

Liquid Modernity and its consequences to Ethics

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Albert Camus, the French philosopher said that ‘a man without ethics is a wild beast loosed upon world’. A society to be free from crisis ethical aspects and practices are very vital. Human life has always been conditioned, in one way or the other by ethics and moral principles. The two World Wars had created a situation in which people were compelled to reflect on ethic in concrete terms. The debates are still going on the fundamental aspects related to ethics and morals. Zygmunt Bauman had taken‘ these debates to further levels with his Postmodern Ethics’ (1993), ‘Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality’ (1995), ‘Postmodernity and its Discontents’ (1997), ‘Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?’ (2008). in these four works he discussed the concepts of ethics and morality in concrete terms. In fact, Bauman, since 1993 to 2017 did not publish even a single work without referring ethical issues. Ethical aspects became an integral of all his works. The words of Town Campbell and Cris Till are noteworthy in this context:

Zygmunt Bauman’s work has reinvigorated sociological interest in ethical questions. Ethics has been at the core of his work for at least the past two decades and he has convincingly positioned ethics and morality as central issues for sociology in our globalized world and liquid modern times.

Hviid Jacobsen 2008: 172

As it was observed by Manni Crone and others Bauman made strong critique on the transformation of ethics into laws in the Modernity. Bauman’s thought on ethics was strengthened by the influence of Michel Foucault, the French philosopher. Even after so many Holocausts and the Auschwitz the individuals who were responsible for them tried to justify their position in executing millions of Jews. They justified themselves with the judicial principles. In the wake of the arguments of Eichmann, a high ranking Nazi German official, who organized the

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deportation of 1-5 million of Jews from all over the Europe to ghettos and killing centers in German occupied parts of Poland and who along with his subordinates deported millions of Jew to Auschwitz, Which has become the emblematic site of the final solution for Jewish question found by the Nazis and where 1.5 millions of Jews were exterminated by poisonous gas in big chamber. In justification of his acts by Eichmann without any ethical concern shocked Bauman. In that context Bauman problematized the very idea of ethics and the transformation of the concept of ethics with the advent of Modernity on the scene.

Bauman totally rejected the idea of linking the ethics with laws in the context of Eichmann's arguments. For Bauman ethics have to be discussed on the responsibility of the individual but not on the foundation laws. Bauman's ideas with regard to ethics were very much influenced by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.

According to Levinas ethics is always based on the context and it is not universal. It always associates with sacrifice and be responsible for the other. Bauman did not approve the universal ethics and treating ethics as laws. In assertion of that he had written 'The Postmodern Ethics'. But, Bauman, did not think that ethics would degenerate into laws, ethical relativism would surface and the idea of anything goes would emerge in Modernity. In contradiction to that Bauman thought that in Postmodernity in place of ethics morality would come. To cite the words of Manni Crone:

Postmodern Ethics' is not book on postmodern ethics, but rather a book on postmodern morality. (61)

Bauman discerns the difference between ethics and morality. In his view what was practiced in Modernity was ethics and what is adopted in the Postmodern is morality. Modernity, in the name of universal laws transformed ethics into legal principles and implemented ethical principles as legal acts. According to Bauman the basic lacuna in the Modern ethics is reducing it to legality and viewing it as a social construct. In the process of studying the Western ethics, Bauman analyzes the foundations of Western ethics.

According to Bauman, it was Immanuel Kant who accepted the idea of universal laws with regard to ethics in the Modernity. Almost all the Modern philosophers rejected the metaphysical

foundations with regard to ethics. They believed that ethical principles emerged out of human reason. Again Kant was responsible for this belief. In the ethical philosophy proposed by Kant there is no reference to the fact that ethical decisions can be made in the concrete situations. On the contrary to this Kant believed that the moral agent has to behave as per the abstract universal laws as an autonomous being. The individual, who is in autonomy by using his rational free-will have to follow ethical rules. His decision will not be influenced by any tradition or religion. In this context Bauman says:

According to Kant, the modern moral subject was 'free' in the sense that he was not ruled by tradition, religion or human nature, but by a universal law that he had formulated himself. (62)

According to Bauman, Kant's consideration of ethics as law had influenced the social reality of Modernity to a large extent. That is reason for modern ethics getting transformed into law-ethics. Modern rulers felt that the people could not run their lives ethically and follow the universal morals principles. Hence, they introduced strict ethical codes and laws to control them. The autonomy that Kant proposed with regard to ethics became heteronomy. In the Heteronomy individual is passive, the external forces are like laws decide his/her behavior and choice.

The Greek-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis compares the autonomy and heteronomy and says that societies that are in autonomy would frame the culture, laws and behavior patterns as per their needs. The people will have an understanding about the laws. In opposition to the in the societies, which are in heteronomy, Bauman says, the people would be under the influence of god, religion, state and the social need. When viewed in this dimension, the ethics which are considered vital in Modernity are the ethics that are framed by the people in their autonomy. Rather they were framed as universal laws by the Modern rulers or legislators. One should not forget that the legislators were supported by the State.

According to Bauman, as Kant proposed ethics as legal principles, later Emile Durkheim proposed that ethics is as the social construct. According to Durkheim individual has no natural ethical capacity. In the social process or training only he becomes as an ethical being. This idea, in a way, Bauman says belongs to Thomas Hobbes who mentioned about the natural state of humans, by their ego-centric and amoral states would be ready for conflict. In simple terms the

idea proposes that the individual by leaving his natural state and entering into social process only thinks about ethics. Outside the social, ethically individual is nothing. By entering into social process and accepting and practicing ethics individual will be transformed as an ethical being. Along with Durkheim, many modern sociologists believed that individual have to be taught ethics through socialization, education and discipline.

In the view of Bauman, if we consider ethics as social construct, transform them into legal codes and apply them with the universal implications, then there won't any scope to discuss them and to decide their merits and demerits as they are made absolute. This will be done by the bureaucracy. Then, in that process there will be every possibility for the events like holocaust and Auschwitz. The history of Modernity is the best example for that they are possible. That is why, Bauman focused much on the consequences of a concrete idea of ethics.

Bauman did not accept that relation between society and ethics is 1:1. The ethics proposed by Kant equated ethics with law. Because of that incidents like Auschwitz were carried out. The moral ground for carrying out such holocausts was provided by the Modern ethics. In this context Manni Crone says:

Auschwitz became a reality when a particular conception of ethics was linked to particular features of modern society" e.g. modern bureaucracy. (63)

Seen in the light of the above, Modernity is not just the emergence of democracy, it is a long journey towards primitivism. In fact, this conclusion was arrived at in 1940s by the members of Frankfurt School like Horkheimer and Adorno before Bauman. Foucault also recognized it. For Horkheimer, Adorno and Foucault the major problem of Modernity is related to reason and the way of using reason in the process of establishing order and discipline in the society. But, Bauman did not understand the reason as the problem of Modernity rather he has seen it in ethics. In his view mere reason did not exist in carrying out holocausts, it is also a concrete understanding of ethics too. In this process Bauman makes certain propositions with regard to ethics.

Bauman did not see Morality and Ethics as one and the same. Morality is related to the desecration of good and bad. It is related to man's thinking, experience and actions. Ethic, unlike moralist brings rules, codes guidelines. In a way, it is the codification of the universal rules. Ethics brings into the social process the ethical principles that would be in the service of the state. Morality is related to the thinking of good and bad in a concrete situation. Morality and Ethics have a long history in the Western world. Their mythical roots can be seen in the Bible.

The story of Adam and Eve is an example for morality without law. In the beginning Adam and Eve do not know that good and bad are divided. Only after eating the apple and the criticism of god made them to know that there was division of good and bad and they understood the reality and practice is are divided into good and bad and they had to choose from them. This awareness made them moral beings. They were compelled to choose between good and bad and right and wrong. In opposition to this, the ten commandments of Moses are example for morality with laws. The commandments are prescriptions for not committing sins and accepting the orders of god. All forms of ethics that emerged in Modernity are like commandments. They are aimed at controlling people. In this process there is no choice for individuals. That is why Bauman called Modernity as age of ethics. Modernity had defined ethics in concrete terms and had seen that there is ambiguity in them.

Like many thinkers, Bauman did not see Modernity as a phase in which religious beliefs are weakened, secular ideas are strengthened and individualization process started. In his view, modernization, industrialization and urbanization are crucial things in Modernity. These aspects have fragmented the lives of the individuals. In the context of this fragmentation, it is inhuman to propose ethics of one dimension. All the modern rulers tried implement morals with rational principles. It resulted into ethics or modern codes or modern ethics. It was mandatory to be adopted by every individual who is living life rationally as the modern ethics is universal ethics. The idea of universal ethics was the result of the belief that humans have the same kind of nature hence they follow the same ethics. In the view of Bauman, the very idea of universal ethic is repressive and it leads to dangerous consequences in practice. In fact, it is a paradox.

Bauman, considered Postmodernity as a phase in which ethics will end. It doesn't mean there will not be any ethics, rather the deterministic ethics; either of religion or of rationality will end.

The Postmodern situation opens new doors with regards to ethics. At the same time there may not be any guarantee that postmodern ethics will be better than Modern ethics at the moment. But there is possibility for the emergence better ethics. In this context Bauman says:

It remains to be seen.... whether the time of post-modernity will go down the history as the twilight, or renaissance, of morality.

Bauman 1993: 3

The concept of responsibility is very vital in the postmodern ethics. In bring rationality onto the forefront in the modernity, there was a concrete objective. The objective is to establish a rational society, in which only rationality would be the determining factor of everything and a parameter for everything. In a way rationality would be absolute. But postmodern ethics is against any kind of absolute. Postmodernity believes that ethical choice intrinsically will be in ambiguity. In the view of Bauman, the postmodern ethics re-personalizes the ethical aspects. It means, it emphasizes the individual responsibility of in ethical choices. In a way, postmodern ethics is an ethics with no ethical codes or laws with it.

According to Bauman, ethical relation is a responsible relation. It is not an activity of mutual exchange of things. It won't demand that as one is behaving responsibly with the other, that the other too should behave responsibly. To be responsible to other is the real responsibility. It is one-sided. I am for others, but the others are not for me. Their existence is my existence. Whatever I do for them, I don't expect anything from them. Bauman says that this type approach is the foundation for postmodern ethics. In fact, responsibility by its very nature is not universal. It is against the concepts of codification and universalization. If ethics is practiced with an expectation of return it is no more ethics. Postmodern ethics by its very nature moves away from rationality. It won't fall into the logic of achievements and objectives.

According to Bauman the moral doesn't have any foundation. It is based only on ethical impulse. Modern moral philosophers and rulers as they did not believe in the ethical impulse and ethical capacity of the individual, they proposed ethical laws, formulated on the basis of rationality. In fact, Kant had very clearly that feelings had no ethical importance. That is why in modernity law-ethics became prominent. In this context Bauman says:

In fact, virtue itself meant for Kant and his followers the ability to stand up to one's emotive inclinations, and to neutralize or reject them in the name of reason. (p.67)

According to Bauman, in ethical issues and actions the scope for reason is minimal. When we encounter an individual, we will not have the full information about him. It is not possible to have a full-understanding about him/her. We cannot form for rational opinion on hi/her. But, in our encounter with that we can understand our nature or objectivity, as by then our ethical response or behavior would have been formed by then. The question whether one should be ethical or not doesn't arise in that context. Involuntarily we have to respond ethically. We should reflect on whether that individual would be useful to us or not. Because, ethical response doesn't involve any expectation. In our ethical response to others we should also think about the usefulness of our response to the other. In this context Bauman says:

If I love her and desire her happiness, it is my responsibility to desire what would make her truly happy.

Bauman 1995:64-65

Adiaphorization or ignoring the ethical implications in the contemporary societies is conspicuous everywhere in contemporary societies. Ignoring the ethical implications in human relations means segregating ourselves for the others and not considering the existence of others. It also means that we are treating others as objects useful to us. Then only the concept of adiaphorization comes on to the scene. In the situation of adiaphorization we don't recognize certain people as ethical beings. We don't respond to any of their concerns. We remain unemotional even when somebody is suffering in our presence. Even when the most inhuman acts are taking place, we just remain as mere uninterested spectators. In this context Bauman observes:

Modernity did not make people crueler; it only invented a way in which cruel things could be done by non-cruel people. (Pp.197-198)

Keeping others away from our ethical preview is nothing but dehumanizing them. The holocausts that took place and the people's obsession with consumption, by ignoring all other

aspects of are the examples of adiaphorization according to Bauman. People are intrinsically says Bauman. If the question, whether people are good put Rousseau, it would say 'yes', but Kant say 'no'. According to Bauman, people by their nature are good. Ethical principle is very vital for humanity. These ethical principles are only distinguishing humans from the other species. To be ethical doesn't mean to be good. In addition to be ethical man should have other capacity, the capacity to say 'no'. In an interview Bauman says:

'No' implies that things 'do not have to be as they currently are', that they can be altered: also made better than they currently are,"

Tester 2001: 44

When one is unable to do so, all our dialogues are useless according to Bauman. Ethics or morality is a matter of choice. If choice is not there is no ethics. In fact, society itself is coordinated choices. The society in which we live is chosen from many choices. Like all our choices our society may be good or bad. Hence, there is always a possibility rectify it. To recognize it means making an ethical choice. This process will be going on. But it is not possible to build morality or ethics like building other structures. The individual should not pose a question, 'why should be ethical?' If it is posed that is end of ethics.

Modernity means to 'clean the society', 'to keep it transparent', and to 'keep it in order'. To keep the society in order means to rectify it and to eliminate dirt, ambiguity and uncertainty. If this process begins once, it goes on eliminating or annihilating everything that comes in its way. It will justify that it is done in the interest of a better society. Even if a race or tribe is considered as a hurdle, even that race or tribe will be annihilated. This was what exactly the Nazis and Stalinists did. Bauman says:

Once you assume that orderly society must be free from dissidents and troublemakers, throwing the heretics in dungeons and shoving the nonconformists out is, again a rational means to the end. (58)

When view from the ethical perspective, a society that accepts the opinion that it is not as democratic as it has to be is the just society. The idea which is just today may not be just

tomorrow. No just would remain just forever. It moves forward. It will be trying to be better and at the same time it protects those who are trying for its betterment. According to Bauman, the idea of justice itself is not static; it is always in a process. It is like a horizon, the just society would be moving towards that horizon.

In the view of Bauman, it is not possible to prove the value of ethics or morality. Ethics is an end to itself, it has no purpose. It should not be practiced either for self-satisfaction or for an economic interest. Our ethical behavior should give confidence to the people around us. To be with them for them is our ethical objective. In earlier times it was like that. Now its character has completely changed. Self-protection and calculations of problems have acquired prime importance today. That is why people are under the impression that is problematic to ethically sound.

We are in a society which propagates self-interest and selfishness only. It pushed the society to such an extent, in which we feel whether it would be possible to change it. This is the result of irresponsibility. We have to at least now recognize our irresponsibility. At present all the people are sailing in the same boat. Nobody should think that he has no danger. We have to think about the predicament of the others. We should come out of our carelessness and callousness. Then only we can create a meaning for our lives. The people who have ethical capacity cannot lead a peaceful life. In the world, which is consisted of 6 billion people, 800 millions do not have nutritious food, 900 millions have no medical facilities, 1 billion people have no drinking water facility, 2 billion have no electricity, 2.5 billion do not have toilet facilities, 1 billion have no access to education and 11 million children are dying every year due to various diseases, which can be cured. Knowing all this, how can one live peacefully is the fundamental ethical question that Bauman raises. In his, this callousness is a kind of humiliation to all of us. It is the result of the fact that we are guided only by selfishness. Ignoring all this is nothing but escaping from our responsibility. Bauman says:

“Responsibility” means now, first and last responsibility to oneself (“you owe this to yourself”).

Bauman 2009: 53

When people are pampering their selfishness, there cannot be any space for self-criticism. They fail to recognize the need to change the social situation and moral positions. They cannot think of a better life. People get recognition or identity by their actions. Recognition is not given; one has to acquire by his/her actions. It has to be created as we create artifacts. When we are able to create our as an art piece, why can't we transform our life into an art-piece, asks Foucault.

In our effort for the transformation of life into an art, Bauman says arts and literature have vital part in that. Arts and literature show us alternative reality. They keep people from falling into the trap of consumerism. People have to explore those possibilities, which will help individuals in molding their lifestyle on their own.

As it has been observed already, the religious institutions, monarchies, and the dictatorships have all made the people by surrendering to the ethical systems they had evolved. Modern societies had also moved on the same lines. They aimed at controlling the people and for that purpose only they framed ethical systems and criminal procedure codes. All most all the modern rulers were under the impression that people are inherently disordered. Hence, they needed training. By training only they would be normal and move in the right path otherwise, they go beyond control. They felt the people should always be kept on the right track. Modernity with its 'will to order' divided the society into two categories; those who implement ethics and those accept them and live accordingly. According to Bauman, this is what is known as legislative reason and it is essential to beyond it. Bauman believes that the situation to come (ought to) should be better than the present situation (is) and the active utopia should be better than the utopia. Living by confining to the present is not the nature of the people. Hope is the force that always drives humans. Thinking beyond the limitations of the present is one the defining characteristics of humans.

Bauman, while discussing the concepts, 'existence for others' and 'responsibility for others,' refers the story of Kane and Abel from the Bible. When Kane faced a question, 'where is Abel?' Kane asks a counter question, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' According to Bauman, this question reverberates, throughout the Western history. According to Bauman, the response of Kane is an unethical question. Because, it openly declares that he is not for others. Though there is honesty in the response of Kane, there is no morality in it. It reflects only ontological aspects, he is he,

and me is me and with regard to existence we both are different. Bauman says that the moral self has to respond by transcending itself. To put it in philosophical terms ethics has to conquer ontology. Ethics should become primary. The opinion of Bauman in this context was analyzed by Benjamin Adam as follows:

In affirming the primacy of the other, challenged, that there is always another to whom I am responsible, and that one should not be content with merely having followed one's legal or finite duties.

Adam 2014: 190

According to Bauman, so far sociology did not focus on the need to go beyond the limitations of the contemporary ethics. It was focusing only on the practice of the ethical system that is in existence. It could not extend its imagination beyond that.

In Bauman's view, ethical choice and ethical practice should not be different. When ethical aspects are expressed at collective level, the responsibility of the individual is not observed. In that way it liberates individual from responsibility. The group by becoming a force kills the role of individual or at least hides him. In this context, Bauman clearly says:

In the crowd, we are alike we go about together, we dance together, we punch together, we burn together, we kill together.

Bauman 1993:132

In the above situation, the question 'what am I doing? It doesn't seem meaningful. We do what others are doing. There won't be any scope for the questions, whether it is just or correct? This is a kind of socialization process. In this context morality and ethical responsibility will disappear. "Sociality of the crowd disposes of responsibility," says Bauman in his 'Postmodern Ethics', p.132). This situation leads to ethical adiabiorization. Exactly in this kind of situations only people like Eichmann are born. According to Bauman, this process of adiabiorization extended from solid modernity to liquid modernity. In the liquid modernity, in the process of social

transformation of individual from the status of producers to consumers, the responsibility that the individuals have to show towards others has limited to his/her self.

After the 1980s the non-political forces are dictating the lives of people. They are transforming individuals as mere consumers. The consumerist attitude infected entire society and consumer psychology spread everywhere. From economy to environment everything was forced in crisis. In this crisis-ridden situation, the individuals are not just for others, they are responsible for them also. The political systems and organizers are not reflecting on meaningful changes. Every change is taking place only in the interest of capital. Society totally failed in keeping a model of dignified and meaningful life before the people. The idea that society can be better than the present is found nowhere. At least it is not found even in the political circles. Moreover, they are bringing the meaningless slogan TINA (There is no alternative). As the desires of individual, his consumption became only priorities, ethics have lost their importance.

In the above context, Bauman proposes that there is need for the revival of ancient Greek practice of *Agora*. *Agora* was a public meeting place in ancient Greece. According to Bauman, at the present, we are in such a place in which people discuss issues with regard to individual and the society and come to consensus. There will be a scope for democratic discussion without prejudices on any aspect. Before participating in the discussions in *Agora* people first have to become humans and they have to come out of partial thinking. In the present context the mutual dependency of people and places is going on increasing. In this context Adam Hirst says:

Bauman's emphasis on possibility, hope, the critique of the self-enclosed rational subject, and the necessity of responsibility offers a credible challenge to sociology, and demands a reinvigoration of its ethical imagination.

Adam 2014: 196

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