality, autonomy and community. In general terms, neutrality concerns the guarantee of religious freedom in the private sphere and the adoption of State actions without religious reference. Autonomy corresponds to "human emancipation", aiming to separate the identity of the human/citizen from their vision as a believer. The community's scope is to extend the understanding of morality more secular than political*(57)*.

Regarding the moral path to follow, the challenge would be to define moral options that are not religious, but accepted by religions. Secular morality should be able to grasp the truths of each moral, religious and non-religious view – as in the conception of the person–, based on the consensus among the "reasonable moral doctrines". There could be no compatibility between secularism (moral) and religion just for the sake of "stability"*(57)*.

The resulting notion was the probability of a moral distanced from the ideas of good and evil, as understood by tradition, and characterized mainly by the legitimate need to maintain the "collective existence". It was called social morality, distinguishing itself from individual morality that can be associated with religious beliefs and their precepts. It would also be a consensual moral, due to the aspects of political representation involved*(15)*.

These characteristics can be visualized in the understanding that the facts underpinning morality often constitute duties that are accepted by everyone involved in problems. But morality is not only an action that "can be universalized". Even though moral practices have not been created to be useful to society (or to contribute to the cohesive survival of human groups), they can be of common utility and a source of social/moral evolution if they have a significant representation that makes a specific conduct clear. The sense of utility comes from the value of numerous elements and the tangle of their relations, considering the various conditions and circumstances, in order to achieve the most adequate possible notion of utility. Its most accurate assessment results from the "combinations of ideas", kept consciously and in order (hierarchical), without anything remaining obscure as to the issues involved. It is still necessary to foresee and combine not only the immediate effects, but also repercussions on all lines and strands "of the social organism". Regardless of the path, one should be aware that the solution that is being undertaken is conjectural since there are always open spaces and inherent risks. "In such matters, certainty is impossible"*(58:11)*.

In another perspective, but with an equally important connotation, reflecting on the two origins of morality – values and their constitutive experiences and the conditions of cooperativity – Joas*(52)* argues that the systems of norms have their concreteness based on these two sources. Within this, according to the specificity of the situations, the agents must consider the good and the just. "The reduction [from perspective] to the just is as one-sided as the reduction to the good; inadmissible, too, is a reduction of the good to religious imperatives"*(52:244)*.

In short, whether from the point of view of Durkheim morality or the notion of Joas, social morality represents an attempt at morality established by consensus, based on secular foundations of equal validity for all, including non-believers. From Durkheim's explanations, we learn that this validity for all can precisely represent the interest in solving a problem that is common and enveloped in social values. On the other hand, the possibility of consensus may correspond to the intervention of other agents who assume assertive postures before the generalized formulations of individuals. From Joas' point of view, we infer a sense of good that holds within itself the clear idea of good, not just as something abstract, but as "that in whose interest all other things are done"*(4:11)*. The just, intrinsically associated with the good, refers to the legitimacy of the acts, to the preservation of the moral elements used and not to exceed the respective measures.

But secularization is recent in a way, in terms of substantially changing cultures and values. Therefore, one cannot yet affirm the effects of their multiple arms on the moral directions between the various generations in the long term. Affirmations about relevant changes between generations would still be at the superficial level of the definition of rules for issues of individual life, with striking differences between the religious and the view of contemporary consensual morality and relatively easy to distinguish. To some extent (secularization is not unidirectional), "one can [even] dismiss the hypothesis that new generations of people of faith exhibit change in fundamental values so that their attitudes are not nourished by the fundamental imaginaries, deeply rooted in their religious worldview"*(52:234)*. Without them being aware, this view influences even those who have moved away from the confessional orientations with which they were formed. This indicates that the confessional imaginary is inherent in secular worldviews, insofar as there is a legacy of religious certainties to the process of secularization. Similarly, there are decisive rejections of confessional aspects because they seem a "counter-identification" to the secular view. There are as many secularisms as there are varieties of religions*(52)*.

However, when the interest focuses on moral judgments, one must deviate from the individual life and analyze the structures that underlie moral judgments, identifying what persists, over time, as confessional religious specificities, for example. The notions of individuality and sociability, which can be conflicting, tend to elicit different attitudes regarding the function of "institutionalized religion" and the role of ethics/moral. Therefore, one must understand the intention when assessing the moral quality of an action and the fact that the content of moral norms are interpreted distinctly, either by the confessional aspects, either as a norm or as an ideal to be followed*(52)*.

We deduce from the changes promoted by the events cited two important points: first, the faculty of the individual to integrate moral precepts to their religious precepts, from which one can conclude a personal position in the context of collective positions; second, the social morality that contemplates moral relativism, assuming a reflection on moral rules that take into account the interests of the collective over the individual. According to Durkheim*(11)*, the tendencies of the collective, as much as their representations, are not generated by individual consciences but by the conditions or state in which the whole "social body" is found. He agrees that individual natures, refractory to new trends or to other representations, may impede the realization of collective interests. He resumes his notion (already mentioned) of individuals as essential elements of society, which enters their consciences and transforms them, and says that their contribution would represent "vague predispositions" and that these could only achieve a defined form through the intervention of other agents.

The notion of collective morality then developed may mark the third moment of the constitution of Western morality, although, according to Espínola*(48)*, much of the old mentality still remains.

Final considerations

What was found from the descriptions was that secular morality, so far, does not circumscribe a line of action, but rather indicates a broad openness (not political or religious) to individual autonomy, the search for neutrality and the vision of community. In the latter, we consider mainly the commitments derived from secularism, subsidized by a morality backed by the universality of duty, in the sense of common utility, good and just, invoking social values and cooperativity.

Moral relativism is implicit in the very opening of the representativeness of social and consensual morality, which substantially separates personal religious belief from common/collective interest. From the point of view of secularism, the autonomy that enables individuals to be guided by a morality that they prefer to associate with their beliefs is the same that supports others to act on behalf of the collective and according to the majority, in the face of complex problems. These distinguish the personal values, which they keep for themselves, from the larger and explicit social interests.

In this perspective, contemporary Bioethics now deals with secular Western societies, the result of

historical dissociations and with strong traditional and pluralistic remnants, because they involve a great diversity of moral beliefs and feelings. With this, it remains for bioethicists, faced with complex problems, to identify an essence in this morality that reaches different communities of beliefs and ideologies. "Essential morality would be compared to a continuist morality, in which people convey to common efforts the moral authority of their consent"*(59:32)*. This essential morality can substantially guide the distinction between the right and the not right, between good and bad. The essence, at this time, may be the notion that subsidizes and ensues the figures of moral strangers and moral friends.

Tristam Engelhardt, identifier and disseminator of the ideas around this figure, "advocated secularity in bioethical dialogues, being himself a practicing Orthodox Christian – thus carrying 'conservative' ideas" on complex topics*(60:3)*. Engelhardt justifies this notion with the fact that each one understands and experiences reality in a distinct way, fundamentally, in the same way, that there are several structures of meaning and meaning. Then conflicts will always and inevitably arise between traditional Christian beliefs and secular understanding of the world as to proper conduct and bioethics*(61)*. He defines moral strangers as "people who do not share moral premises or rules of evidence and inference sufficient to resolve moral controversies through rational argumentation"*(59:32)*. Moral strangers, which does not mean strangers to each other, can resolve moral issues through common agreements. In contrast, there are moral friends who share (only) one morality in essence and can contribute to the resolution of controversies by resorting to sound moral arguments of recognized authority, for example*(59)*.

The notion of moral strangers appears as a representation of moral relativism for judgment and solution of complex bioethical problems.

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Received: September 30, 2022
Accepted: May 12, 2023