The Moral Values and Dilemmas in Romanian University. The Influence of Prosperity on Ethical Behavior

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Abstract

Upon analysis, it appears that education is the only solution to prevail over this moral crisis; the dilemma of contemporary society, faced with this moral challenge, lies at the crossroads between philosophy and pedagogy. Moral value education cannot be reduced to “civic education” or to “human rights education”, as it lies at the crossroads between the logic of the mind and the logic of the heart, which generate values together. A “new ethics” is necessary, one which must reflect our historical standpoint, because the overthrow of a set of values and the inauguration of a “new moral” cannot be achieved by one “brilliant Zarathustra”.

The questions of our papers are: What was and what is it now the University? And what are university professors’ responsibilities? Are the social-economical changes influencing the academic activity?

Keywords:
moral model, university field, moral values, religious values, ethics, education

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The university. What was and what is

The outlook of philosophers\(^2\), writers or any type of analysts in Romania, when regarding the same subject – Romanian moral values – is very different. It ranges from pessimism and “hopelessness” about the existence of moral values, to the optimistic vision of moral transformations in contemporary society.

Some authors ascertain a syndrome of moral “virus removal” in Romania, a country which has been virus infected “not only physically and mentally, but also politically”\(^3\), and which needs “an ethic surgeon’s scalpel”. Today’s slangy and corrupt Romania cannot be saved through culture only, but through moral means. “In what concerns me”, R. Cesereanu asserts in an investigation of Romanian bad habits, “I no longer search for a Romanian aesthetics, but for an ethics. Scholarly disputes (when they do happen) appear to me obsolete: scholars are stuck with the same fixed ideas and conceptual battles. On the other hand, I am interested in the inner crusade of Romanians. If this still possible, if it has not died out. I do not know what the future holds in store, and I cannot foretell it.”\(^4\)

The direction of research towards ethics and moral in recent years has been motivated by the increasingly obvious observation of a moral value crisis, along with a “hopelessness about overcoming this moral value crisis (...) Many people make no effort for moral improvement, they aim neither at universal human values such as truth, good, beauty, nor at the Christian values of love, faith and hope, or at the modern values of liberty and justice; on the contrary, they exhibit anomic attitudes, characterised by a lack of values, restricted moral-spiritual efforts, carelessness and apathy, restlessness, anxiety, hopelessness.”\(^5\)

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\(^3\) Ruxandra Cesereanu, Năravuri românești. Texte de atitudine (Editura Polirom, Iași, 2007): 92.

\(^4\) Idem, 231.

\(^5\) Gheorghe Bunescu, Școala și valorile morale. Teorii și practici ale dezvoltării psihosociomorale (Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1999) :3
We may add that, beside the importance of the mere existence of the above-mentioned values, this “moral value crisis” has multiple causes, three of which are most obvious: firstly, society itself fails to generate moral values, lacking axiological landmarks; secondly, the moral value trainers (society, the educator, the family, institutions, the media etc.) either do not fulfil their roles, or exhibit certain inconsistencies in their respective values promoted; thirdly, we identify the lack of educational policies and strategies to form the youth’s moral profile.

Upon analysis, it appears that education is the only solution to prevail over this moral crisis; the dilemma of contemporary society, faced with this moral challenge, lies at the crossroads between philosophy and pedagogy. Moral value education cannot be reduced to “civic education” or to “human rights education”, as it lies at the crossroads between the logic of the mind and the logic of the heart, which generate values together. A “new ethics” is necessary, one which must reflect our historical standpoint, because the overthrow of a set of values and the inauguration of a “new moral” cannot be achieved by one “brilliant Zarathustra”.

In these circumstances, in which man moulds and is moulded by values, the importance of education in forming moral values is inscribed into a vicious circle. Who is responsible for the transfer of values, for their creation, transformation and adaptation to social and historical changes, and how do individuals or groups react when their inner values are threatened? “Sometimes”, claims Gh. Bunescu, “the blame is placed on the family, school, church, mass media as failing to fulfil their educational role, or on the inconsistencies between the institutions with educational functions. Rarely ever are scientists and politicians blamed for the moral crisis, for not having created and established educational policies and strategies. There emerges a tendency of passing the blame, as if nobody had taken part in the genesis and spreading of (moral) values.”6 The author recalls W. Mills, who emphasises the importance of values both in the life of the individual and in that of society, mentioning the fact that “people feel better when they have a set of values, which is not under any type of threat. They go through crises, either in the form of personal tribulations (when the individual senses a threat against his

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6 Idem, 4
values), or in the form of public conflicts (when certain groups sense a threat against one of their values); panic ensues if they think that all their values have come under threat. Indifference ensues when there is no awareness of one’s own values, or the sense that these values are under threat, and apathy ensues when one becomes indifferent to all values. Anxiety ensues when there is no awareness of values, but an intense awareness of hovering threats and a state of continuous indisposition ensues when anxiety is generalised.” However, enforcing a scale of values for the achievement of social order and claiming that it is fixed “hinders posing and solving social issues” and does not stimulate historical creativity.

L. Grunberg (cited by Gh. Bunescu), in his volume Axiologia şi condiţia umană, claims that the establishment of axiology as a branch of philosophy and the demarcation of a value field represents “one of the most important discoveries in the history of philosophical thinking.”

Raising the issue of value implies reflecting upon spirituality. In Filosofia valorii, Petre Andrei asserts that value should be considered a logical, fundamental element of conscience: “the process of acquainting oneself with a value is logical and results in explanatory theoretical values, the recognition process is a practical one and results in practical, capitalised values”; thus ensues “an identification of the relationships between the practical valorisation process and the theoretical value awareness process, of their connection and especially […] of the social element in this value assessment process.”

But presently, “in a culture of opinions passed for ideas, of whims seen as liberties and wishes taken for concepts, in which, evidently, reading is scarce, but talking is limitless […], individuals of scant education think they possess universal truths, people with no personal achievements offer diagnostics, and the effort to put together systematic analyses is disregarded.”

According to Nicolae Râmbu, reflecting upon values has always been a constant in philosophy, “but this constant becomes central in

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7 Ibidem
8 Bunescu, p. 5
9 Petre Andrei, Filosofia valorii, (Fundaţia Regului Mihai I, Bucureşti, 1945): 21
10 ibidem
11 Andrei Marga, Diagnoze: articole şi eseuri (Editura Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2008) : 11
crucial historical moments. For the rest of the time, people live in the
world of values just as they breathe, unaware of them as they are
unaware of the weight of air.”\textsuperscript{12} This becomes possible if two major
conditions are fulfilled, so that “reflection upon values becomes
primordial: ensuring the freedom of thought, which means democracy,
and, secondly, shaking up the traditional value system” which, in most
cases, has been created exactly by those events, wars or revolutions
“carried out in the name of certain values”. This entails an important,
troublesome moment in the history of a nation, capable of reawakening
spirits and causing a rethinking and rearranging of values. In such
moments of historical sieving, values face non-values on the battlefield.
Non-values are supported by those latent forces which lie in wait of
opportunities. However, values are supported by culture, as “democracy
without culture is a disaster, especially in moments of radical change,
when one set of values is replaced with another, in accordance with the
spirit of the time.”\textsuperscript{13}

There can be no dwelling place more suitable for culture and
democracy than the university, with its protective walls. The university,
initially conceived as a religious and later political institution, “is regarded
today only as an institute for professional training”, when, in fact, it is “a
social institution of much greater significance”, asserts Dimitrie Gusti.
The university, as an organic part of society, is “its quintessence of
value”; as mentioned by Constantin Cucoș, it is “a testimony of a layered
culture at a certain moment, directing its lines of evolution.”\textsuperscript{14}

The university has the privileged role to fashion society’s mental
space. “The specificity of the framework of academic values may be
 deducted from the predominance of certain values or their particular
forms of manifestation (force, density, individuation, authority,
credibility, original connection with other values), certainly not from the
emergence of completely new values, which do not exist in other
formative and cultural spaces. Academic values, that are a matter of
blending, dosage, accent, may be implied both directly, at the level of the

\textsuperscript{12} Nicolae Râmbu, „Timpul prefacerii tuturor valorilor”, în vol. \textit{Educație și valori românești în context european}, (Editura Spiru Haret, Iași, 1997): 70
\textsuperscript{13} Idem, p.71
\textsuperscript{14} Constantin Cucoș, „Orientări și dileme valorice în spațiul universitar” în \textit{Câmpul universitar și actorii săi}, (Editura Polirom, Iași, 1997) p. 24
Theoretical discourse (the authenticity of the disseminated knowledge, the accuracy and depth of the discursive style etc.) and at the level of the interpersonal relationships between the active participants in the process."\textsuperscript{15}

The university represents a forum capable of disseminating the cultural, behavioural, ethic or civic values desirable at a given time. Views are split as to the University’s capacity to establish the set of values independently of the political-historical or social structures and periods; nevertheless, it must be mentioned that an authentic promotion of values in academia is ensured by an authentic functional autonomy, not to suffer external influences. “The academic institution is established in an area of value stability and authority, attitudes which may be promoted even during most restrictive times”. It may manifest itself as a ‘reservation’ where veritable values are able to retreat and conceal themselves during unfavourable times. Not for extended periods, because one cannot ignore social transformations and mutations that appear within the society, or “contagions brought in from the outside”. C. Cucoş asserts that, as a higher court that condenses and disseminates values, the university “does not merely translate the values of the social space, but selectively intervenes in their propensity. The education carried out here must maintain its true dimensions, reactive towards the present and prospective towards the future. The academic space is where values are forged, established, disseminated, but here certain values are also discussed, concealed, blamed or denied – values that oppose certain social, ethic, scientific, political or ideological commandments. The selection or proposal of values will take into account their importance and dignity, their efficacy in a well-established framework.”\textsuperscript{16}

The academic, as a performer in the university campus, has the role of sorting, of filtering these ethic and moral values. Moreover, the institution is held directly responsible for what happens to its “products”. “Its objective is not merely to seek the truth, but also to handle it correctly and to protect it from destructive or anomalous manifestations. The one who issues a theory, an idea, takes part in the process of capitalising his work, and may be held responsible for the consequences of his ideation. Academic deontology is more than

\textsuperscript{15} Idem, p. 25
\textsuperscript{16} Idem, p.26
required. The academic researcher will impose himself rules as to the
time or space limits and reverberations of his endeavours.”\textsuperscript{17}

The academic is more than a “living archive”; he is the one who
must convey the results of his own research and help students attain the
art of discovery. He must be a true performer on the stage of education.
“The status of higher education performers is very different from that of
pre-university performers. Lower education students are much more
dependent on teacher authority, while higher education students reach an
enhanced autonomy. Authority is no longer under the teacher’s
monopoly, as it is partly seized by the apprentice.” The higher education
student is the subject of his own becoming, independently contributing
to his personal progress, consciously and wilfully self-improving.
However, the Romanian authors have identified the lack of joyful
learning, of the zest for the privileged moments specific to this age.

The university, apart from its role of forming the elites that will
lead society towards emancipation, must also “supply the social system
with performers capable of satisfactorily undertaking commitments of all
sorts. The university is to favour the encounter between science, art,
philosophy and all constituents of culture, so that its graduates may
benefit not from a unidirectional education, only in the activity field of
their profession, but also at the larger scale of cultural and relational
competences, without which a narrow specialisation cannot be justified
or accomplished. We do not need geniuses or, in the words of C. Cucoş,
“accurate beasts”, but psycho-behaviourally and morally harmonious
people, capable of taking on the highest responsibilities.

Brent Sockness, professor of “Religious studies” at Stratford
University promotes the idea that the university should turn towards
stimulating critical thinking in religious aspects as well, as “promoting
religious literature would be a commendable objective, as most students
are uninformed or badly informed on their own religious traditions (...).
if the students were better educated about religion, as a human
phenomenon, we would avoid many mistakes that are done daily in the
public (...). The goal of academic education is to determine the unique
space dedicated to studying, critical interrogation and reflective life.”\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} Ibidem,
\textsuperscript{18} Scotty McLennan „Moral and spiritual inquiery in the academic clasroom”, Journal of
College&Character, vol.VI, no.4, May 2006
\end{flushright}
From the author’s point of view, we should not expect teachers to be upright people, to listen carefully, to be responsible creators of the discipline they teach, to believe that being a professor is a vocation or care about the students in front of them, human beings. It would be advisable from time to time that the teacher use the student’s life experience or even his own in order to elucidate a course issue. The personal point of view is not the interesting part of the method, if the materials from the course are relevant for the students. What is important is that the student exits his own world, a goal that is beneficial morally and spiritual. Moreover, becoming an adult person, a superior human from an Aristotelian point of view “is normal, as what is most valuable for a child differs from what is most valuable for an adult and what is valuable in the eyes of a vulgar man differs from what is valuable in the eyes of a superior man.”

In his study, McLennan concludes: “There are many different ways, to engage students in a moral and spiritual interrogation in the class room. Our task in the university is to take this project seriously. We must remember our liberal obligation, even in the big research institutions, which is to help students find meaning in adult life. We must form graduates in order to “promote public good by exercising a positive influence on humanity and civilisation”, by being religiously instructed, ethically sensitive, critical thinking’s higher abilities. They must participate in projects of self-assessment and of emphatic knowledge (...). This is when we will be able to say that we are the worthy heirs and employees of liberal arts, that have always taken care of the development of academy students and civilisation’s survival in a dangerous world.”

In the case in which the teacher limits his activity to bland doctoral exposure of accumulated knowledge, “he does not fulfil his mission, as he must awaken new powers, making his science into a living force that enters the student’s spirit and envelop him, opening new horizons and higher, more luminous and noble targets. The University does not have the role of turning young students into savants. It cannot do that, as much more time and painstaking research are needed. The

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University must teach students with the *scientific working method* and it must awaken in their souls the passion for science and thought.”\(^{20}\)

Lots of authors have discussed the interaction method between students and teachers. As the goal of the university is not just to transmit knowledge but also “to help students develop their intellectual capacity – not just career-wise – but also for their participation in family life and politic field” says Roberts Eric). An adequate method, by some authors, would be “Socratic learning – teaching the students by questioning them and determining them to redefine their position by critical analysis” (Satz, Debra, quoted by Mc Lennan). „The lack of knowledge, culture and education represents a horrible disease that brings only suffering.”\(^{21}\)

According to the Report to UNESCO of the *European Commision on Education for the Twenty-First Century*\(^{22}\), higher education relies on four foundations and directions of action: *learning to know*, to recognise past, present or virtual reality; learning to learn permanently, autonomously acquiring the cultural values extant at a given time; *learning to do*, to act and reach a pragmatic competence in a certain activity field; learning to face various and complex social situations, in which you strive to integrate; *learning to live together*, to be permissive and attentive towards the other, to optimally perceive alterity and to feel solidarity with it, according to the circumstances; carrying out joint projects and being prepared to handle potential conflicts related to the due respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace; *learning to be*, to make the most of your personality, to become capable of independent and responsible judgment, to ceaselessly create yourself, to live and breathe values, to spread and amplify them by your own acts.

The academic, or *Homo academicus*, in the words of Adrian Neculau, is a teacher and “complies with the evaluation/promotion criteria of the *University Charter*, but asserts his value in his field and specialisation and draws his prestige from his scientific community membership.” He promotes his personal values and rules, but

\(^{20}\) Andrei, Petre, „Ce este universitatea şi care este menirea ei?”, în *Câmpul universitar şi actorii săi*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1997, p. 147


\(^{22}\) *Raport UNESCO al Comisiei Europene a Educației pentru Secolul XXI*(1996): 91-104
simultaneously obeys the authority of the institution. But how are responsibilities divided, when the permanent tendency is to ensure academic autonomy? This is how the author presents the situation of academia at the beginning of 1997: “The state manages the academic institution (resources, plans, programmes) and establishes/accepts selection and promotion criteria, but gives the academic community the right to establish its specific standards and practical ways of action. Ultimately, there is a correlation between the manner of managing the academic profession (including the management of subjects and scientific directions) and the traits of the community, the practices of its social performers. For instance, a bureaucratic, centralised management of the academic institution will result in the construction of a social field marked by static control norms, standardised behaviours, evasion strategies etc. Bureaucratic coordination engenders rigid norms, formal hierarchies, academic oligarchies. The state imposes terms of service (status norms, recruitment procedures), it allocates resources (human, material), it determines prestige and legitimation criteria, and in exchange it requires behaviours that will anchor and consolidate these prescriptions.”

Is the university still an instrument for value production and transfer? Are olden rituals the steps of a moral catharsis, but also the proof of having taken a step further? This is how Dimitrie Gusti described the atmosphere of medieval universities, where it was customary for a doctoral candidate, right after his thesis defence, to perform a series of strange symbolic scenes, laden with deep meanings. The candidate climbed on the desk, which meant that he wished to exit the world of apprenticeship and enter that of the masters; he placed the doctor’s hat upon his head, as a sign of liberty; he opened a book, thus showing that he would honour old teachings; then he closed the book, thus showing, at the same time, his independence from those teachings; he adorned one of his fingers with a beautiful ring, as a sign of betrothal to one of the faculties and, finally, he was embraced by the dean, as a proof of refinement and conclusive entry into a world of equals, of masters. These were six symbolic acts: cathedra (the desk), pileus (the hat), liber apertus (the opened book), liber slaustus (the closed book),

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annulus (the ring) and osculum (the embrace), which meant emancipation, liberty, respect for tradition, longing for renewal, refinement, equality! Behold a ceremonial of academic solemnity, meant to offer an intuitive parable of the great ethical price of academic life always and everywhere, as explained by Dimitrie Gusti.

**Prosperity or poverty in the university**

*Their influence on ethical behavior*

“Social values and norms in the transition period”, a chapter of the volume *Sociology, Ethics and Social Politics*\(^{24}\), coordinated by Cornel Constantinescu and Ioan Mihăilescu, emphasises the fact that, during the transition period, as well as during the preceding communist era, moral and social debasement were made possible partially by the precarious circumstances of economic life. One of the few ways to “stay warm” used to be the popular saying “poor but honest”. “The poor should feel happy about their poverty, because poverty secures morality, and they should keep away from prosperity, because prosperity walks hand in hand with dishonesty”. This manner of thinking was due to the fact that poverty has always been associated with honesty, whereas prosperity, with dishonesty.

This type of correlations between unethical behaviours and a person’s socioeconomic level has given rise to many controversies over the years. Character has been seen, alternately, as a natural component of the person, or as an externally determined factor. “Economic and social factors may interfere in the process of developing moral traits. People on the brink of despair due to wars or material want will fail to develop a proper moral character.”\(^{25}\)

Neither is poverty a guarantee of morality, nor is prosperity an indicator of dishonesty. Studies carried out in several countries have revealed that economic want usually drags along social and moral want. In order to be moral, people need to have decent living conditions. Few will still accept earthly poverty in exchange for divine gratification. People’s activities are directed towards fulfilling certain needs and aspirations. As low level needs (nourishment, housing, personal security) are fulfilled,

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\(^{24}\) Original title: Sociologie, etică și politică socială

people begin to be motivated by higher level aspirations (taking part in social life, asserting one’s personality, gaining prestige). If the major part of one’s time is used for obtaining nourishment, that person will behave biologically, to the near exclusion of his or her cultural and moral dimensions.\(^{26}\)

As it turns out, neither in the previously mentioned era, nor in the subsequent period have state-employed teachers enjoyed material privileges. Moreover, the legally accepted forms of protest – strikes – were not thoroughly carried out, due to “moral” reasons, connected to the fact that the beneficiaries (pupils or students) would have been prejudiced (losing part of the curricula or examinations). Unlike transport or administrative staff protests, teacher protests cannot produce major blockage. From recent years’ experience, teaching staff has had the lowest salaries of all state employees.

Statistically speaking, a brief well-publicised analysis is not hard to carry out. As proven by previous analyses, many state-employed teachers have left the country in order to accept a better-paid job in agriculture. Many of the fruit pickers in Western Europe are Romanian teachers, who have left their jobs and country behind to work alongside lower education graduates. The same cannot be said about medical staff, another major state-employed category. Graduates from the Universities of Medicine have gone abroad to work in their fields for much higher salaries than the ones they would have earned in Romania, even considering the extra sums of money they could have obtained throughout the month (by unofficial means). Even lower level medical staff members have rarely had to choose different careers abroad than their pre-university education.

Mentioning this situation may lead to a simple, painful conclusion: while the other state-employed categories have had the possibility to perform their professions of choice and have been well rewarded financially, teachers have had to give up professional satisfaction (along with self-esteem and social status), in order to earn money. Thus, they have been deprived of the possibility to evolve in their careers, or even to ever resume their teaching careers.

From another point of view, that of society, how will a student think and act, when finding out that his or her teacher, the one who has always emphasised the importance of studying as a means of improving one’s chances, leaves the country to seek fortune, because the spiritual one he was giving his students could not ensure for him a decent lifestyle?

How can we look down upon high school graduates who refuse to continue their studies and choose to enter the workforce? Or how can we convince the growing percentage of students who work during their undergraduate years, in order to provide for their own education, to give up their working hours in order to study more and better? If Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is perfectly applicable, we may understand why, in some cases, the saying “love passes through the stomach” includes love of study. The teacher becomes a paradigm of the person who gives up professional evolution in exchange for financial balance.

As asserted by C. Cozma, “in a world where a moral organisation of material life is necessary, by the principle of ‘respect for human dignity’, more so because the current economic policy bears the mark of market criteria: competitiveness, productivity, maximum profit, in a free game of selfish interests that deepens the segregation between, on the one hand, the rich, the powerful, the decision-makers […] and, on the other hand, the poor, the weak, the discontent, the envious, the ones who are ready to cause destruction in order to survive and consequently lose interest in working. In these conditions, resorting to a set of moral values and norms – linked to: ‘duty’, ‘responsibility’, ‘merit’, ‘rectitude’, ‘justice and rights’, ‘cooperation’, ‘solidarity’, ‘community’ et al. – are fully justified.”

An analysis carried out by Alma Mater (January 2009) estimated that the average age in academia is 55. In pre-university education, thousands of substitute teachers keep schools functioning. As for preschool education, the situation is even gloomier. In the capital city only, in the above-mentioned period, 500 retired kindergarten teachers were needed to ensure relatively normal functioning of state kindergartens.

A prospective study carried out in 15 Romanian universities by Mihaela Miroiu shows that higher education teaching staff is perceived as part of the poorly remunerated category of state employees, a fact sustained by budgetary reality and the lack of a wage law. As they go through their undergraduate and postgraduate years, young people become “passive actors”, making up excuses for the existing problems. “Although more reflective and critical, full-time PhD students tend to adapt to the teacher paradigm of considering an academic career in Romania to be a pact with poverty and provincialism, at least up to the rank of Associate Professor.”

These analyses emphasise the fact that teaching positions are no longer desirable, for two reasons: the salary is considered too low for subsistence and, on the other hand, the teaching career no longer brings professional satisfaction, due to changes throughout the years: curricular changes, alternative textbooks, advancement difficulties, tenure contests, various liabilities and the duration of their fulfilment, “troublesome” generations and teacher-student conflicts. “Teacher-student conflicts, to be found in many schools, should be examined more closely. One should not believe the explanations that these are caused by a poor understanding of democracy, poor students’ personal retaliation, infantile or adolescent bravados […] when a large portion of adolescent students rise against their own educators, the situation becomes more complex. In many cases, the students’ outbursts represent an honest revolt against double-dealing, lies, incompetence and corruption.”

“We also boast of eminent teachers, but we overlook the (tens of thousands!) of unskilled teachers, those distraught with private lessons or those who ask for their “share” to give a passing mark to a scapegrace.”

This is how Ioan Mihăilescu motivates the existence of unethical conduct in schools: “School should have been and should be one of the main institutions for moral and civic education. But, in communist society, it was not. Especially during the last years of the communist regime, civic education was reduced to inoculating servility to the single

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28 Mihaela Miroiu, (coord) Etica în universitaţi. Cum este şi cum ar trebui să fie.
29 Mihăilescu, Ioan, op. cit, p. 71.
party and to an aggressive nationalism, in the name of patriotism. Moral education was almost non-existent, and, when carried out, it sounded like a boring sermon. There were notable exceptions: some kindergarten, primary school and secondary school teachers carried out excellent formative activities. The exceptions, as many as they might have been in some parts of the country, do not invalidate the assessment that school contributed to the corruption of several student generations. The promotion, marking, reward and merit selection system was vitiated in most schools. Deliberate lies about social realities throughout the country discredited educators. Bias and bribery contaminated most schools”, claims Ioan Mihăilescu. Unethical conducts in the academic environment are often accepted by the majority and, moreover, they exist due to a habit. Their successful practice actually represents an ethic of “making do”, like the previous generations did or like colleagues do. Sometimes, “making do” is equated with a successful life. It is well known that much of the needful information is obtained from older colleagues. “The Romanian Students’ Union made a top of bribery given during the examination session, which shows that, at Medical School, 200 to 1,500 dollars are paid in order to pass an exam, 50 to 500 dollars are paid for an exam at technical universities, and up to 200 dollars are paid for an exam at art and social science universities. There are covert methods of offering and accepting bribery, such as saying “buy my book (be it poor or plagiarised) and you’ll pass the exam”, and there are straightforward methods: a group of students raises money and the secretary mediates; or each student places the money inside the exam papers. It is not very surprising that Medical Schools are first in this top. The student offers bribery being aware that, after graduation, he or she will make up for it from bribery offered by patients”, we quote from a statistics on bribery cases in education.

But what was the financial status of higher education teaching staff in the Romania of the distant past? “High exigency for teaching staff was rewarded accordingly. Iorgu Iordan wrote that tenure in past Romanian higher education was worth as much as a good estate, but came with extras: renown and a reliable income. Thus, the professor could purchase a great number of foreign books and magazines. He could afford to travel for a fellowship at a great university, for documentation and self-improvement, circumstances that teachers in
Western countries still enjoy. Therefore, he could permanently maintain his training at an international level.”

Approaching the field of ethics, entering deeper into its secrets and explanations and, chiefly, forming an ethical way of thinking about life and about one’s profession, determines the layman to stop analysing the “events” in his profession as accidents caused by temperament, whim, bad habits, lack of education or experience of the person having caused them. Entering the land of ethics determines the individual to assume a different point of view. One cannot keep being passive and assume that the person who caused the “events” must have had another bad moment. Ethics requires one to go deeper, to find the real explanations at the root of behaviours, to distinguish between reasons and causes. “Whim” will be replaced with the phrase “unethical behaviour”, because this is what has actually happened. As a professional, one cannot afford to have whims. The professional has learned, creates and respects rules. You cannot be a professional – in the sense of being good at one’s own profession – without being ethical; without having a moral behaviour and reasoning.

“But why are the members of academia silent?” asks Prof. Ioan B. Marcus. This is a question worthy of the ambitions (and achievements) of the beginning of the century and millennium; but the most important fact to be explained is that “the higher education teacher does not yet have the awareness of his role inside society, he easily gives up his prerogatives as a model and explainer of his nation’s consciousness. He remains silent because, in most cases, he has nothing to tell the others or finds himself unable to tell them something without being misunderstood and punished. In addition to the above-mentioned pattern, we may mention the feeling of a generalised helplessness, derived from noticing that, no matter what one does or says, things follow their seemingly natural course, which, in most cases, ignores the requirements/imperatives of the moment. This is a truth that you need not be a member of academia in order to test in the daily life of our society.” However, the author claims that this nation has had people

who, “by their righteousness and moral force, have changed the spiritual profile, the cultural and historical destiny of this nation. Were we responsible enough, we could join St Augustine in saying: “Si potuerunt hi et hae, quare tu non, Augustine?” Which is to say: if so many were capable before us, why should we be incapable?”

Is the teacher an individual “experiencing a generalised helplessness”, as claimed by Ioan B. Marcus, or is he just lenient? In the view of Comte-Sponville, tolerating injustice means becoming its accomplice. Lenience must not be extreme; to be lenient in the face of a threat to lenience itself, for instance, may lead to its disappearance. “If I am infinitely lenient”, says Karl Popper, “even towards intolerant people, and if I do not defend the lenient society from their attacks, the lenient and lenience itself will end up disappearing.” Bauman considers that, unlike the other virtues, such as love and generosity, lenience is essentially limited, because “infinite lenience would mean the end of lenience.”

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34 Zygmund Bauman, Etica postmodernă, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 2000, pp.178-179