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# CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ETHICS OF ECONOMIC SCIENCE. LIBERALISM AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

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## Abstract

The structure of the research presented by us in this article includes: some interferences of the ethics of economic science with other areas of thought, liberal-referential ethics of contemporary economic doctrines, examples of alternatives to liberal ethics, contributions of ethics to the important themes of economic science, the ethics of the economy in special conditions (war, financial crisis, pandemic), the application of ethical norms in the legislation of the European Union, ethics and equal opportunities in economic science, problems regarding ethics, truth and methods of research in economic science, coordination among ethics, economic doctrines and social movements.

As for alternatives to liberalism, we have chosen Christian doctrine, economic thought independent of established economic doctrines, corrective currents of liberalism, such as social liberalism and humanism.

We have indicated as important themes of the ethics of economic science the profit of companies, the problems of environmental protection, the choice between production efficiency or the equity of the distribution of the necessities of life, employment, the ethical dimensions of the choice between intervention and non-intervention in the economy.

Through the content of the article and especially through the conclusions presented, we believe that we have suggested some new directions of research on ethics in economic science.

**Key words:** truth, economic science, liberalism, economic doctrines, Christian doctrine in economics

## I. Introduction

Ethics has evolved a lot lately. The numerous studies related to ethics show its strong connections with society and with different fields of scientific research. Naturally, economics and economic science cannot be missing from the list of possible applications of ethics. Man ensures the essential conditions of life following a well-organized activity. Nature does not make available to man free of charge only a tiny part of what is necessary for him to live. Economic science helps man to transform the resources available in nature into the goods he needs and to distribute them in such a way as to ensure the continuity of the respective flows. evolved a lot lately. The numerous studies related to ethics show its strong connections with society and with different fields of scientific research. Naturally, economics and economic science cannot be missing from the list of possible applications of ethics. In the whole process of organizing and improving work, as studied by economic science, ethics undoubtedly intervenes.

In this article we have analyzed ethical aspects of the liberal doctrine in parallel with some of its alternatives. Liberal doctrine has been a referential for economic science since the era before Adam Smith until the present day. We avoided the standard alternatives of

liberalism: interventionism, social democracy and communism. Instead, we discussed the Christian doctrine, the humanistic doctrine and systems of economic thought outside the established doctrines, but also corrective variants of liberalism. We want to formulate some new openings for debates regarding real alternatives to liberalism, other than those already established. The problems of the ethics of economic science have a limited completion in space and time, concretized in imperative legal provisions that must lead to solving the problems in a fair way. We have chosen to analyze the application of the ethics rules in the legislation of the European Union, of which we are citizens. We also propose that in the future there will be scientific debates in which Marxism, interventionism under market conditions, classical liberalism or neoliberalism, Christian doctrine, the new doctrines that have emerged as models developed outside the established doctrines will be able to be compared strictly from an ethical point of view .

## **II. Economic literature review**

The courage to put economic doctrines face to face, including their ethical essence, regardless of how big the differences in approach or temporary are, we find it well documented in Mark Blaug (Blaug, 1992). There are studies focused on economic doctrines in which the work is viewed in direct and direct connection with the life of the authors and the era in which they lived (Butiseacă, 2011) or on the evolution of ideas as recorded in the history of economic thought (Văleanu, 1996).

For classical liberalism, the already established books written by Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill are relevant (Smith, 2009; Ricardo, 1959; Mill, 2015). The ethical elements of the economic doctrine from the perspective of classical liberalism are succinctly and clearly formulated (Smith, 2017).

As reference works of the Vienna School, there are titles that have become classics for the respective school of thought (Mises, 2018) or newer ones (Zittelman, 2023). The pertinent analysis of ethical elements based on the coverage of needs by stigmatized occupations is also relevant (Block, 2021).

Since the ethics based on the doctrine of the Austrian School experienced a certain degree of expansion, systematizations were imposed over time. One of these systematizations can be found within the debates within the Rothbard Austrian School (Rothbard, 2022).

An objective synthesis of the arguments of the Austrian School, centered including on elements of economic ethics, can be found both in the approaches from the outside (Bremond, 1989) and from the inside (Salin, 2013, p.98). Depending on the position in which a particular analysis of the Austrian School stands, ethical arguments will be able to move from the ethics of freedom to the paradox that those who pay for decisions are not those who make them.

Regarding the ethical elements based on state intervention in market economy conditions, there are studies from the middle of the 20th century focused on avoiding or combating economic crises (Keynes, 2009) or recent studies focused on reducing inequalities according to new ethical norms (Pikety, 2019).

The most radical, translated and internationally read alternatives to liberal doctrine, are those written by Karl Marx and Pikety (Pikety, 2014; Marx, 1953).

The ethics based on the economic doctrine of Christianity and other great religions is well argued in synthesis works (Dumea, 2015; Isidor, 1997; Bartolomeo, 2007) or in various studies focused on a certain faith: Weber for Protestants (Weber, 2003) or Sombart for Jews (Sombart, 2009). General syntheses between faith and the ethics of economic science are also useful (Napoleon & Franc, 2009).

Humanism (Voiculescu, 2018) or social market economy (Taşnadi, 1997) can be mentioned in the category of other systematized doctrines.

### **III. Some interferences of the ethics of economic science with other fields of thought**

One of the areas of interference for the ethics of economic science is that of economic policies. Economic doctrines are validated through the economic policies that are based on them. Starting from the connection between the ethics of economic science and the ethics of actually applied economic policies, we arrive at communication ethics issues. Here, considerations such as those from the field of research into the fake news phenomenon are useful (Bortoş & Hagi, 2023).

There was a strong current of thought in France, recorded as early as the nineteenth century, which held that political economy was less the science of wealth than the science of human activity; the richest country is always the one that works and produces the most. Through this, political economy was linked to morality and industrial freedom to all freedoms (Laboulaye, 2001, p.91).

Following the expansion of the importance of ethics, newer research has identified new areas of inquiry. Among them are the contributions to the development of ethics by some personalities who did not have the quality of philosophers (Stroe, 2023). We thus understand that an ethics of the human being (such as Eugen Russu), of anthropology (Ion Biberi), of science and medical practice (Nicolae C. Paulescu), of education and pedagogy (Leon Cosmovici), of geography (Simion Mehedinți) can be developed. , etc.

Conducting ethics studies in particular fields of science or human activity can be done by professionals in the field who have taken the step toward the integrative synthesis required for such an endeavor. By reading and carefully analyzing a fundamental text like that of the philosopher Constantin Stroe, we understand that it is not obligatory to ask personalities who have made contributions in the field of integrative ethics neither an immaculate life, nor irreplaceable contributions of their entire works.

The correlation between ethics and efficiency is observed by more and more researches in various fields. For example, recent studies have demonstrated the relationship between the rigorous application of ethical norms in the work process and creativity through the concept of cognitive empathy (Madonna, 2023, pp.43-48).

Such research results transform ethics from a field that receives and develops novelties from the world of science into a provider of themes. In the case of the role of cognitive empathy in increasing work efficiency through increased creativity, new topics for discussion regarding the mechanism of generating added value and profit are put before the economic doctrines

The creativity of employees can be much more important than that of the entrepreneur in the case of large and very large companies. It seems that the studies at the microeconomic level have already overtaken the general theoretical ones. In multinational companies, employees and managers perform duties that classical doctrines, especially of the liberal type, consider to belong only to employers.

### **IV. Liberal ethics - referential of contemporary economic doctrines**

In several fields of research there is a situation where one type of approach is dominant and all the alternative solutions that appear are related to it. This is the case of economic science and implicitly of the ethics of economic science: there is the referential called the liberal doctrine.

Liberalism is referential even in the books in which counter arguments to those supported by this doctrine are dominant. All solutions are put face to face with the liberal ones: the reactions to classical liberalism, the directorial defiance of neoclassical liberalism, the discussions about the complex problems of today's humanity (Sută-Selejean, 1992). The same philosophy is also present from the point of view of French economic thinking: most of the

ideas discussed, except for those aimed at the management of companies, are for or against liberal solutions (Dedieu et al., 2011).

Economic liberalism had a much larger scope than political liberalism. Numerous authoritarian systems or dictatorships have used liberal thinking in the economic field. Over time, a series of Governments have invoked belonging to different political systems (socialist, social-democratic, nationalist/patriotic, even extreme left), but they have used the values of the liberal doctrine in the economic field every time they had the opportunity.

The liberal model based on business generating progress was used not only in free market systems but also by governments expressly based on the doctrine of interventionism. Recent history has put into circulation, for example, Romania's participation in the period of the centralized economy on the American market through companies specialized in certain types of business, rigorous calculations made to benefit from the tax advantages in force, care for the repatriation of profits (Opriș, 2019).

Under these conditions, the question arises whether the people at the top of the communist state's hierarchy sincerely believed in the command economy or were forced by circumstances to use the advantages of the free market economy strictly on a case-by-case basis.

## **V. Alternatives to liberal ethics**

### **V.1 Alternatives having a corrective role of liberalism**

Some alternatives to liberalism tend towards the rigorous observance of established and specific institutions. For example, in the humanist doctrine we find references to the construction of the market or the development of the market culture (Voiculescu, 2015). For this reason, the humanist doctrine can also be understood as a form of liberalism updated with today's concrete economic problems.

Social liberalism or Ordo-liberalism was particularly successful in Germany in the middle of the 20th century. However, his ideas were floated long before their actual application. A coherent model of the ideas of social liberalism can also be found in Romania immediately after the Second World War in the case of the party led by Gheorghe Tătărăscu (Băluță, 2002). The program of this party (Mureșan, 2023, pp.143-152) sets economic objectives similar to those that were later applied in Germany.

### **V.2 Christian ethics applied to economics**

The Christian variants of economic thinking start from the objectives that economic development projects must pursue. We are talking about a Christian ethic that defines the social purpose of development. In this ethics, the issue of the standard of living is a single landmark along with the attitude towards life, the trust in God and the world, in one's own powers and possibilities to lead one's life, to the feeling that one belongs to this society in which one lives, that one can contribute at its best (Marx, 2013, p.39 ).

Although, from a strictly ethical point of view, there are no nuances in the different beliefs that Christianity has, there are nuances in the way of transmitting the actual economic doctrine. Within the Christian doctrine, the economic thinking promoted by the Catholic Church has a distinct role. In addition to the Papal Encyclicals or firm and clearly expressed opinions by Christian-democratic economists, syntheses centered precisely on ethical elements began to appear. Among the syntheses of this type elaborated recently, we find the concepts of economy of communion and economy formulated (Bradu, 2019).

The efforts of the Catholic Church were not limited to the elaboration of well-developed doctrinal syntheses. Christian ethics regarding the economic issue was also present in the form of a coherent and intense practical action. Perhaps in the case of the Christian economic doctrine we find the most rigorous correlation between the doctrinal concept and the practical action or policy adopted. In many cases, especially in Eastern Europe, the ways of economic

action based on the Christian doctrine have been less publicized, and future research should bring to light such approaches. For Western Europe there was an obvious effort to present concrete actions in accordance with Christian social doctrine (Wright, 2010, pp.235-236).

An important contribution to the research of the ethical elements of the Christian economic doctrine is also the firm messages of the Romanian Orthodox Church in which reference is made to its patrimonial relations with the Romanian State. Both the sacrifices made by the Romanian Orthodox Church from a patrimonial aspect and their reflection on the ethics of economic science remain recorded (Vlăducă, 2010). Messages in this direction were formulated by the Most Blessed Daniel every time contemporaries left the impression that they did not know the essence of the secularization of church assets in the 19th century. Patrimonial problems of all Christian churches can constitute a direction of research for the ethics of economic science.

Rereading some texts based on interfaith dialogue can have an important role on research in the field of ethics of economic science. For example, in the philosophy of Kabbalah there is an edifying principle regarding the importance of ethics: The righteous are greater than the angels (Franck, 1943, p.129). The notion of justice thus becomes a fundamental one on which any ethical edifice must be based, including in fields oriented towards practical life, such as that of economic science.

### **V.3 Contributions to the ethics of economic science outside established doctrines**

It must be remembered that there are numerous limits to the approach from the perspective of traditional doctrines to all ethical problems posed to economic thinking. Some topics were not the subject of doctrinal debates. In addition, the evolution of life has presented economic thinking with new problems that are difficult to fit into the patterns of their founding model.

An example of an economic system of original thinking outside the established doctrines is the one generated by N. Georgescu-Roegen. One of the innovative elements introduced into the theoretical space of economic science with strong ethical implications is entropy (Roegen, 1979). The essence of the conclusions of his model is that it generates a lot of reflection on the ways and essence of development.

Ethical contributions in economic science positioned outside the classical doctrines can also be found in Anghel N. Rugină. It has a whole chapter entitled <the third revolution in ethics>. His main referent is George Edward Moore, as a relativistic reformer of ethics at the beginning of the 20th century. Within the revolution that Moore achieved is both the correlation of ethics with the stage of evolution of the sciences and the nuance of truth in ethical theories. Thus we can talk starting from the 20th century about a modern ethics of relativity and an ethics of disequilibrium. These are complementary to the classical ethics of certainty and the ethics of balance. In addition, considerations of the relationship between persuasiveness and truth are valuable. For the evolution of economic theory, the following emphasis is of great importance: if I have succeeded in convincing, this does not mean that justice is on our side (Moore, 1960, p.145). At the same time, subsequent researches based on new models and hypotheses have broadened the area of understanding of the complementarity between certainty and relativity, between balance and imbalance. Although, as a reflection of the spirit brought by Moore, models based on uncertainty and disequilibrium also appeared in economic theory, they remain as particular developments or as working hypotheses in rigorous scientific study.

In most of the models on which current economic doctrines are based, the assumption of equilibrium is expressed or at least implicit. In the absence of balance, some representatives of economic doctrines who have had the opportunity to apply them in reality, temporarily accept exceptions to their basic rules.

## **VI. The contribution of ethics to the important themes of economic science**

### **VI.1 General conditions**

In the conditions in which the economy aims to distribute limited resources to practically unlimited needs, the question arises of the criteria considered when analyzing the impact of ethics in economic science.

The respective criteria must be measurable and the data must be publicly available or at least widely accessible. In totalitarian systems, even those that apply the strict rules of the market economy, assessments are not certain because the data lacks the necessary degree of credibility.

A more restrictive model from the point of view of the area of comparative analysis of solutions based on ethics in economic science can be found in Schumpeter. The question arises as to whether the economy and society existing today is essentially liberal. It would be useful to determine to what extent or proportion the economy and society in Europe, North America, South America, China, Japan, the rest of Asia, Africa, Australia adhere to liberal assumptions. Knowing the degree to which liberalism is still present allows the correct imputation of the effects of a certain doctrine, the liberal one. In order to design the future, it is necessary to correlate the effects of different economic systems with their performances.

### **VI.2 The profit of the companies**

A problem of economic ethics is the profit of companies. It is known that in Marxist doctrine profit was considered a tool of exploitation. For a long time the defense of the free economy centered on the necessity and opportunity for profit. However, Mises makes strong arguments in favor of the social function of profits and raises alarm signals, also from an ethical perspective, about the risk of non-profit business management (Mises, 2021).

### **VI.3 Environmental protection – ethical issue of contemporary economic science**

Among the new problems that appeared in the 20th century with major ethical implications was the protection of the environment and the preservation of the man-nature balance. In the 8th decade of the 20th century, the issue of environmental protection and resource conservation was included in the policies of most national governments, having a strong support at the international level through the Reports of the Club of Rome. Through its connection with the very life of Earth's inhabitants, the issue of environmental protection is ethical in its essence. The possibility of a convergence of economic systems and thinking in the problem of natural imbalances, primarily in terms of resource conservation, has been mentioned since the 20th century (Constantinescu, 1976, pp.316-327). The topic of environmental protection in correlation with that of sustainable development is today really treated similarly, sometimes even identically, by the different economic doctrines.

### **VI.4 The efficiency of production or the equity of the distribution of the necessities of life**

One of the important themes of the ethics of economic theory is the dilemma of the efficiency of production or the equity of the distribution of what is necessary for life, sometimes expressed in the form of the equality-inequality dichotomy between human beings in terms of the contribution to the realization of the products and services necessary for living and implicitly in their position in the distribution chain. Efficiency frequently requires inequality of distribution, being seen in turn as a direct and immediate result of the diversity and variability of the parameters of each individual. From a purely philosophical point of view, the contributions that appeared immediately after the factual and harsh manifestation of the project of equalizing people generated by the Bolshevik revolution should be remembered. Major topics such as the ontological and religious foundations of society, democracy, the state, liberalism, anarchism, war, economics, culture can be treated under the generic title philosophy of inequality. By carefully reading such an interdisciplinary study we will be able to understand the connection between philosophy and economics. The sincerity specific to Russian philosophy results from the lack of any attempt to hide the polemical component of the content: the very title suggests that it is a reaction to contrary views in the field of social philosophy.



Although he also leads the argument against radical equalization solutions, the data of the developments regarding the relation of man to the economy is totally different from the argumentation that appeared later under the auspices of the Austrian school: <life has become more and more difficult; man had to pass from extensive to intensive work; the rhythm of life has changed> (Berdiaev, 2005, p.292). The primacy of economy and efficiency at the dawn of the contemporary era from the perspective of the philosophy of inequality poses problems that post-war doctrines develop statistically but in an opposite sense.

In the question of economic relations between people, a central place is occupied by the sphere on which the main attention must be directed: production or distribution. It is probably a surprise to mention that in the production-distribution ratio we find fair theoretical solutions since the 19th century in Russian economic and philosophical thinking. It has been known since then that the main attention must be paid not to distribution, but to the development of production, because only in this way can the payment of labor be raised and the capitalist's profit be increased (Batiuşcov, 1889).

The relationship between the efficiency of production and the equity of the distribution of the necessities of life is established from several points of view. One of the areas of research is that of equal access to resources. Different plans are already appearing here:

- a) internationally, between different countries
- b) at national level, between its resident individuals or companies
- c) at the regional level, in the case of confederal systems based on the free movement of goods, capital and people, such as the European Union.

At the national level, Turgot's considerations are relevant according to which the freedom of movement of labor and products is beneficial and ethical at the same time. The circulation of labor has in mind its freedom, the first form of freedom, its own, sacred and imprescriptible. The free circulation of grain trade is in turn the only means to prevent, as far as possible, excessive price inequalities (Turgot, 2019, p.12). During the period in which Turgot lived, the grain trade was essential. He was referring to this when he wrote about freedom of trade. Despite economic, social and technological progress, grain trade has remained an important point on the international agenda today, complemented by the movement of many other goods and services.

An important problem that economic doctrines have to solve is that of employment. There can be no question of economic rationality and the ethics of development if a part of active people cannot find work. Employment is perhaps one of the issues where efficiency and ethics combine best. Economic history has already confirmed a truth: the social, political and economic consequences of unemployment are very difficult to separate. When unemployment rises all social tensions rise due to the psychological effects on workers and their families. For these reasons, technological development is expected both to replace some manual activities and to identify new forms of activity under the conditions of a high level of employment (Freeman & Soete, 1994, pp. 9, 141-144).

#### **VI.5 Ethical dimensions of the choice between intervention and non-intervention in the economy**

Two categories of arguments were formulated against state intervention in the economy:

- a) economic laws are the basis of the functioning of the economy, which must be allowed to function; acting against economic laws wastes resources and automatically decreases the possibility to satisfy consumption needs, usually affecting the citizens with the weakest position in society
- b) state interventions usually create inequity, in the sense that the distribution is only based on objective criteria regarding the contribution made to the production of goods obtained.

The elements of unfairness usually captured by liberal doctrine contain both illegitimate advantages for some and undeserved disadvantages for others. In Romania, since the beginning

of the 20th century, the mandatory ethical elements specific to the market economy were mentioned. Even the state can set useful objectives in order to respect the ethics of the market economy, thus having an eminently moral vocation. In order to act morally, the state must assume 3 main obligations: defining and maintaining legality, managing the budget area, ensuring national security. Failure to respect legality leads to the proliferation of atypical forms of capitalism, those that parasitize the public system (Vosganian, 2001, p.262).

## **VII. Economics ethics in special conditions: war, financial crisis, pandemic**

An important problem of economic ethics is the attitude proposed by the different doctrines in special conditions. The most common cases in which the rules under normal conditions can no longer be applied are: war, financial crises, pandemic, exceptional weather phenomena such as floods or long drought, earthquake, etc.

### **VII.1 War and economic ethics**

The state of war is considered, both in economic and political doctrines, as an alternative to the normality of peace: here is clearly the difference between the state of nature and the state of war. At the same time, this special state is linked to rights violations, with the prevention of future harms called the prevention of future evil (Locke, 1999, pp.62-63). In wartime the most complex ethical problem was the enrichment of a few while the vast majority suffered great privations and many lost their lives. Because of the difficulty of eliminating this problem, efforts have been focused on finding solutions to prevent war. It may be an axiom that war unjustly alters social hierarchies, however democratic a country may be.

### **VII.2 Ethics in a pandemic (ethics during a biological crisis)**

A recent severe biological crisis was the Covid 19 pandemic. It was a crisis of the world economy and of every national economy in part originating from biological causes. Although the intensity with which it was felt had obvious national nuances, the general worldwide characteristic was common: a major contraction of the economy accompanied and followed by major irreversible structural or technological adjustments.

A succinct analysis of the economic effects of the pandemic carried out from the perspective of the Austrian School was drawn up even during its development by Jesus Huerta de Soto (de Soto, 2021). In this approach, liberal axioms can be respected even in conditions of biological crisis, as was the case with Covid 19.

There are analyzes of the Covid 19 pandemic relatively independent of doctrinal options (Coșea, 2021). In crisis conditions we find surrealistic references in such approaches: *one dies from the pandemic and from the crisis. Death from crisis, however, is longer and more painful*. For this reason, in addition to a characterization of the state of the economy during the pandemic, solutions for the post-pandemic period are presented.

### **VII.3 The economic crisis of the transition to the market economy**

From the perspective of the school centered on the national interest in Romania, with global developments as references, Florea Dumitrescu is part of it. He developed a series of ideas placed outside the general framework of economic doctrines for the solution of exceptional problems, atypical for the history of economic thought

From the category of unclarified problems in the standard format of economic doctrines was the generalized financial blockade. (Dumitrescu, 2005, pp.31-38). It justifies state intervention when market functioning assumptions are not met based on economic history from the periods of supremacy of liberal thought.

Similar to the mode of action during the Great Economic Crisis of 1929-1933, limited state intervention is allowed to bring the economy to a state of equilibrium.

### **VIII. Application of ethics rules in European Union legislation**

As a result of the confrontations of doctrinal ideas on development ethics, depending on the balance of power generated by electoral support, norms have emerged that emphasize different components of human life and its perspectives. In Europe, fundamental values that have become traditional are expressly protected by legal norms, such as life, property, physical security, but also newly emerging values such as access to education, mobility, equal treatment (Popescu & Voiculescu, 2004). With regard to the intervention mechanism, a particular emphasis on supporting employment is observed. The rigor of the procedures and the intensity of the efforts towards the field of employment can lead us, more or less justified, towards an acceptance of the work value theory. On such a hypothesis, we can also admit that at the level of the EU Commission it is appreciated that the unlocking of reserves regarding work itself or human resources as potential represents the most important source of economic growth. Also, on this path we will probably succeed in building the resources to break the vicious circle of poverty in as many communities or for as many citizens as possible.

In European economic thought and political philosophy, ideas related to equality or equal opportunities according to social criteria are dominant. By ensuring equal opportunities on different social criteria, the dominant European current, formed by the algebraic sum of several doctrines, believes that it will maximize the participation in the economic or social life of the population. Without exclusions or access restrictions, with equal opportunities for all, society and the economy as a whole will benefit from an increased contribution to development.

Among the ethical elements included in European social law are aspects of health and safety at work. In this field, there are public control tools already proven to be particularly effective. The right to work is defined as part of the objective of ensuring the highest possible level of employment. We also identify in the component of European labor law fair remuneration, the right to information of the employees, the trade union right (Carta, 1996; Carta, 1961).

Equality between men and women, the subject of doctrinal debates for over a century, finds its reflection in tested and subsequently improved legal norms (EU Directive 76/207/EEC, 1976; Directive 2002/73/EC, 2002). Both the most profound rules of humanity and the need to promote demographic policies have generated the protection rules for pregnant, lactating or breastfeeding workers (Directive 92/85/EEC, 1992).

A great deal of sensitivity existed in Europe regarding equality on the basis of ethnic or racial origin. In addition to the Community legal norms (Directive 2000/43/EC, 2000), company policies and those of associative systems (including in impact areas such as sports) have emerged that harshly sanction ethical violations focused on equal opportunities.

In principle, we can admit, according to what was presented above, that the legal system of the European Union respects the current standards of economic ethics from the perspective of the human being viewed in isolation. It is not the subject of this article to analyze compliance with ethical norms at a collective level, for countries or groups of citizens of the European Union.

### **IX. Ethics and equal opportunities**

An important ethical parameter in the evaluation of economic doctrines is openness to the real assurance of equal opportunities. In turn, equality of opportunity concerns different criteria: gender, social category, country of origin, religion, nationality, age, existence of disabilities, etc. Equality of opportunity refers to access to employment (employment and wages), to economic initiative (entrepreneurship), to management positions within companies and state institutions, to the development of liberal professions, etc. Equity can be assessed from the starting positions to each of the legitimate targets mentioned above or from the structure of the positions already occupied.

### **IX.1 Equal opportunities between men and women**

One of the criteria for equal opportunities is based on gender. For a long time, men were advantaged by the workings of economic mechanisms. In addition to drafting a Directive and numerous recommendations, the European Union has included active intervention tools to reduce the segregation of women in member countries. Among these instruments, there were also major axes or fields of intervention with financing from structural funds, mainly the European Social Fund.

Within the ongoing projects, national studies were carried out and active measures were taken to reduce segregation. Indicators of segregation were tracked in terms of unemployment, employment, entrepreneurship, including young entrepreneurship (Andronie & Făiniși, 2012).

### **IX.2 Equality of opportunity based on ethnic, religious or racial origin**

The idea of equality of citizens regardless of ethnic origin or race first appeared in the social sciences and was later taken over by economic science. Ethical understanding of the importance of this type of equality can be deepened by rereading and reinterpreting earlier texts based on different humanist views. Following the understanding of the entire social significance of this type of equality, there will be definite automatisms not only in national economic legislation or in the internal rules of large companies, but also in the everyday behavior of citizens.

We bring back into focus the meanings of equal opportunities according to ethnic origin, religion and race as they were seen by Russian avant-garde intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Belonging to a certain faith or ethnicity was considered to be nothing reprehensible in itself. Although every people has its bad individuals, there cannot be a whole bad people because individual responsibility would be eliminated. Equality of rights regardless of ethnic, religious or racial origin, in turn generates equality of responsibilities. Through the lack of feelings of justice and love, there is a departure from fundamental Christian values. Hate feelings of any kind can pervert society from its foundation and contribute to its moral savagery (Soloviov et al., 2021, pp.107-108). In the terms of economic science of the beginning of the 21st century, we can translate the requirements of the Russian intelligentsia by increasing the taxable mass due to the contribution of all ethnicities, beliefs and races resident in a territory. We can also state that peace between communities is beneficial but must be based on mutual respect. Collective civic responsibilities, whether state or local, can be borne more easily if they are distributed among a greater number of equal members of the community, by including all minorities, regardless of ethnic, religious or racial origin.

There can be cohesion of the entire community in the face of unpredictable hardships, with a greater chance of success, if the fundamental values of justice and mutual appreciation are respected among the members of the community.

The finality of ethical approaches remains, however, legal regulation. The legal norm has the ability to impose rules. Thus, even when there is a risk of unwanted exceptions to the ethical norms, the coercive force can act. As a synthesis of the evolution of social thought and practice in Europe, we have a clear norm of the European Union in the application of equal opportunities based on criteria of ethnic origin and race (Directive 2000/43).

The dynamics and flexibility of economic processes has determined the need for regulations in newly emerging issues, such as part-time work (Council Directive 97/81/EC, 1997) or fixed-term employment contracts (Directive 1990/70/EC, 1990). New forms of work are frequently called precarious. They are necessary, but their use cannot be abusive against employees.

## **X. Some problems regarding ethics, truth and research methods in economic science**

### **X.1 General problems of truth and research methods in economic science**

Strong arguments have been brought over time in favor of the experiment and the induction method. Experience prevails because it reflects the constraints that reality puts before the wandering imagination (Iliescu, 1994, p.146). In the classical period of modern political thought, the alarm signal was sounded for what was to appear later, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the economic-social utopias.

In this sense, we find the ideal idea that what man wants to be true, he happily believes (Bacon, 2011). Only real data can validate the performance and efficiency of an economic system. The problem is that in economy and society experiments cannot be carried out. Only ideas that had the opportunity to be put into practice when a certain doctrine had the ability to become dominant in a country and impose itself in the act of governance can be tested as experimental and real case studies.

In the 21st century, however, we can say that there were already numerous and varied doctrines in the position to be the basis of economic and social policy in different countries. What should be done involves the effort to collect and analyze the data based on the methods applied by the specialized disciplines of economics. The combined efforts of collecting and interpreting data from economic history, statistics, accounting, economic analysis, public finance, etc. will be necessary.

An important theme in the methodology of a research field is the establishment of the position of the scientist in relation to the research results. Discussions arise about the neutrality of the scientist in general, of the one in economic science in particular.

Developments in ethics and the impossibility of experiment in economic science have generated discussions on the neutrality of the scientist. The values expressed by the scientist, including the one in economics, are by definition subjective, they pass through the scientist's thinking filter. New approaches at the end of the 20th century reformulated the scientist's neutrality theorem as follows:

There is and should be no place in science for purely subjective, personal values and value judgments

There is and must be a place in science for objective social values and value judgments, but with the obligation to also provide the corresponding logical or empirical demonstration (Rugină, 1993, pp.311-347).

### **X.2 The need for interdisciplinarity**

There are limits when a particular problem is analyzed from a one-sided, single-discipline point of view. There are observations regarding the exaggeration and exclusivity of historicism (Menger, 2022), of accounting or statistics, etc. It is useful to avoid any references to states of affairs in the real economy and society if they are not based on correct, validated and scientifically interpreted data relevant to the problem being analyzed.

## **XI. Ethics, economic doctrines and social movements**

Economic doctrines cannot be separated from the factors that have determined and will continue to determine social movements. The trigger of any social movement is discontent and dissatisfaction. Individuals and groups compare what they have with what they believe is their just and legal right. It can be personal or collective relative deprivation. The transition from despair to revolt or rebellion occurs when the situation worsens, including when the worsening occurred after a period of progress (Dario Paez & da Costa, 2023, pp.115-116).

The role of economic doctrines in social movements is both explanatory and triggering. Economic doctrines can explain a certain factual or legal situation, the causes that brought to a certain critical point. At the same time, economic doctrines offer solutions to situations considered unfair or unjust by disaffected social groups



It is not necessary for a doctrine to suggest violent action. They can appear to the extent that the solutions proposed by the economic doctrines assume radical changes impossible to achieve in any other way than a violent one.

An important dimension of the application of ethical norms in economic doctrines is the credibility they generate. An important aspect of the credibility of the economic policies generated based on the doctrines is in terms of validating the hypotheses considered.

Ever since the 20th century, economic science asked a simple question: in what terms is a good economic policy defined? (Lordon, 1997, p.155). It would be necessary to define performance in economic policy more precisely, especially when it can well characterize a certain dominant doctrine.

It is also useful to separate the doctrinal identity assumed by the public power and the actual content of the adopted economic policy. In this way, the factors that contribute to a certain result will be more precisely identified and the cause-effect relationship can be adequately outlined. Without such advances in the study of economic phenomena it is difficult to make an ethical verdict on the application of a certain economic doctrine

## **XII. Conclusions**

In this article we have included some contributions to an important research area: the ethics of economic science. If at the level of some applied disciplines of the economy, such as management, sales, accounting, marketing, there have been important developments in the field of ethics integration, economic science has benefited less from systematized studies. As a rule, each economic doctrine invokes its own superiority over the others, including from the point of view of ethics. We aimed to present a synthetic picture of a way of approaching ethics in economic science. Obviously, in order to give content to our research, we must refer to a limited number of doctrines. We made their selection based on the originality of the interpretations.

Liberal ethics remains for the moment a referential for research in the field of ethics of economic science. Alternatives to liberal ethics usually refer to it or take it from its constituent elements. The main themes of the ethics of economic science are the production and distribution of wealth, human action for the production of the necessities of life, employment and unemployment, ensuring equal opportunities, transposing the results of doctrinal research into policies and laws or other normative acts.

Regarding the research methodology, the ethics of economic science will take up the issues of neutrality of the scientist, of the validation in the real economy of the research results, the positioning of the doctrines in relation to the social movements.

New research will be useful to take up in the ethics of economic science the advances recorded in other areas of research on ethics and in the applied disciplines of economics.

Rereading some older fundamental philosophical or economic texts can open new horizons of research in the field of ethics of economic science.

In principle we can admit that the legal system of the European Union respects the current standards of economic ethics from the perspective of the human being viewed in isolation.

As in other fields of research, the ethics of economic science knows both broad groups of thought in the form of established doctrines, as well as research having an autonomous character from them. Economic doctrines, both from the perspective of basic research and ethical implications, present a high degree of heterogeneity.

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