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What Kind of “Ethics” is New Testament Ethics?

1. Exhortation and argumentation – 2. Ethical reflection and biblical message – 3. Indicative and imperative

In one of his discourses (III 23, 29-34) Epictetus tells us about his teacher Musonius Rufus:

Rufus used to say: “If you have nothing better to do than to praise me, then I am speaking to no purpose”. Wherefore he spoke in such a way that each of us as we sat there fancied someone had gone to Rufus and told him of our faults; so effective was his grasp of what men actually do, so vividly did he set before each man’s eyes his particular weaknesses.

Men, the lecture room of the philosopher is a hospital; you ought not to walk out of it in pleasure, but in pain. For you are not well when you come; one man has a dislocated shoulder, another an abscess, another a fistula, another a headache. And then am I to sit down and recite to you dainty little notions and clever little mottoes, so that you will go out with words of praise on your lips, one man carrying away his shoulder just as it was when he came in, another his head in the same state, another his fistula, another his abscess? And so it’s for this, is it, that young men are to travel from home, and leave their parents, their friends, their relatives, and their bit of property, merely to cry “Bravo!” as you recite your clever little mottoes? Was this what Socrates used to do, or Zeno, or Cleanthes?

Well! But isn’t there such a thing as the right style for exhortation? – Why yes, who denies that? Just as there is the style for refutation, and the style for instruction. Who, then, has ever mentioned a fourth style along with these, the style of display? Why, what is the style for exhortation? The ability to show to the individual, as well as to the crowd,

the warring inconsistency in which they are floundering about, and how they are paying attention to anything rather than what they truly want. For they want the things that conduce to happiness, but they are looking for them in the wrong place¹.

Today, this would, probably, not be a suitable quotation in a speech on the occasion of an anniversary or fare-well-lecture of a colleague or one's teacher in ethics or moral theology. We use to distinguish the business of an ethicist from that of a preacher or spiritual master. Moral theologians and philosophers of today do not regard promoting ethical conduct as their proper or genuine business, as A.C. Ewing says about the moral philosopher:

Even if he can tell us how we ought to act, I fully realize that the major part of the ethical task is to bring ourselves to do what we believe we ought to do: it is far easier to form good ideals than to live up to the ideals we have formed, and to persuade a person by reasoning that something is his duty is by no means necessarily to induce him to do it. That is the work of the preacher, the practical psychologist and the candid and sympathetic friend, not of the philosopher *qua* philosopher².

In this respect, moral philosophy of today is very different from ancient. The lecture hall or the seminar is not regarded as a hospital, the teacher not as a physician. As the examples of Rufus, Epictetus or Socrates show, however, the ancient ethicist regarded exhortation (προτροπτικός) and refutation (ἐλεγχτικός) as their proper business. R. Burrige refers to Isocrates (Evagoras 77), where we read:

For we exhort (προτρέπομεν) young men to the study of philosophy by praising others in order that they, emulating those who are eulogized, may desire to adopt the same pursuits³.

When we speak of New Testament Ethics, we have to be aware that this kind of ethics is much more similar to the ancient understanding of ethics. The characterization of Rufus by Epictetus may remind us immediately of the Old Testament prophets or John the Baptist. Even though Jesus' exhortations sound less harsh (in general, at least), he is nevertheless a moral preacher like John. His sermons

¹ Translation from Epictetus. 1946. *The Discourses as reported by Arrian, The Manual and Fragments*. Transl. by W.A. Oldfather II. London: Heinemann – Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard UP.

² Alfred C. Ewing. 1965. *Ethics*. New York: Free Press, 154f.

³ Richard A. Burrige. 2007. *Imitating Jesus. An inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*. Grand Rapids (Michigan) – Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 29.

exhort and refute; insofar he has little in common with moral philosophers and theologians of today. The encounter with Jesus may, indeed, be experienced like a hospital (ιατρεῖον); he is a kind of physician not only by his words, but also by his deeds.

1. Exhortation and argumentation

Why don't moral philosophers of today regard exhortation as their professional duty? One decisive difference between our time and ancient times is that there are more divergent opinions in matters of right and wrong. Exhortation, however, presupposes unanimous ethical convictions on the behaviour which is the object of the exhortation. Where such unanimity is missing, argumentation, not exhortation, is needed. Seneca is aware of this difference when he speaks of exhortation or the *pars praeceptiva philosophiae*, which the Greeks call παρανευτική⁴. In his letter 94 he deals extensively with this part of philosophy:

That department of philosophy which supplies precepts appropriate to the individual case, instead of framing them for mankind at large – which, for instance, advises how a husband should conduct himself towards his wife, or how a father should bring up his children, or how a master should rule his slaves – this department of philosophy, I say, is accepted by some as the only significant part, while the other departments are rejected on the ground that they stray beyond the sphere of practical needs – as if any man could give advice concerning a portion of life without having first gained a knowledge of the sum of life as a whole!⁵.

What Seneca has in mind here, seems to be something like a “Haustafel”. What is characteristic for that kind of exhortation or paraenesis, is that it simply presupposes the duties of the people addressed, of the parents and the children, the husband and the wife, the master and the slave. These terms do not only denote a biological or social relation, but a certain “role” with its duties implied. Because

⁴ Seneca. Letter 95,1 (*Petis a me ut quid quod in diem suum dixeram debere differri repraesentem et scribam tibi an haec pars philosophiae quam Graeci paraenetice vocant, nos praeceptivam dicimus, satis sit ad consummandum sapientiam*).

⁵ Letter 94,1 (*Eam partem philosophiae quae dat propria cuique personae praecepta nec in universum componit hominem, sed marito suadet quomodo se gerat adversus uxorem, patri quomodo educet liberos, domino quomodo servos regat, quidam solam receperunt, ceteras quasi extra utilitatem nostrum vagantis reliquerunt, tamquam quis posset de parte suadere nisi qui summam prius totius vitae complexus esset.*) Translation from http://www.stoics.com/seneca_epistles_book_3.html.

these duties are simply taken for granted and not critically reflected, we have today the right or even duty to question these implications. How these roles are simply taken for granted, is nicely illustrated in Epictetus' discourse II 10 titled *How is it possible to discover a man's duties from the designation which he bears* (Πὼς ἀπὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων τὰ καθήκοντα ἔστιν εὐρίσκειν) and he illustrates:

Next bear in mind that you are a Son. What is the profession (ἐπαγγελία) of this character? To treat everything that is his own as belonging to his father, to be obedient to him in all things, never to speak ill of him to anyone else, nor to say or do anything that will harm him, to give way to him in everything and yield him precedence, helping him as far as is within his power.

Next know that you are also a Brother. Upon this character also there is incumbent deference, obedience, kindly speech (...) Next, if you sit in the town council of some city, remember that you are a councillor; if you are young, remember that you are young; if old, that you are an elder; if a father, that you are a father. For each of these designations, when duly considered, always suggests the acts that are appropriate to it⁶.

What is important, is that the respective terms (father etc.) are not used in a neutral, but in a normative sense. Normative or evaluative terms are typical for exhortation, for paraenesis; the most prominent example for this kind of speech may be the Decalogue. The fourth commandment, for instance speaks of father and mother in a normative sense, not, however, in the active sense of a role, but in the passive sense of somebody, to whom we owe a certain behaviour like respect or care. In the second part we find evaluative verbs like "stealing", "murdering", "committing adultery" which imply already that the respective action is forbidden, morally wrong. Insofar, these exhortations are tautologies. This tautological character is very clear in the prohibition of killing we find in the Koran (6:151): "You should not kill anybody, whom God has forbidden to kill, except when you are legitimized".

We find a similarly tautological formulation in Rom 13:7 (KJV):

Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

There is no detailed information about the persons to whom these things are due. Therefore, we might have some doubts about the usefulness of such kind of exhor-

⁶ II 10, 7-12.

tation. Seneca mentions the Stoic philosopher Ariston of Chios, who had expressed these kinds of doubt and discussed them at length⁷: “*Quid prodest (...) aperta monstrare?*” (What good does it do to point out the obvious?) The answer is:

A great deal of good; for we sometimes know facts without paying attention to them. Advice is not teaching; it merely engages the attention and rouses us, and concentrates the memory, and keeps it from losing grip (*Plurimum; interdum enim scimus nec attendimus. Non docet admonitio, sed advertit, sed excitat, sed memoriam continet nec patitur elabi*).

A quite different task is answering questions on right and wrong behaviour or solving ethical controversies, as Paul did, for instance, in 1 Cor 7 and 8-10. This task is called “the gift of true discrimination” (δοκιμάζειν τὰ διαφέροντα Phil 1:10) in New Testament language or “prove what is God’s will” (Rom 12:2) or “prove what would please the Lord” (Eph 5:10). Why is it important to be aware of this difference between exhortation and argumentation?

- 1) These tasks of exhortation and argumentation should never be confused; otherwise one can easily fall prey to a temptation typical for theologians or preachers (or, maybe, also politicians, sometimes): argumentation by exhortation. This happens always, if one sees the roots of opinions regarded as wrong or dangerous in vice or immoral attitude and appeals to conversion, instead of trying to convince with arguments.
- 2) In publications of New Testament ethicists we often find phrases like:
 - Paul grounds his ethics in Christology.
 - Paul’s ethics are theologically grounded in three images of community, cross and new creation.
 - Ethics is an integral part of theology.
 - As with all the biblical writers, Luke’s ethics follows logically from his fundamental convictions about his Christ.
- 3) Those statements usually do not take into regard the class of ethical message we find in the Bible, which is mostly paraenesis, exhortation⁸. This may be the reason for some characteristic of many surveys of New Testament ethics, which Burrige observes (3) that they “never grapple how they might be applied to the contemporary world”. Such reservation is, in one

⁷ Letter 94,25.

⁸ This use of the term is a bit different from that of exegetes. They mean normally a literary kind of speech: a kind of extensive exhortation. In my use the scope of ethical speech is the criterion.

respect, wise. Scripture cannot solve the controversies of today, and exhortation is often spoken in a concrete situation of which we today often have only incomplete knowledge; therefore Burrige is right, when he states that scripture can never be “the final court of appeal”⁹.

Some examples may illustrate this statement:

- a) Often we find in the NT only one side of the coin. We have to be always aware of the (may be, controversial) aspects not mentioned. We find, for instance, exhortations to forgive our enemies; but Jesus does not say anything about how we should react in the case that the offender is not conscious of any misbehaviour or guilt, as it was sometimes the case, for instance, in the interrogations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa or in Rwanda.
- b) For similar reasons, I would be cautious to diagnose contradictions between Jesus and, for example, Paul. It may be true that Paul’s instruction, “not to associate (...) or even eat with sinners” (1 Cor 5,11) “seems to ignore Jesus example”¹⁰. But Jesus did not have to give rules for the discipline of a Christian community; the *Sitz im Leben* is different. Jesus did not tell people about the ethical implications of their conversion or their acceptance of Jesus’ message as did John the Baptist, when he was asked by the people: “What shall we do then?” (Lk 3:10). Zacchaeus, however, draws the consequences for himself, and Jesus condemns the unforgiving servant in the respective parable (Mt 18:21-35), and he tells the woman caught in adultery: “Go, and sin no more!” (Joh 8,11).
- c) Paul condemns harshly sexual intercourse with a prostitute (1 Cor 5); but we do not know what he would have told a prostitute wanting to convert to Christianity and to be baptized. To give up her job would have meant, probably, loss of income. And – as we know – there were a lot of prostitutes in Corinth.
- d) For Paul (Rom 1:20-23.26-27), homosexual intercourse is a consequence or symptom of refusal to honour God as God. But what would he have thought about faithful Christian homosexuals? The immorality of homosexual behaviour is simply taken for granted by Paul; otherwise it could not be a symptom of not honouring God, or of paganism¹¹.
- e) Even where we find real argumentation, like in 1 Corinthians 7, we have to be cautious of conclusions for today. For a fully correct understanding

⁹ Burrige. 2007. *Imitating Jesus*, 382.

¹⁰ Burrige. 2007. *Imitating Jesus*, 72.

¹¹ Cf. Werner Wolbert. *Barmherzigkeit oder Gerechtigkeit?*. Münster (forthcoming), 25–34.

of that chapter we would need the letter, the Corinthians wrote to Paul. We cannot understand the contentions and arguments fully without knowing the background in Corinth and the questions of the Corinthians.

2. Ethical reflection and biblical message

Overlooking different notions of ethics is one mistake, exaggerating the difference is the other one. What I mean, may be illustrated by the following quotation of John Barton:

I have suggested that the study of Old Testament ethics has sometimes suffered from an unwillingness on the part of scholars to contemplate “philosophical” questions at all, on the grounds that the people of ancient Israel simply were not interested in, or could not have understood, questions of such a kind¹².

Barton criticizes¹³ authors like Eichrodt and Hempel when they emphasize the “theonomy” of biblical ethics, “almost to the exclusion of other models”; “they were, of course, drawing on much solid evidence from the texts. But they were also surely motivated partly by a dogmatic scheme in which the true theological amount of ethics is viewed as divine command”.

According to Barton, Eichrodt and Hempel projected their (Barthian) understanding of ethics onto Old Testament texts. Obviously they did not reflect on the homonymy of terms like “autonomy” and “theonomy”; they did not realize, that the Old Testaments never reflects on the *Euthyphron*-dilemma, that the language of the Old Testament may sound positivistic (theonomous), but that the message might not be meant strictly in that sense. Barton states

Hempel and Eichrodt, at least, presented their reading of the texts as correct historically, not just as desirable theologically. And it is possible, that they failed to see how far their own theological preferences might be distorting their judgement about the historical facts¹⁴.

¹² John Barton. 2003. *Understanding Old Testament Ethics. Approaches and Explorations*. Louisville (Kentucky): Westminster John Knox Press, 53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

Biblical scholars sometimes think that, in order to get a genuine understanding of Old or New Testament ethics, one has to keep aside insights of systematic ethics or moral theology. As we have seen, this may lead to an unreflected use of ethical terms. We should not forget that there is even no term like “ethics” or “morals” to be found in the bible and, therefore, no particular biblical sense of these terms to take up. We have instead to make a reflected use of our ethical terms, as a remark on the following quotation by Leander Keck may illustrate

The New Testament writers do not shun reward and punishment as sanctions. The notion that the good is to be done for its own sake, not with an eye on future reward, simply never appears, for New Testament is not oriented toward the good but to God’s will, character, and activity as actualize in the Christ event¹⁵.

This is, as an observation, not simply wrong; but behind this statement lies a one-sided (or misunderstood) Kantianism.

- a) We have to remind ourselves, first, that Kant was probably the first to become aware of the problem of eudaimonism. If the good is not done for its own sake, but, for instance for pleasure or for happiness, morality is only a means to an end outside morality, and the ethical demand is merely hypothetical. We should not presuppose that New Testament writers were aware of this problem. The New Testament authors, probably, would not have understood or would have had, at least, some difficulty to understand the opposition “good for its own sake – good with an eye on future reward”.
- b) The relation between morality and the eternal reward is not a means-end relation, but a relation of deserving: Whoever does the good for its own sake, deserves the eternal reward. Kant made this point very clear: *Daher ist auch die Moral nicht eigentlich die Lehre, wie wir uns glücklich machen, sondern wie wir der Glückseligkeit würdig werden sollen. Nur dann, wenn Religion dazu kommt, tritt auch die Hoffnung ein, der Glückseligkeit der-einst in dem Maße theilhaftig zu werden, als wir darauf bedacht gewesen, ihrer nicht unwürdig zu sein*¹⁶.
- c) For Kant (like the Epicureans, but unlike Aristotle) happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) is a pure non-moral value, whereas for Aristotle and the Christian tra-

¹⁵ Burrige. 2007. *Imitating Jesus*, 48.

¹⁶ Immanuel Kant. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akad. Ausgabe VI, 130.

dition morality is included in it¹⁷. In the latter case, the end of eudaimonia is not something different from morality.

What could it mean that Paul grounds his ethics in Christology? What do verbs like “ground” or “found” here mean? In the Introductory of his book *Foundations of Ethics* W.D. Ross¹⁸ refers to the following statement of Aristotle:

We must (...) set the observed facts before us and, after first discussing the difficulties, go on to prove, if possible, the truth of all the common opinions about these affections of the mind, or, failing this, of the greater number and the most authoritative; for if we both refute the objections and leave the common opinions undisturbed, we shall have proved the case sufficiently¹⁹.

Whereas physical sciences cannot start from opinions or *a priori* assumptions, ethics cannot start from scratch; it has to start

with the opinions that are crystallized in ordinary language and ordinary ways of thinking, and our attempt must be to make these thoughts, little by little, more definite and distinct²⁰.

Founding ethics on Christology, or on the words and deeds of Christ, would then mean to take those words and deeds as the authoritative or binding starting point. This cannot, of course, be in isolation from other opinions; first, because of the incompleteness of the biblical message, and, second; because this message itself needs to be interpreted correctly. For another point I refer to Hastings Rashdall’s book *Conscience and Christ*:

I believe that it could be shown that the idea of an objective moral obligation is not only consistent with, but naturally leads up to and even logically demands, if the fullest meaning is given to the term objectivity, the belief that morality consists in obedience to the will of a perfectly righteous God²¹.

¹⁷ Ragnar Holte. Glück. In RAC XI, 246–270.

¹⁸ William D. Ross. 1968. *Foundations of Ethics*. Oxford: University Press 1968 (= 1939).

¹⁹ EN 1145b2-7, quoted from Ross. 1968. *Foundations of Ethics*, 1s.

²⁰ Ross. 1968. *Foundations of Ethics*, 3.

²¹ Hastings Rashdall. 1924³. *Conscience and Christ. Six Lectures on Christian Ethics*. London (Reprint 1969), 117s.

Ethics grounded in Christology in this sense excludes all forms of moral subjectivism, relativism or non-cognitivism. Morality is not founded on a sovereign decision of the individual person. It stresses that God's commands are not arbitrary, but expressions of his own righteousness. This includes that God and man have some idea of righteousness in common; otherwise humans could not be perfect or merciful as their heavenly father (Mt 5,48; Lk 6,38). That means that certain metaethical theories are not compatible with the ethical message of the Bible.

In this context, ethics means metaethics, whereas the statement of Aristotle, probably referred mainly to the *c o n t e n t* of the ethical demand. There is a danger, if we try to find a particular demand or norm on Christology. This danger may be illustrated by the *Haustafel* of 1 Pt, where the slaves are admonished to be subject to their masters, even to the bad ones. When they have to suffer, they have to follow Christ's example (2:21): "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps".

Today it would seem absurd to *g r o u n d* slavery as an institution or strict obedience to an unjust command on Christology, on Christ's example of obedience and suffering. The institution of slavery is something immoral for us, whereas it is not condemned as such by the New Testament. That means: If you recommend obedience and suffering as a way of imitating or following Jesus, you have already presupposed that (at least, in the case you address) this is the right or laudable behaviour. A particular ethical demand can as such not be grounded on Christology; it must be proved as morally right in advance. This becomes very clear in the case of the slaves in 1 Pt, because the result is apparently wrong. But the result can also be right, even if the argument, the "foundation" itself is wrong. If, for instance, you argue: slavery has to be abolished, because Christ liberated us from the slavery of sin, or because God liberated us from the slavery of Egypt, your conclusion is right, but the argument not valid, because you overlooked the homonymy of the term "slavery".

The language of "grounding" etc. is, of course, inspired by the fact, that in the New Testament the ethical demand, the imperative, follows the indicative of salvation. Some reflections on this relation are needed for clarifying the issue.

3. Indicative and imperative

We read in Eph 5:1:

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

The faithful are admonished to imitate God's and Christ's love. But this love is not only the standard to fulfil, but also the reason or ground for the moral demand. Similarly, Jesus says in the Gospel of John (13:34):

A new command I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

What is demanded in the imperative, is already realized in the indicative. The imperative admonishes to act according to the standard already realized in the indicative. It is rarely noted, that those formulations are versions of the Golden Rule which demands that we act according to the same standards which we expect others to act on. The reason (or one reason), why this is rarely noted, may be that, at least biblical scholars associate the term "Golden Rule" normally only with Mt 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" or its negative counterpart (cf. Tobit 4:15). But there are also other formulations that express the sense of the Golden Rule more precisely. M.G. Singer says about the standard formula: "that as it stands, the rule is imprecise and needs qualification. It neither says what it means nor means what it says"²².

A prominent example of misunderstanding is that of Immanuel Kant when he objects, the judge would not like to be treated by the culprit, as the judge treats the culprit²³. But the Golden Rule is not a rule of strict reciprocity; it can also be applied

²² Marcus G. Singer. 1971². *Generalization in Ethics*. New York: Macmillan Pub Co, 16. A possible misunderstanding may be illustrated by the version of an American industrialist in the 19th century: "Do unto others what others would do unto you; but do it first".

²³ Immanuel Kant. *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, BA 69: „Man denke ja nicht, daß hier das triviale: *quod tibi non vis fieri etc.* zur Richtschnur oder Princip dienen könne. Denn es ist, obzwar mit verschiedenen Einschränkungen, nur aus jenem abgeleitet; es kann kein allgemeines Gesetz sein, denn es enthält nicht den Grund der Pflichten gegen sich selbst, nicht der Liebespflichten gegen andere (denn mancher würde es gerne eingehen, daß andere ihm nicht wohlthun sollen, wenn er es nur überhoben sein dürfte, ihnen Wohlthat zu erzeigen), endlich nicht der schuldigen Pflichten gegen einander; denn der Verbrecher würde aus diesem Grunde gegen seine strafenden Richter argumentiren“.

on asymmetric relationships, like parents – children or teachers – students, or physicians – patients. The judge in Kant’s example would have to ask him- or herself, whether his (her) judgment would be similar, if he or she himself (herself) had committed the same crime. In that sense Isocrates advises Demonicus: “Conduct yourself toward your parents as you would have your children conduct themselves toward you”²⁴.

The Golden Rule forbids applying a double standard as another formulation, also in Mt 7, makes clear (7:1-2):

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with which judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you.

Or illustrated with a metaphor (7:3-5):

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in your brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

Similarly Isocrates to Nicocles 61 (negative and positive):

Do not do to others that which angers you when they do it to you. Practice nothing in your deeds for which you condemn others in your words. (...) Be not satisfied with praising good men, but imitate them as well²⁵.

The last phrase could be modified for Christians: “Be not satisfied with praising God (Christ), but imitate him as well”.

What is presupposed in the indicative: that God’s or Christ’s behaviour is indeed praiseworthy, is that God (Christ) acts according to the standard of love, of moral goodness; otherwise we could not distinguish benevolent and malevolent deities. The behaviour of the gods of ancient Greece did not always comply with those standards (to put it mildly). That means, our standard of goodness is not derived from Christ’s word and deeds; they are rather a clear and unspoilt example of this standard.

²⁴ Isocrates. To Demonicus 14.

²⁵ Isocrates. To Nicocles 61.

The imperative presents morality as fully realized in Christ. And it is at least incompletely realized in the justified faithful; he (she) is already the good tree that bears good fruit (Mt 7:17). But for the Christian following Christ’s example morality does not cease to be an imperative. Therefore, there is also a second version of the Golden Rule applied on the relation God – man, which points forward to the coming judgment. One version was already mentioned (Mt 7:1-2):

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with which judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you.

Here, the imperative is followed by the announcement of the judgment for those who do not comply with the ethical demand, because God cannot approve of behaviour contrary to his own standard, his own measure. There is, of course, also the positive version, the promise for those who live according to God’s will; the most impressing example of this version may be the beatitudes.

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The following statement of R. BurrIDGE hits an important point (350):

The use of terms like “biblical” is often just a useful way of raising the noise level and claiming authority for one’s own point of view.

My paper may contribute to understand better why this happens easily. In a still more elegant way (in a Latin *distichon*) the reformed theologian Petrus Werenfels (+ 1703) stressed a similar point when he said about the Bible: *Hic liber est, in quo quaerit sua dogmata quisque; invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua*²⁶. (This is the book in which everybody looks for his dogmas and finds them).

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Zusammenfassung: Was für eine Art von „Ethik“ ist die Ethik des Neuen Testaments? Wo man von einer Ethik des Neuen Testaments spricht oder ein entsprechendes Buch schreibt, ist oft nicht geklärt, was das beinhaltet und was von einem solchen Projekt zu erwarten ist. Von heutiger Ethik erwartet man vor allem die Beantwortung praktischer Fragen und die Prüfung ethischer Argumente und ethischer Sprache. Neutestamentliche Ethik ist vor allem Ermahnung, Paränese; ihr geht es um das Tun des bereits als richtig Erkannten und um das Wachstum im Guten. Insofern ähnelt sie dem antiken Verständnis von Ethik, etwa der Stoa.

Schlüsselworte: Neutestamentliche Ethik, Paränese, Stoa, Haustafel, Eudämonismus.

Abstract: When we speak on New Testament Ethics or somebody writes a book on that subject we often wrongly presuppose what that means and what we can legitimately expect from such a project. From the Ethics of today we expect answers on practical questions, studies on ethical arguments and on moral language. New Testament Ethics, however, is primarily exhortation, parenesis which aims at acting according to what is recognized as morally right and at moral growth. Insofar it is similar to how Ancient Ethics, especially the Stoa, understands itself.

Keywords: New Testament Ethics, Parenesis, Stoa, Haustafel, Eudaimonism.

Streszczenie: Jakim rodzajem „etyki“ jest etyka Nowego Testamentu? Kiedy mówi się o etyce Nowego Testamentu albo pisze się o niej książkę, często nie zostaje wyjaśnione co to oznacza, i czego należy spodziewać się po takim projekcie. Od współczesnej etyki oczekuje się głównie odpowiedzi na praktyczne pytania oraz weryfikacji argumentów etycznych i języka, jakim się posługuje. Etyka nowotestamentalna jest przede wszystkim

napomnieniem, parenezą; chodzi w niej o czynienie tego, co zostało uznane za słuszne i o wzrost w dobru. Pod tym względem etyka Nowego Testamentu jest podobna do starożytnego rozumienia etyki, przykładowo w stoicyzmie.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka Nowego Testamentu, pareneza, stoicyzm, tablice domowe, eudajmonizm.

