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Feil, Gabriel Sausen; Paz, Júlia Rocha

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What is ethics? Four Conceptual Possibilities in Communication Research

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Gabriel Sausen Feilⁱ

Ⓜ <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3546-6874>

Júlia Rocha Pazⁱⁱ

Ⓜ <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5625-4371>

ⁱ (Universidade Federal do Pampa, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação e Indústria Criativa. São Borja – RS, Brazil).

ⁱⁱ (Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação. Santa Maria - RS, Brazil).

Abstract

This work aims to present four concepts of ethics used in the research project “Ethical-non-moralist advertising.” Each concept treats the term differently: ethics as a synonym for morals, ethics as legislation, statute, or code, ethics as a reflection of morals, and ethics as aesthetics of existence. To achieve the objective, this work uses the bibliographic research method and is based on texts produced mainly by the authors Yves de La Taille (2007), Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (2017), Clóvis de Barros Filho (2014), Bruno Abílio Galvão (2014) and Michel Foucault (2019). With this, understand that the term ethics can have different meanings and understandings, depending on the context in which it is applied.

Keywords: Ethics. Morals. Advertising. Communication.

Initial considerations

In terms of contextualization, it is important to explain that our research is part of the research project “Ethical-non-moralistic advertising: recommendations for the professional sphere and proposition of an analysis method for the academic sphere,” coordinated by Professor Gabriel Sausen Feil at the Universidade Federal do Pampa (UNIPAMPA), São Borja Campus. The project, started in 2020, aims to “compose a set of recommendations for an advertising activity to be ethical, but not moralistic” and, “based on the set of recommendations, present an analysis method for research that aims to analyze ethical issues of a communicational activity.”

Within this research project, there are several works in development. This is one of them whose contribution is the presentation of the four concepts of ethics used in the project. For that, we carried out bibliographical research based on texts by authors Yves de La Taille (2007), Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (2017), Clóvis de Barros Filho (2014), Bruno Abílio Galvão (2014) and Michel Foucault (2019).

The scientific-theoretical relevance of an academic work, according to Lucia Santaella (2001, p. 173), can manifest itself when the knowledge that results from the investigation “provides the construction of a new theory, evidently rarer case, or fulfills gaps detected in the knowledge of the area, or helps in the understanding of complex theoretical concepts.” That is when the research developed opens doors or serves as a basis for new research and theoretical constructions, when it serves as a complement or contributes with new perspectives to the knowledge produced in the area, or when going through complex theoretical concepts to collaborate with their understanding. As part of the research project “Ethical-non-moralistic advertising: recommendations for the professional sphere and proposition of an analysis method for the academic sphere,” we understand that the scientific-theoretical relevance of our investigation can be expressed in the contribution it brings to develop further research. From this perspective, the research project in which we are involved relies on this study to understand the different ways of approaching the term ethics in different research in the area of advertising. In regards to the social relevance of a work, according to Santaella (2001, p. 174), it can be expressed “when the knowledge that results from the research is focused on reflection and debate around social problems or when a practical knowledge is sought as a means of intervention in social reality.” This way, the research must answer the interests of theory and practice, thinking about both the theoretical-scientific return it produces and the return it generates for society, then connect the important aspects to both. Thus, we highlight our study’s social relevance as it provides clues to overcome the trivialization of ethics. The term, in some cases, especially in common sense, is confused with moral, with the simple duality between right or wrong, as in the first concept presented in this work (in which the term ethics is used as a synonym for moral, which is the set of rules of conduct or behavior, values, and beliefs that establish what it is to be good or bad within a given group).

Furthermore, to choose a theme for research, Santaella (2001, p. 158) explains that it must have “everything to do with the life story and, especially, with the intellectual history of the researcher.” The author (*ibidem*, p. 158) describes some factors that influence the choice of the topic, such as the area in which the researcher is inserted, their repertoire of research in the area, the intensity of contact with researchers and experts in the area, and their experience in research. Therefore, we justify our personal choice for this topic, considering that it is an area of affinity for the researchers involved and that is part of a research project in which they both participate, one as coordinator and the other as a member.

Concepts

In this section, we review the four concepts of ethics proposed: ethics as a synonym for moral; ethics as legislation, statute, or code; ethics as a reflection on morals; ethics as the aesthetics of existence. We highlight that the fact that this research is part of the research project “Ethical-non-moralistic advertising” is what justifies why we specifically use these four concepts of ethics and not more or other concepts. This way, we appropriate the distinction of concepts proposed by the bigger project.

Ethics as a synonym for moral

In the first concept, ethics as a synonym for morals, we present the term as it is used in common sense knowledge acquired from people’s daily lives. According to Yves de La Taille (2007, p. 25), “morals and ethics are concepts usually used as synonyms, both referring to a set of rules of conduct considered mandatory.” The author explains that the terms are the inheritance of two distinct cultures - Latin (moral) and Greek (ethics) - which used them to name something similar: “the field of reflection on the ‘customs’ of men, their validity, legitimacy, desirability, demandability” (*ibidem*, p. 25). Therefore, it is understandable that the terms are confused or present similarities. This explains why, when we say that an attitude is ethical or unethical, we refer, in common sense, to what seems to be good or not according to what we understand by good attitudes, customs, principles, values, and behaviors. According to Clóvis de Barros Filho (2014), in video:

moral is a set of principles that we freely follow in our lives, the things we oblige ourselves to respect because we freely decide to do so; moral is what we would not do under any circumstances, even if no one was watching, even if we were invisible. [...] When you are alone with yourself, dialoguing with yourself to find the best path and the best conduct, you find yourself at the heart of morality¹.

¹ In the original: “a moral é um conjunto de princípios que seguimos livremente na nossa vida, aquilo que nos obrigamos a respeitar porque livremente decidimos assim; a moral é o que não faríamos de jeito nenhum, mesmo que não tivesse ninguém olhando, mesmo que fossemos invisíveis. [...] Quando você está sozinho com você mesmo, dialogando consigo mesmo para encontrar o melhor caminho e a melhor conduta, você se encontra no coração da moral”.

With this, moral is made up of rules of conduct that permeate the entire way of life of a group of people, not as a statute, a code, or legislation, but as rules that are passed from generation to generation, which remain in the air, that deal with what that group of people judge or understand to be good. Since childhood, people learn what they should or should not do at home, school, or on the street. These are teachings passed not in the form of law but as rules of behavior that must be accepted within a social group. With this, we understand that each group has its own morals: in religions, for example, each follows the commandments, rules, or behaviors that they believe to be moral and abhor the immoral. Another specific example is what happens to children of divorced parents who live with both their mother and father: it is possible to notice the differences in each family, which behaviors are acceptable in one and not in another. This also happens in schools, prisons, on the streets, among others.

Ethics as legislation, statute, or code

In this concept, the term ethics still dialogues with the concept of morals, but it differentiates itself by establishing a border between the public and private spheres. According to La Taille (2007, p. 27), “the concept of moral would be reserved for rules that apply to private relationships (the behaviors that a good father or a good mother must have, for example), and the concept of ethics for those who govern public space”². Thus, a declared morality emerges in legislation, statutes, oaths, ethics committees, codes of ethics in professions, etc. It is a way of formally regulating the moral principles of a given group.

In the area of Advertising, for example, there is the Code of Ethics for Advertising Professionals, which “defines the ethical principles that should guide advertising”³ (CENP, 1957, 2020). This code serves as an instrument for formalizing the consensual rules for advertising activities. When this happens, these rules become law. However, this concept of ethics still dialogues with the first concept, which understands ethics as a synonym for morality precisely because it is a prescription, a duty, and a norm for a certain group’s behavior.

This way, ethics, according to the second concept presented, is similar to the first concept (ethics as a synonym for moral) for creating rules for human behavior, but it differs when seeking to legitimize these rules through supervision of behavior and research application by professionals in a given area in the form of documents, statutes, codes, and formal laws.

Ethics as a reflection on morals

Here, we present ethics as a reflection on morals, as a study of morals. In this concept, morality is the rule of behavior, as in the first concept, but it differs from ethics, which studies morals. To Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (2017, p. 20)

2 In the original: “reserva-se-ia o conceito de moral para regras que valem para relações privadas (os comportamentos que devem ter um bom pai ou uma boa mãe, por exemplo), e o conceito de ética para aquelas que regem o espaço público”.

3 In the original: “define os princípios éticos que devem nortear a publicidade”.

The fundamental function of ethics is the same as that of all theories: to explain, clarify, or investigate a certain reality, elaborating the corresponding concepts. On the other hand, moral reality varies historically, and its principles and norms vary with it. The intention of formulating universal principles and norms, leaving aside historical and moral experience, would remove from theory precisely the reality that it should explain⁴.

In this sense, we say that ethics is diverse; it is always under construction because its object of study is not static; it is in constant transformation. Society transforms history and, along with it, also transforms its values, beliefs, and habits. Furthermore, universalizing the study of morality would be like leaving only the things that “suit everyone,” which embraces all groups. However, it would exclude or close eyes to all the particularities, the singularities of each place, each social group, the realities of their ancestors, what they went through to get to the present moment, how they live, and so on.

As for this concept, ethics is the study of morals; then, ethics does not have the objective of dictating the rules or norms of behavior that it considers correct or true but seeks a theoretical reflection on these rules and norms. Vázquez (2017, p. 17) says that “the value of ethics as a theory lies in what it explains, and not in the fact that it prescribes or recommends with a view to action in concrete situations.” That is, ethics questions morals - it does not indicate the best path, and it is not a normative, but morals, yes. Moral is practice, daily acting, and the mechanisms created to follow what is expected in a given group. Therefore, morality comes before ethics, which refers to theory reflection.

Ethics as aesthetics of existence

For the fourth concept, we seek to express it in the way Michel Foucault (2019) uses it: ethics as aesthetics of existence. At this point, ethics is more about self-evaluation and self-examination. We can understand this concept from four topics: the difference between morals and ethics, the four axes that reflect about sexual morality, to whom this ethics refers, and the aesthetics of existence.

In his book “The history of sexuality 2: the use of pleasure”, Foucault (2019, p. 16) seeks to understand “in what way, why and in what form sexual activity was constituted as a moral field”⁵. These questions involve a set of practices that the author calls “arts of existence”:

4 In the original: “a função fundamental da ética é a mesma de toda teoria: explicar, esclarecer ou investigar uma determinada realidade, elaborando os conceitos correspondentes. Por outro lado, a realidade moral varia historicamente e, com ela, variam os seus princípios e as suas normas. A pretensão de formular princípios e normas universais, deixando de lado a experiência moral histórica, afastaria da teoria precisamente a realidade que deveria explicar”.

5 In the original: “de que maneira, por que e sob que forma a atividade sexual foi constituída como campo moral”.

This must be understood as reflected and voluntary practices through which men not only establish rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, modify themselves into their unique being, and make their lives a work of art that carries certain aesthetic values and respond to certain style criteria⁶ (FOUCAULT, 2019, p. 16).

Foucault (2019, p. 31) provides an overview of Christian morality and Greek morality in ancient society and centralizes his study by analyzing “from which regions of experience, and in what forms, sexual behavior was problematized, becoming the object of care, element for reflection, material for styling”⁷. In his research, the author (*ibidem*, p. 63-64) chooses to investigate aspects related to sexuality as he realizes that, in the reflection of the Greeks in the classical era, when it comes to drinking, food, and sexual activities, the tendency is to exaggerate or get out of control. After some time, however, sexual activities became a problem that required more attention than eating behaviors.

The difference between morals and ethics: in this fourth concept, we can understand morals as “a set of values and rules of action proposed to individuals and groups through various prescriptive devices”⁸ (FOUCAULT, 2019, p. 32), rules that are inserted into our lives from some social groups, such as families, schools, churches, etc. Foucault (2019) calls this set of prescriptions a *moral code*. Here, we can also understand morality as the “real behavior of individuals concerning the values and rules that are proposed to them”⁹ (p. 33), the way we relate to the moral code that we have been inserted into, whether we follow them or not and how we follow. These different actions or forms of conduct are called *morality of behavior*.

As Foucault (2019, p. 33) explains, “There are different ways of ‘conducting’ oneself morally, different ways, for the individual who acts, of operating not simply as an agent, but as a moral subject of that action”¹⁰. This way, what he calls the *determination of ethical substance* happens when this way of guiding the morality of behaviors in the face of a moral code is presented by placing the individual as the main subject of their actions.

In short, to be called “moral,” an action must not be reduced to an act or a series of acts that comply with a rule, law, or value. It is true that every moral action

6 In the original: “deve-se entender, com isso, práticas refletidas e voluntárias através das quais os homens não somente se fixam regras de conduta, como também procuram se transformar, modificar-se em seu ser singular e fazer da sua vida uma obra de arte que seja portadora de certos valores estéticos e responda a certos critérios de estilo”.

7 In the original: “a partir de quais regiões da experiência, e sob que formas, o comportamento sexual foi problematizado, tornando-se objeto de cuidado, elemento para reflexão, matéria para estilização”.

8 In the original: “um conjunto de valores e regras de ação propostas aos indivíduos e aos grupos por intermédio de aparelhos prescritivos diversos”.

9 In the original: “comportamento real dos indivíduos em relação aos valores e regras que lhes são propostos”.

10 In the original: “existem diferentes maneiras de ‘se conduzir’ moralmente, diferentes maneiras, para o indivíduo que age, de operar não simplesmente como agente, mas como sujeito moral dessa ação”.

involves a relationship to the reality in which it is carried out and a relation to the code to which it refers, but it also implies a certain relation to oneself; this relationship is not simply “self-consciousness,” but the constitution of oneself as a “moral subject,” in which the individual circumscribes the part of himself that constitutes the object of this moral practice, defines his position concerning the precept he respects, establishes for a certain way of being that will be valid as his own moral achievement; and, for this, he acts on himself, seeks to know himself, controls himself, puts himself to the test, improves himself, transforms himself¹¹ (FOUCAULT, 2019, p. 36).

Consequently, by turning inward, the individual can see what he does not like, what no longer serves him, and can change and improve some aspects so that he can be more in control over his life and have more satisfaction. Bruno Abílio Galvão (2014, p. 3), when commenting on Foucault’s concept of self-care, explains: “In saying that self-care is constituted as an action of the subject towards himself, this, differentiating itself from a selfish and narcissistic position, necessarily, implies an action towards the other”¹². With this, we understand that, in this movement of turning towards oneself and transforming oneself in some aspects, it is also possible to transform what the individual offers back to the world surrounding them. Therefore, by turning to himself, he obtains a result, even if that result is provisional and temporary, and then turns to the world.

Furthermore, Galvão (2014, p. 4) explains that there is another dimension studied by Michael Foucault based on studies by Friedrich Nietzsche, which implies “thinking of the individual as a possibility of exercising power in the sense of ‘will to power’ which through its desiring vital force, ‘doubles’ the force that is coextensive and contrary to it, constituting an affection towards itself”¹³. Thus, the individual needs to have knowledge and control over their desires so that they can have control over their lives and the lives of those who are controlled by them.

11 In the original: “em suma, para ser dita “moral” uma ação não deve se reduzir a um ato ou a uma série de atos conformes a uma regra, lei ou valor. É verdade que toda ação moral comporta uma relação ao real em que se efetua, e uma relação ao código a que se refere; mas ela implica também uma certa relação a si; essa relação não é simplesmente “consciência de si”, mas constituição de si enquanto “sujeito moral”, na qual o indivíduo circunscreve a parte dele mesmo que constitui o objeto dessa prática moral, define sua posição em relação ao preceito que respeita, estabelece para si um certo modo de ser que valerá como realização moral dele mesmo; e, para tal, age sobre si mesmo, procura conhecer-se, controla-se, põe-se à prova, aperfeiçoa-se, transforma-se”.

12 In the original: “ao dizer que o cuidado de si se constitui como uma ação do sujeito para consigo mesmo, isto, diferenciando-se de um posicionamento egoísta e narcísico, implica, necessariamente, uma ação para com o outro”.

13 In the original: “pensar o indivíduo como possibilidade de exercício de poder no sentido de ‘vontade de potência’ que, por meio da sua força vital desejante ‘dobra’ a força que lhe é coextensiva e contrária constituindo um afeto em relação a si”.

According to Foucault (2019, p. 39), “the emphasis is placed on the relationship with oneself that allows one not to be carried away by appetites and pleasures, which allows one to have, in relation to them, dominance and superiority”¹⁴. With this, the author explains that it is necessary to remain free from any slavery that desires and pleasures imply, as they place the subject in a position of passivity and submission in relation to them when not controlled.

The four axes that reflect about sexual morality: Foucault (2019) identifies four important axes that frequently address reflection on sexual morality. First: the notion of *aphrodisia*, which concerns “acts, gestures, contacts that provide a certain form of pleasure”¹⁵ and is questioned regarding its activity, regarding who is passive to it, and regarding the amount of times it is exercised.

Second: *chresis*, which is using pleasures (*aphrodisia*) in the way that suits us, “a question not of what is permitted or prohibited among the desires experienced or the acts that are committed, but a question of prudence, of reflection, of calculation in the way in which their acts are distributed and controlled”¹⁶ (*ibidem*, p. 65). This should take into account some aspects, such as the individual’s need or desire and the need for generation, the opportunity of the moment (of life as a whole, of the seasons and the moment during the day), and your own status (positions of power require more temperance).

Third: the notion of *enkrateia*, which deals with “the form of relationship with oneself, this ‘attitude’ that is necessary for the morality of pleasures, and which manifests itself in the good use one makes of them”¹⁷ (*ibidem*, p. 76). In other words, it is characterized by the individual’s mastery over himself, the struggle and resistance over his desires, the effort of self-control, restraint, and temperance, and the fight in relation to his pleasures. It is a relationship of internal battle against oneself, one’s desires, and pleasures, which must always be exercised and not renounced or ignored.

Fourth: freedom and truth, which concerns “the individual’s attitude toward himself, the way in which he secures his own freedom with respect to his desires, the form of sovereignty he exercises over himself [...]”¹⁸ (*ibidem*, p. 94-85), which does not mean that the subject can indulge in his pleasures, but that he is not a slave to them. This freedom is, then, “the power that is exercised over oneself, in the power that is exercised over others”¹⁹ (*ibidem*, p. 96).

14 In the original: “a ênfase é colocada na relação consigo que permite não se deixar levar pelos apetites e pelos prazeres, que permite ter, em relação a eles, domínio e superioridade”.

15 In the original: “atos, gestos, contatos que proporcionam uma certa forma de prazer”.

16 In the original: “questão não do que é permitido ou proibido entre os desejos experimentados ou os atos que se cometem, mas questão de prudência, de reflexão, de cálculo na maneira pela qual são distribuídos e controlados seus atos”.

17 In the original: “forma de relação consigo, essa ‘atitude’ que é necessária à moral dos prazeres, e que se manifesta no bom uso que se faz deles”.

18 In the original: “atitude do indivíduo em relação a si mesmo, a maneira pela qual ele garante sua própria liberdade no que diz respeito aos seus desejos, a forma de soberania que ele exerce sobre si [...]”.

19 In the original: “o poder que se exerce sobre si, no poder que se exerce sobre os outros”.

This way, the person who must exercise power and have authority over others is the one who can see the truth about themselves, make a self-evaluation and become aware of their desires and pleasures, exercise authority over themselves, having temperance as one of the essential characteristics to achieve this authority.

To whom this ethics refers: in his study, Foucault (2019, p. 97) takes into account, mainly, who is in power since they could easily satisfy any of their desires and would then surrender to them. However, after all, “how could one hope to obtain the obedience of others if he could not ensure the submission of his own desires?”²⁰. If they do not put themselves in a position of power over their pleasures, the subject is at their mercy, which can lead them to lose authority over themselves and others.

Thus, Foucault (2019, p. 30) highlights who self-care should work on: “it is an elaboration of masculine conduct made from the point of view of men and to give shape to their conduct”²¹. In that regard, it is a morality made by men and for men, and, without a doubt, free men. Temperance is a fundamental virtue for having sovereignty over oneself and must be cultivated in relation to the pleasures of men since “to be intemperate, in effect, is to find oneself in a state of non-resistance and a position of weakness and submission concerning the strength of pleasures; it is being incapable of that attitude of virility towards yourself that allows one to be stronger than yourself”²² (*ibidem*, p. 101). The author (*ibidem*, p. 105) explains that in ancient Greek, it was understood that those who possessed this virtue could make the best decisions rationally and abstain from bad ones.

The aesthetics of existence: when turning inward, the subject finds himself in a conflict between what he is doing and what he should do to have control over himself and, then, be able to have authority over others. According to Galvão (2014, p. 12), this care, when turning towards yourself, is composed of “a set of practices and rules of existence that the subject gives to himself, and this care towards himself, transforming his attitudes and his subjectivity, makes life, metaphorically speaking, ‘beautiful’, culminating in the understanding of it as ‘aesthetics of existence’”²³. However, this does not mean that your entire life changes according to this set of voluntary practices and rules. It is possible to measure moments of transgression, moments in which one leaves aside what is expected from the individual as a being belonging to a society, his control over himself and others, his temperance, and the achievement of what is in your own desire is put into focus; and moments when temperance and self-control of their pleasures are

20 In the original: “como pretender obter a obediência dos outros se não pudesse assegurar a submissão de seus próprios desejos?”.

21 In the original: “é uma elaboração de conduta masculina feita do ponto de vista dos homens e para dar forma à sua conduta”.

22 In the original: “ser intemperante, com efeito, é encontrar-se num estado de não resistência e em posição de fraqueza e de submissão em relação à força dos prazeres; é ser incapaz dessa atitude de virilidade consigo que permite ser mais forte do que a si próprio”.

23 In the original: “um conjunto de práticas e regras de existência que o sujeito dá a si, e esse cuidado para consigo, transformando suas atitudes e sua subjetividade, torna a vida, metaforicamente falando, ‘bela’, culminando na compreensão desta como ‘estética da existência’”.

required so that the subject can make the best attitudes and decisions as someone in a position of power.

To Foucault (2019, p. 111), “it can be said that the moral reflection of Antiquity regarding pleasures is not oriented towards a codification of acts nor a hermeneutics of the subject, but towards a stylization of attitude and an aesthetics of existence”²⁴. This way, by finding the will to change his subjectivity and doing something about it, by managing to master his pleasures and desires, even having the possibility of surrendering to them and still choosing not to do so, the individual achieves what the author calls the aesthetics of existence. In other words, it achieves the singularization of life, making life a unique, original, and distinct work of art so that it follows some style criteria for its existence and freedom.

That way, when faced with the question “Who is ethical?” we can answer it in the following way: according to the first concept, ethical is the one who follows the rules who follows the prescriptions; according to the second concept, ethical is one who follows the written, documented, formalized rule; according to the third concept, ethical is one who researches human behavior and its rules; and according to the fourth concept, ethical is someone who takes care of themselves through a reflective practice.

Final considerations

Our research aims to present the four concepts of ethics used in the research project “Ethical-non-moralistic advertising”, which are: ethics as a synonym for moral; ethics as legislation, statute, or code; ethics as a reflection on morals; ethics as the aesthetics of existence. To do this, we developed bibliographical research with authors who explain each concept. The main authors used in our research are Yves de La Taille (2007), Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (2017), Clóvis de Barros Filho (2014), Bruno Abílio Galvão (2014) and Michel Foucault (2019).

We emphasize that we specifically use these four concepts of ethics because our research is part of the research project “Ethical-non-moralistic advertising”. Therefore, we appropriate the ethical concepts used in the project and not other or more concepts.

In the first concept, ethics as a synonym for morals, we understand that when this concept is used, it deals with a set of rules and norms that are learned in people’s daily lives, from when they are born through the social groups they live in, such as family, school, and church. These rules and norms, however, are not like legislation or codes of ethics but are teachings that remain in the air, like those passed from generation to generation of what a certain group judges or understands to be good.

24 In the original: “pode-se dizer que a reflexão moral da Antiguidade a propósito dos prazeres não se orienta para uma codificação dos atos nem para uma hermenêutica do sujeito, mas para uma estilização da atitude e uma estética da existência”.

In the second concept, ethics as legislation, statute, or code, ethics still refers to the rules and norms of a group. However, here, they are declared in the forms of legislation, statutes, oaths, ethics committees, and codes of ethics in professions, among others. This concept is close to the first one but differs by formally regulating the moral principles of a certain group.

In the third concept, ethics as a reflection on morals, we present ethics as the study of morality. Here, morality continues to be rules and norms of behavior, as in previous concepts. However, ethics studies these rules of behavior. This way, we understand that morality is practice; it is how we act in our daily lives, and ethics refers to the study of these behaviors, not to dictate what is right and/or wrong, but to understand and reflect on them.

In the fourth concept, ethics as aesthetics of existence, we present the concept as used by Foucault (2019). For better understanding, we separate this concept into four topics: (1) the difference between morals and ethics: morals refer to the rules that are inserted into our lives from some social groups, called by the author a *moral code*, but we can also understand morality as the way we relate to this moral code, understood as the *morality of behaviors*. Thus, what Foucault (2019) calls the *determination of ethical substance* is when the way of conducting the morality of behaviors in the face of a moral code is presented by placing the individual as the main one in their actions; (2) the four axes that reflect about sexual morality: the notion of *aphrodisia*, *chresis*, the notion of *enkrateia*, and freedom and truth; (3) to whom this ethics refers: in his study, Foucault (2019) takes into consideration, mainly, men who were in power, since they can easily indulge in their desires and pleasures, but when they choose not to do so, when they have self-control and temperance, that is when they can best exercise leadership functions; and (4) the aesthetics of existence: when the person finds himself in a movement of return to himself when he finds himself in a conflict with his desires and manages to have self-control and mastery over himself. This is the moment when one arrives at the aesthetics of existence; when one has control over his life, the individual makes it a unique work of art.

Finally, we emphasize that there is always the possibility of developing further reflections in research. Therefore, our work can also serve as a support or starting point for different reflections and research on the concept of ethics that we could not address here.

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About the authors

Gabriel Sausen Feil

Associate Professor IV at the Universidade Federal do Pampa, leader of the t3xto Research Group (Unipampa/CNPq), and member of the Research Network Writings of Difference in Philosophy-Education (UFRGS/CNPq). At graduation, teaches in the Social Communication - Advertising and Propaganda Course; in Postgraduate, teaches and coordinates the Masters degree in Communication and Creative Industry. PhD in Education from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul; master in Science Education from Unijuí; and graduated in Social Communication - Advertising from the same University. He explores three lines of research: Innovation and/or invention: communicational masters and/or wasters (GP t3xto); Collection of advertising strategies (GP t3xto); and Communication for the creative industry (PPGCIC). E-mail: gabrielfeil@unipampa.edu.br

Júlia Rocha Paz

Graduated in Social Communication – Advertising and Propaganda from the Universidade Federal do Pampa (UNIPAMPA), São Borja campus. Master's student at the Postgraduate Program in Communication at the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (POSCOM-UFSM). CAPES/DS scholarship holder (2022-2024). E-mail: rp_julia@hotmail.com

Authors' contribution

Feil, G.S.: project administration - conceptualization - supervision - methodology - writing - proofreading and editing; Paz, J. R.: conceptualization - writing - proofreading and editing - original draft.

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The authors declare that data supporting the research are contained in the article and/or supplementary material and are available in a public repository.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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