PRAGMATIC MORALITY AND TALEBIAN WAY OF THINKING?

Gheorghe Săvoiu[1] Mladen Cudanov[2],
[1]University of Pitesti, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Law, Pitesti, Romania,
[2]University University of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia
Contact e-mail: gsavoiu@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The sections of the article ensure a relatively slow but concise transition from the modern meanings of the pragmatic word, attached to morality, to specific Talebian way of thinking about equalities/ inequalities and virtue. Simple analysis can offer complex results sometimes, but only based on a specific risk and the logic of probabilities as in Talebian way of thinking.*

Key words: *pragma, pragmatic, morality, virtue, inequaliy, ethics, talebian ethics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Where does the word pragmatic come from, and how can a pragmatic morality be defined in modern times? These two questions are debated before the presentation of Nassim Nicholas Taleb's original way of thinking [1].

The real origins of pragmatic as Latin word, comes from the Greek language and these origins describe in a philological dictionaries' tour a passage from *pragma* (deed or act) to *pragmatikos* (relating to fact). The modern sense of *pragmatic* opposed to idealistic and is connected with: i) the contemporary human attitude or "*behaviour that is dictated more by practical consequences than by theory or dogma*" in Oxford English Dictionary [2]; ii) the recent meaning of "*relating to matters of fact or practical affairs often to the exclusion of intellectual or artistic matters: practical as opposed to idealistic*" in Merriam-Webster Dictionary [3]; iii) the usual "*solving problems in a practical and sensible way rather than by having fixed ideas or theories*" in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary [4]; iv) the resignification as "*concerned with practical considerations of one's actions, and less concerned with principles*" frequently synthesized in "*having a* [permanent] *practical point of view*" in Word Reference Dictionary [5], somehow this final sense being more important for this paper.

Education expands all these significations with that of *application of all theoretical concepts* as the notion that children *learn by doing*, that critical standards of procedure and understanding emerge from the application of concepts to directly experienced subject matters, has been called *"pragmatic."* [6].

But the most impressive or the most important results of this phenomenon of multiplying pragmatic word's signification, for this papers' ideas, remains the eight-time increasing of its uses of the word in any communication, quantified by Google on analysing texts from the Internet after 1900 til 2019 (Fig. no. 1):
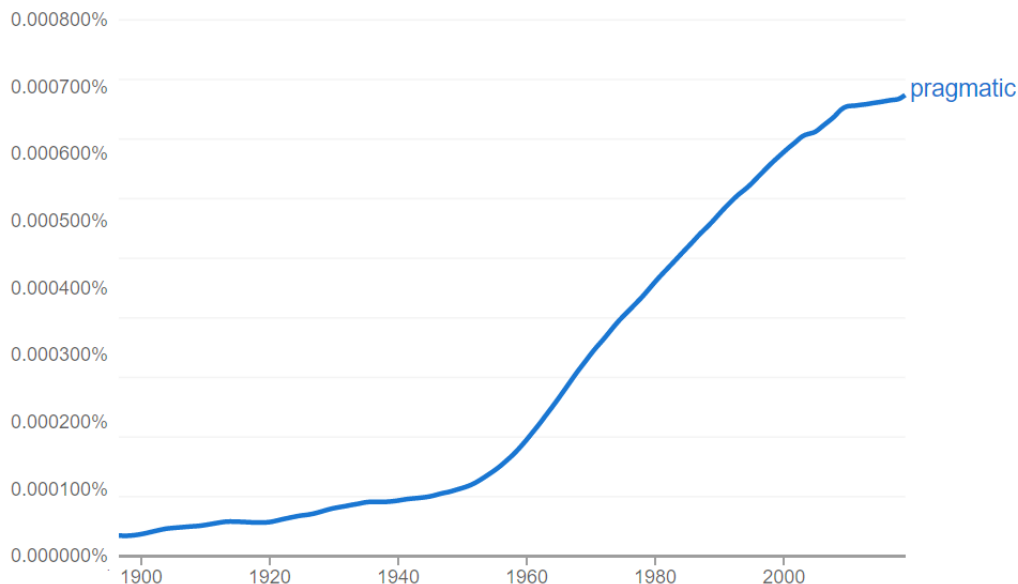
Source: Google Ngram Viewer https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?year_end=2019&year_start=1900
Fig. no. 1. The percentage's evolution of the global mentions of word pragmatic between 1900 and 2019 [1]

First of all, every conceptualization of the pragmatic morality demands the definition of morality and implicitly of ethics. Morality as an ensemble of moral habits as it was signified in Latin by *mos-moris* comes from the same ancient Greek language, respectively from *moralis*, a word

equivalent with *ethos*. Morality quantifies the presence and the changes of moral standing, acquired through skills, feelings and beliefs, attitudes and mentalities, principles and norms, values and ideals of liaisons between individuals or individual and society (family, community, social group, nation, etc.), materialized in acts and facts, deeds and actions, which specify a certain mode of behavior. A moral individual can be a person who possesses practically and in different quantities, all the above elements and aspects, being completely different from the immoral individual, who is characterized by immorality or absence of morality, but also from the amoral individual, placed outside of any morality). Pragmatic morality refers to the practical set of principles that can discriminate normatively between good and evil and to a practical behaviour of individuals in their relationships with other individuals but also in their (co)existence within the community (society).

In modern academic education, morality also becomes the object of study of a scientific discipline, well-known as ethics. Thus, ethics is defined as being the theory and science of morality.

2. WHY PRAGMATIC MORALITY IS ALSO CLOSER TO RELATIVITY, AS PHYSICS IS?

Does or doesn't any pragmatic person have time and inclination to deal with social morality? Does or doesn't this person's attitude imply a specific pragmatic morality? The subsections are possible answers simultaneously not only to the title of the section that incorporated all but also to the two previous questions.

2.1. Multiple significances of ethics

The meanings of ethics have been continuously diversified and relativized: i) the theory and science of morality (reunited study of morals or habits with moral impact), ii) the form of knowledge of the dynamics of morality; iii) discipline of dialogue, education of dialogue, and criteria of tolerance in dialogue; iv) set of rules of moral behavior, v) systematic study of the regulations of the individual (contractual) behavioral relations; vi) systematic introspection on the moral impact of individuals' decisions; vii) a specific human way of living and interacting, etc.

2.2 Pragmatic ethics as the pragmatic science of morality

Pragmatic ethics is also the main sphere of applied philosophy in which aspects and problems of a moral nature are researched with necessary relativity, and the answers to questions such as: what is good or evil, how should we behave and many other like these, are a natural result of an investigation realized exclusively in an applied manner of thinking. Pragmatic ethics investigates the applied moral principles, their association in

time or space, and the historical evolution of the applied morality in society, carefully observing the set of norms of moral that are relatively accepted within human communities. Pragmatic ethics was born as a science of applied ethos or as pragmatic morality, of the human choice made with discernment in the direction of good or evil (Confucius, Socrates, Plato etc.), or with the real intention of any man to become virtuous (Confucius, Aristotle etc.). Thus pragmatic ethics and pragmatic morality demarcate practically the content of the relative social ideal (ideal behaviour).

2.3. Can an ethic of virtue be relevant and modern?

The history of morality begins in the proximity of virtue. Since two and a half millennia ago, Confucius in *Analecte* [7] describes the becoming of the virtuous man as a complex and coherent process carried out according to the principle of reciprocity, during a necessary identity in the behavioral chain "*thought - word – deed*", as a fundamental target of education and evolution.

Socrates considered the obedience of the law as an essential necessity for the becoming of humanity, proving with his own death this truth and that he was ready to link virtue to human knowledge. Plato, the most important disciple of Socrates, considered that ethics can't be learned by everyone, ethics being not accesible to everyone, but useful for the best, and for this, education (including moral education) must always be at state's disposal ...[8] The Athenian academy, well-known as Akademia, created by Plato, which will survive for almost a thousand years, will have as its major objective to contribute to the moral preparation of future politicians. In the turn of Aristotle, Plato's best disciple, he pragmatically reconsidered education, surpassing his mentor in this respect. Aristotle believed that the product of education in his school Lykeion must be a perfect disciple, proving this by the remarkable way in which he educated the young Alexander, who would become the future emperor Alexander the Great. Aristotle proposed an entirely new relationship, in which virtue has happiness as its substitute, outlining an ethic of happiness through virtue. Aristotelian happiness, however, was multidimensional and consisted of balancing virtue, contemplation and external goods.

In *Groudwork of the Methaphysics of Morals* (1785), Immanuel Kant explains that ethics is founded by answering the question What should I do? ("Was soll ich tun?"). But the most important or essential question of ethics posed by Kant remains: What can I know about what I need to do? ("Was kich ich wissen über das was ich tun sol?") [9]. Kant's ethical view is a deontological one, based on the idea that rationality is good in itself and that all individuals are rational beings. Thus, one question automatically arises: Is Homo

Rationalis truly universal? Kant states that the fundamental principle of morality is this: "*Treat humanity, both in yourself and in the others, always at the same time as an end in itself, and never only as means.*" Here we find old Confucianist echoes in the generalized essence of the reciprocity's principle. This is the Kantian statement known as the human essence of the "*categorical imperative*" which reborn the ethics of general happiness.

The utilitarian theory or utilitarianism, elaborated by the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, appears natural in this context when it claims that the pursuit of people's general happiness is the ultimate moral goal. The three steps of utilitarianism are obvious and connected to each other: i) happiness is the only thing that truly has real and intrinsic value; ii) actions are right only when the promoted result is happiness, and wrong as that is unhappiness; iii) everyone's happiness counts equally. Of course, each individual seeks his own happiness, but utilitarian ethics proposes a happiness valid for all human beings, obviously able to feel pain and pleasure. The "*principle of utility*", also called the principle of general happiness, states that actions are moral insofar as they produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people (maximizing total happiness or sometimes minimizing total unhappiness). The same principle of utility takes into account only the moral purpose of producing the greatest amount of general happiness or the least amount of unhappiness. The alternative is dominant, and the theory of utilitarian remains an ethical theory that insists that we should not focus on the duty to do good, but on the consequences of actions that reduce evil as much as possible, in a volatile conceptual context and as relative as conceptual significance.

Contractual ethics is based on the idea that society and derived human relations can best be explained in terms of a contract as a social agreement between free persons, defining rights and obligations, personal freedom, and political government. The major result of contractual ethics becomes a code of ethics, which is a synthesis of contractual ethics, and in academic education is assimilated to a moral contract between each member of a community and its whole or the university as a system. Such a code includes aspects related to education, research, discipline and academic integrity, etc.

In this historical context of the becoming more and more pragmatic of morality, one can easily see that the actuality of ethics is relevant, regardless of the re-signification of virtue or happiness. The modern ethics can keep its validity only by increasing the importance of pragmatism. To paraphrase Eutifron's dilemma: "*Does ethics decide that an action is moral only because it is pragmatic, or is an action automatically pragmatic only because it is also ethics?*" Instead of an answer, this paper promotes the Nassim Nicholas Taleb's rationality or Talebian way of thinking...

3. TALEBIAN WAY OF THINKING ABOUT PRAGMATIC MORALITY AND ETHICS

Nassim Nicholas Taleb is not only an experimental mathematician but also a succinct, rigorous one, because the need for more empiricists and conjecturers is a real need today. Nassim Nicholas Taleb always has new ideas to write about using probability in science and search of a new reality, from philosophy to mathematics, from finance to politics, from evaluating the risks to foresight population in demography etc. His ideas as a necessary reaction to Gauss' overestimating the statistical population variance lead to the much higher application of probabilities in a large interval for several standard deviations away from the normal distribution.

First of all, his opinion about moral leadership being rather an action, not a position, may be more connected to pragmatic ethics and not at all to ideal, to the happiness and all theory about that. Some caustic and malicious voices consider him a "*flaneur or idler*" because of his entitled protest against the false theorists of the superiority of Academic life in front of real life. His passion for probabilities include probabilities of a real life, excluded by many Academics or even worse renamed as unnecessary topics. Minding the core process of creativity, and lateral thinking concept proposed by Edward de Bono, we can ask ourselves if the "*flaneur or idler*" is useful in today's research burdened more by the form than by the substance and new ideas. Liberty and improvisation is very needed in the phase of ideation, which should precede every frontier-braking research. Without fresh ideas and creativity, research is basically repetition or incremental improvement of the previous findings.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb way of thinking make anyone to understand why so many books and papers about ethics have so far offered an extraordinary feeling of artificiality. The pragmatic morality underlines first of all the discrepancy between words and actions as a modern adherency to non-reciprocity or to anti - Confucianism. Good and bad are very common ideal subjects of theoretical ethical books or lectures. However, Talebian pragmatical morality means to be confronted with the real things, especially when "*the ethical people*" tend to freak out of reality, especially when this reality is not an honourable one.

The simplexity of Talebian way of thinking or of Taleb's ethics is truly refreshing mainly as a result of a clear understanding of the pragmatic morality from which it was born. All his books put the major question in a direct or indirect manner: "*Does that person have his skin in the game?*" redefining in

many original ways, creative types or allusive rather than explicit kinds of delimitation the new pragmatic ethics transposed from the study of the pragmatic morality in modern times:

 i) the false dichotomy with reality disappears, and ethics does not pretend that the existence of pragmatic morality and the (co)existence of theoretical ethics are somehow a common choice where only the ethics concept can be recognized: "*My point is that wisdom in decision making is vastly more important, not just practically, but philosophically, than knowledge*" [10]; In this society, where the relative value, availability and cost of obtaining the information (and even knowledge) is declining due to the technological progress, his point is sharper than ever before.

ii) base rate failure of theoretical ethics may suppose that the current situation with everything in place is the only relevant reality, in this case ignoring that much of what means a pragmatic attitude in a modern world not only in retrospective but also in prospective times: "*No, we don't put theories into practice. We create theories out of practice*" [10]; Taking a perspective that moral is a social category (which elegantly explains differences in national and civilisational viewpoints of moral actions), Taleb proposes a direction to unify the differences.

iii) argument to false ergodicity, creating a background in classical ethics can not assume that the statistics for a large number of individual something is true of every member of that world: "*You may never know what type of person someone is unless they are given opportunities to violate moral or ethical codes*" [10];

iv) in his trying to avoid the ambiguity between the meaning of what suggests a term like pragmatic ethics (that is coming from pragmatic morality) and general ethics Nassim Nicholas Taleb underlines the difference between the essence and the appearance of ethics in any human activity: "*Work ethics draw people to focus on noise rather than the signal* " [11];

v) like in any oxymoron of one pragmatic ideal: "**If your private life conflicts with your intellectual opinion, it cancels your intellectual ideas, not your private life*" [1];

vi) even a necessary duality must be deleted: "**To make ethical choices you cannot have dilemmas between the particular (friends, family) and the general*" [1];

vii) neither good nor bad definitions of pragmatic ethics are important,but the truth is one cannot avoid the impact or the consequences of unethics opinions or attitudes: "**If you give an opinion and someone follows it, you are morally obligated to be, yourself, exposed to its consequence*" [1];

viii) the excess of legality in ethics can alterate the pragmatic ethics indeed: "*Modernity has replaced ethics with legalese, and the law can be gamed with a good lawyer*" [10];

ix) in this new mixture the only real component remains courage: "*Courage is the only virtue you cannot fake*" [1];

x) the objectivity of the pragmatic ethics remains in reality and in mankind perceptions of that: "*you will never fully convince someone that he is wrong; only reality can*" and "*reality doesn't care about winning arguments; survival is what matters* " [1].

 On Tweeter Matthew Pirkowski wrote about the concept of pragmatism itself: "*This is by definition pragmatism, not rationalism. One could argue pragmatism as rational, but must sacrifice logic as irrational to do so.*" (Tweet, Oct. 28. 2017). In fact, this answer is the most exciting and adequate solution to identify correctly the pragmatic sense to Nassim Nicholas Taleb's succinct definition: "*what works cannot be irrational.*" This echoes economic pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping that *"the colour of the cat doesn't matter as long as it catches the mice"*. Another pragmatic stance is that in social and organizational millieus, we (essentially more than the laws of nature) actively create our environment and reality. So, what works in those environments, cannot be irrational, because whatever works helps create the system itself.

 Nassim Nicholas Taleb can explain pragmatic two modern realities, when "*one person needs to be intolerant with intolerance*" and why "*the biggest problem with modernity may lie in the growing separation of the ethical and the legal*" [12]. One researcher must read his books, and so he can understand an answer like this: "**The curse of modernity is that we are increasingly populated by a class of people who are better at explaining than understanding...Let us conjecture that the formation of moral values in society doesn't come from the evolution of the consensus. No, it is the most intolerant person who imposes virtue on others precisely because of that intolerance. The same can apply to civil rights.*"[1]

 Finally, the truth is that even the pragmatic morality and pragmatic ethics can be fully understood only in conditions of dynamic equality, specific to developed economies, cultivated countries, and educated populations. Only in these realities, a strong form of philosophical pragmatism can appear, in which ideas have merit only if they can be shown to work in practice: "*There is no such thing as the "rationality" of a belief, there is the rationality of action*" and "*anything that hinders one's survival at an individual, collective, tribal, or general level is irrational.*" [1]

3. CONCLUSIONS

 Any comments on the Nassim Nicholas Taleb' s multidisciplinary ideas, can show him as a prolific mathematician, placed rather in reality not in theory, and as the smartest statistical thinker in the

demolition of the precariousness of the econometrical modelling. He remains a thinker who believes in "*The Black Swan*", in heavy tails or extreme events [13] and also one able to offer the real epistemology to his students and the nature of knowledge and morality to the academic life, in his unique series of books, from "Incerto"…

His way of thinking does not much care for the theoretical academic opinions and the different academic or non-academic publics [14]. His scientific bases, reasoning, truths are somehow placed on a different timescale, certainly a dynamic one based on equilibrium in front of reality and all of these aspects give him specific integrity of the pragmatic morality. All very well, but of what practical use is this specific way of thinking? One can paraphrase Michael Faraday and use his famous words: "*Of what practical use is a new born baby*?"

Thinking of a Taleb as of a forerunner for a new way of thinking, we can ask ourselves, what good would proactive creation of the way of thinking bring? From a pragmatic point of view we can have benefits of a "safe" way – we need reality to change first, and then we collectively adopt our way of thinking. Of course, phenomenons or reality change and a new way of thinking are interconnected, but following the Rogers curve, innovators and early adopters of a new way of thinking are a small minority. That can be called the reactive approach. Proactive approach is to change a way of thinking, and that will build new and change environment. That form of social engineering is the rational and conscious design of our social, organisational and cultural environment.

Reasoning in pragmatic ethics brings together a hypothesis extracted from reality or even a thesis with arguments that practically support, prove or prove it historically. That is why in pragmatic ethics, opinion is not in itself a moral argument, and in order to become a thesis, it must later be demonstrated on the basis of a pragmatic argument, offering scientific or at least realistic or proven reality evidence of relative truths. It is about those relative truths that more and more people believe in and that belong to a certain historical moment. However, one can say that humankind wishes more people were fluent in silence... Nassim Nicholas Taleb is absolutely right when it comes to much-applied areas, under many risks' pressure and where the actual doing is more worthwhile in life than learning theories in academia. Nassim Nicholas Taleb will remain not only a pragmatic researcher and a robust practitioner, but also an anti-fragile teacher for the long term future, even when he will look fragile for theoreticians... The majority of the academic researchers can trust in his sentence: "*True intellect should not appear to be intellectual*" [1] to be easier accepted in real life, to be pragmatic...

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