EDUCATION FOR INTEGRITY: FACTS, RISKS, CHALLENGES, SOLUTIONS

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Abstract
Based on the alarming data related to the integrity deficit that manifests itself on all levels in universities (not only plagiarism of all types and forms but also numerous other acts of deception), we propose a new strategy to address academic ethics. It consists of moving from teaching norms-based ethics to teaching ethics based on virtue.

Keywords: academic integrity; academic dishonesty; virtue ethics; Romania; university

In this paper we set out on the one hand, to signal the worrying situation of ethical management and the ways in which ethical deviations are managed in Romanian universities, and on the other hand to highlight the need for a discussion about reconsidering the issue of academic ethics. How could academic communities overcome conformism, bureaucratization, limitation of autonomy, loss of ethical identity in educational institutions? What could initiate and accelerate the process of internalization of values and improvement of ethical performances in the Romanian educational system? Questions of this kind and the answers formulated can form the basis of the discussions for initiating these more than necessary changes in Romanian ethical education.

Deficit of integrity in current times

In December 2014, the Prime Minister of Romania at that time sent a request to the University of Bucharest informing them that he was renouncing his PhD title, all as a result of accusations that he had plagiarized a significant part of his doctoral thesis (Socaciu et al., 2018). The violations of university ethics did not begin and unfortunately did not end with that scandal. 2014 remains only the year in which deception in universities has climbed to the highest level of state leadership. At the present time, the prime minister in office, as a result of the accusations of plagiarism (Șercan, 2022a) has requested in court, the annulment of the

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complaints of plagiarism, and succeeded, thus blocking the analysis of the authenticity of his doctoral thesis. The lack of academic honesty at the highest level not only rises to the severity of 2014, but surpasses it, as two other government ministers are accused of taking immoral actions.

Shortly before the beginning of the academic year, Education Minister Sorin Câmpeanu resigned as a result of suspicions of deception raised by a journalist, who is also a university professor. According to the accusations, Câmpeanu allegedly "fraudulently appropriated the paternity of the creation of 13 chapters", from a university course published in 2006 "passing himself as the author of those sections" (Șercan, 2022b). Although the evidence is clear to any person familiar with the regulations related to the elaboration and publication of scientific papers, the justifications offered by Câmpeanu and denying of the records, on the occasion of his resignation, strengthen the suspicions related to his integrity. The academic community, with very few exceptions, did not provide evidence that it would reject such actions of deception, even more so the National Council of Rectors, whose president (self-suspended) is Campeanu himself, issued a statement by which the rectors of the universities announced that they support the resigning minister. Only the rectors of three universities in Romania did not sign the document, given that several specialists in academic fraud confirmed that the minister's actions are not allowed in the university space.

In the last two decades, cases of violation of university ethics have attracted the attention of the press and public opinion, especially when plagiarists were characters of high visibility, mainly politicians at the highest level, but there are numerous signals that the lack of academic honesty affects the education system on all levels and thereby the entire society. Armanca (2022) summarizes some of the causes of the integrity deficit in the educational system: the system that manages academic ethics (laws, regulations, control and sanction institutions) is politically dependent; ethics committees are dependent on the management of the institutions; the work of the bodies empowered to sanction plagiarism and other ethical misconduct is hampered by cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and are subordinated to politicized structures.

On the one hand, ethical education and the promotion of desirable behaviors in universities are lacking or poorly represented, and on the other hand, tolerance and passivity in relation to violations of ethics are manifested everywhere in education. Thus, the not at all favorable image of a society in which the lack of honesty at the university level is tolerated or even protected by the state institutions, which take decisions that favor the lack of ethics, is outlined.

Studies addressing the ethical misconduct of students present worrying conclusions. For example, a study in which 1127 subjects participated shows that 95% of the Romanian students took actions without honesty (Ives et al., 2016). Whatever the causes are - the desire to gain time,

to get higher grades or advantages, not knowing the rules of citation, defying rules and requirements, poor promotion of the culture of integrity, tolerance for plagiarism within the university (McCabe, 2001; Park, 2003; Șercan, 2017), the culture of integrity is not familiar to students in Romania.

However, this worrying situation should not surprise us, given that ethics as a school subject does not find its place in the national curriculum. Is it reasonable to expect that students who walk the steps of universities will be familiar with integrity standards, given that ethical education is lacking or is left to chance throughout the educational system?

Insufficiency of normative ethical theories

Along with the aforementioned causes, the influence exerted within the higher education system and ethical education by the traditional ethical theories had a significant contribution to the accentuation of the integrity deficit. The most influential were the deontological theory and the utilitarian theory, of which the first one contributed decisively. The term deontology designates all the norms and rules that a person exercising an activity is obliged to abide. If we talk about education, deontology traces the landmarks of the interaction between the people involved in the educational act and thus outlines the framework and limits of the teachers' interventions.

The deontological approach to ethics has decisively influenced the contemporary life and conducts (Cioară, 2010). Its name originates from the Greek *deon* (duty, obligation) and it dictates that certain actions are right or wrong in themselves, regardless of other considerations. Deontological ethics is imposed in education by the introduction of key terms, concepts, themes and topics: dignity, duty, integrity, respect and on the other hand by enforcing tools and practices of regulation, management and sanctioning (if necessary) of certain behaviors.

Deontological tradition in ethics finds its beginnings in the debates of classical Greece that had at their core the key concepts for the correct understanding of human behavior. The dispute over *nomos* (law) and *physis* (nature) led to Plato and Aristotle's conceptions. (Buckel, 2006) The theory of natural law was transmitted from antiquity to medieval times, and in its modern version it was the cornerstone of the secular theory of human rights. And the latter contributed to the emergence of ethical management of organizations, that is, precisely the field that is responsible for the emergence, maintenance and development of the culture of integrity. Although in Romania universities are not entirely autonomous, there is a framework in which these organizations can manifest and develop as moral professional communities.

In the contemporary context, organizations regarded as entities in constant change and transformation (Bradford and Burke, 2005). Certain explanatory models consisted of extrapolating the models of individual

development – for example that of Kohlberg (1981) to the case of organizations (Logsdon & Yuthas, 1997; Sridhar & Camburn, 1993).

A more elaborate model (Rossow & Vuuren, 2003) rejected these ways of mirrored application of the theories of individual moral development. G. Coleman had previously identified no less than six levels of the natural mode in his conception of the growth of an organization: 1) commitment, 2) drafting, 3) action and feedback, 4) reassessment, 5) integral ethical culture, 6) total alignment and integration. He observed that each level reached translated into a higher degree of integration than the previous one. He extracted the idea that the levels denote the organization's attempts to manage its morality in a more concerted and sophisticated manner as time went on (Coleman (2000).

Rossow and Vuuren (2003) built a descriptive, evolutionary-inspired model that, thanks to its heuristic character, is worth summarizing. According to them, organizations go through five *ways* of managing ethical issues, increasingly more complex – immorality, reactivity, compliance, integrity, and total alignment.

In the first phase, the preferred conduct is *immoral*, when the ethical dimension is totally ignored due to the advantages that the violation of ethics entails, when ethics and success are seen as incompatible. Next comes the awakening of the moral sense, the organization *reacts* but focuses on strictly formal actions (e.g. the adoption of ethical codes). The organization's reputation remains low and lacking in credibility as it is permissive to manifestly immoral actions that are covered up and go unpunished. It is only in the *compliance* phase that ethics are applied from the perspective of the rules, and their violation is sanctioned. The goal becomes the prevention of unethical behaviors and affirms the organization's desire to increase its reputation. In the next stage, of *integrity*, the internalization of values and standards deriving from them is achieved, and ethics is approached from the perspective of internal values and not from that of external norms. Once *total alignment* is achieved, ethics is integrated into the purpose, strategy and operations of the organization, becoming an integral and inalienable part of the culture and purpose of the organization (Rossow and Vuuren, 2003, 392-393).

If we overlap this model over the realities of our education we can see, even at a cursory analysis, that the Romanian universities are only at the beginning of the road to integrity. Of the five ways of managing ethics, with very few exceptions, they barely went through the first two. From a formal point of view, they all adopted, bound by the education law, a code of ethics of their own, and appointed ethics committees, so they would fit into the reactivity phase. But there are many examples of universities that still tolerate rectors accused of acts of deception in leading positions (Armanca, 2022).

If we were to apply this model in the analysis of the Romanian realities, we would notice that at best, our universities have barely made the transition from immorality to reactivity. A little over a decade ago, through a legal act, universities were forced to develop and adopt codes of ethics. The Code of Ethics (or Deontological Code) is an important tool through which agents in a professional field build an identity through which they assert their ideals, beliefs, priorities and means for achieving all of these. (Mureşan, 2006) "The moral code or the code of ethics is composed of a coherent set of values, principles and moral norms, imposed by an organization in order to ensure a successful, integral professional life. The teacher from Bucharest also emphasizes very well what is the finality of this set of rules, on the one hand, the elimination of any injuries that could be brought to the members of the organization and the most significant aspect, when we talk about education: the respect for the dignity, integrity and autonomy of all those affected by educational practices." (Mureşan, 2006, p.102)

A deontological code is materialized in a coherent set of moral professional obligations, imperative actions and prohibitions that the practitioners of a profession assume in order to promote and protect some fundamental rights and values on which society is based. One of these values is intellectual honesty. This value as well as the principles and norms that are necessary for its establishment are found among the provisions of the codes of all universities. For example, in *the Code of Ethics and Professional Deontology* of Babeş Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, one of the universities with the best reputation, honesty is treated in articles 26 to 31, the code having 44 articles in total. However, when there are cases of violation of the principles of honesty, the university has difficulty preserving its reputation. For example, it is during this current time period that a third plagiarism scandal is unfolding, in which an incumbent minister is involved. This concerns Lucian Bode, the Minister of the Interior, who is accused of plagiarizing his doctoral thesis in a proportion of at least 18.5% (Officer, 2022). The minister denies the allegations, and *the UBB Ethics Commission*, empowered to clarify the situation, is accused of declining its responsibilities or delaying the resolution of the case (Cornea, 2022).

Although article 30 states very clearly: "Even if an author makes an important personal and original contribution in a certain work or creation, if plagiarized elements are included, elements that do not comply with the principles of attribution, that author violated the ethical rules on intellectual property" (in *the UBB Code of Ethics and Professional Deontology* , art. 30), the commission hesitated to draw the conclusion that was required by virtue of the evidence: the author violated the ethical rules by not complying with the principles of attribution, so he plagiarized!

Returning to the Vuren & Rossow model, it is necessary to establish that there are few Romanian universities that meet the conditions required

by the *compliance* phase. In the vast majority, the adopted codes of ethics have remained mere documents without any applicative value, or at least these values are unknown; and even if their existence can be acknowledged, they have no active role in university activities. Universities do not experiment with ethical management systems and ethics committees lack autonomy and are ineffective.

Even universities with the best reputations have difficulty in resolving obvious violations of the ethics of research. Despite these realities, the institution that monitors the quality of university education triumphantly announces that of the 23 universities evaluated in 2021, 22 have obtained the *high degree of trust*. Meanwhile, the rectors of 70 out of 73 universities – most of which have a *high degree of trust* from ARACIS, showed their support for S. Câmpeanu after stating that his resignation from the position of minister of education, announced following the accusations of plagiarism, was "unfair". Moreover, he resumed his position as rector and was even invited to resume his position as president of the National Council of Rectors, from which he was suspended during the exercise of the mandate of minister (Ionescu, 2022).

The deontologists' insistence on the importance of moral rules or constraints, based on the belief that the avoidance of evil is the main, if not the only moral responsibility, fuels a legalistic conception of morality that obedience or conformity to the law is defining for our status as fair persons (Davis, 2006). If our moral duties are reduced to compliance with the requirements strictly formulated by the letter of the law, and the law has certain shortcomings, for certain actions that disagree with ethical principles, we can end up with situations in which we cannot be held accountable. You could remain a professor at the university, you could occupy the highest positions in the academic hierarchy, even if you have committed plagiarism, as long as the university or the legislative power does not elaborate and apply clear procedures and mechanisms by which the action of plagiarism, is criminalized, proven and sanctioned. An institution or organization that limits itself to this narrow perspective on morality cannot demonstrate a sincere attachment to the professional and social values that justify and legitimize its existence, and the foreseeable consequence is that it will not be perceived in the public opinion as a responsible organization (Cioară, 2014). As professionals, we should understand better than the practitioners of other occupations or professions, that "we are members of an ethical community, and not just free arbitrators or guardians of our own virtues, while also being concerned about the fate of others, as well as with the fate of the community as a whole" (Davis, 2006, 246). This concern cannot be given away and cannot be reduced even to the compliance of the standards of the norms and to the fulfillment of professional duties (the elaboration of a deontological code, does not solve

the problems, but is only a first step in managing them), but "by the active interest of people in promoting the good of others" (Davis, ibid.).

Recent developments in the academic space have highlighted several consequences that deontologism favors and demonstrate that theoretical resources engaged in deontological ethics and the harmful influence of moral legalism have shown their limits and proved practically ineffective in the management of ethical conduct. The normative capacity of prescribing rules of behavior and moral organization of social life remained reduced (Cooter, 1997). In the plan of moral development and perfect, the deontologist current favored the emergence of an "anonymous moral subject, indoctrinated to make moral choices that have no psychological connection in relation to his past or future". (Kupperman, 1988, p.120). We can thus speak of a at least partial failure of the ethics of deontology to regulate the right actions in the academic community.

Revival of the ethics of virtue

Starting with the second half of the last century, amid dissatisfaction with the influence of deontological ethics and utilitarianism, an alternative current was developed, inspired by the long and valuable tradition of virtue theory, present in all the great ancient systems of thought, but masterfully developed in the Aristotelian ethical conception. But before we present this new orientation, let us broadly recall the contribution of Aristotle.

The central problem of Aristotelian ethics revolves around the nature and means of achieving good, instituted as "the perfect goal to which everything tends, the only one pursued forever for himself and never as the achievement of another purpose" (Aristotle, 1988, p. 7). The goal towards which any human effort tends, is the achievement of the state of *eudaimonia*. (etim. gr. *eudaimonia* – happiness, well-being, success), which consists of the realization of every being's nature, or the exercise of virtue. Before Aristotle (Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureism), the virtues were considered the whole of the provisions that contribute to the good life, of first rank were considered the cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. In the ethics of Aristotle virtue refers to the cultivation of personal excellence, to that which the being of man accomplishes trough excellence, virtue being the access way to *eudaimonia*. Man's virtue is to act according to reason, but it acts in fact only supported by character. The essence of eudaemony is determined "by the nature of man's specific act as a man, a purely spiritual act consisting in the active exercise of the powers of the virtuous soul according to reason or not without reason" (Nicomahic Ethics 1098a, 7-8), throughout an entire accomplished life.

Aristotle placed virtue in relation to the traditional *middle way*, customizing it according to the skills and capabilities of each one, each carrying within himself his own model and developing within his own

limits. Starting from the structure of the soul, the philosopher establishes a hierarchy of virtues corresponding to each part of it: the ethical virtues (of character) and the dianoethic virtues (of the intellect).

Ethical virtue is defined as the "just measure", as the "midline", between two extremes, that is, between two vices (excess and insufficiency). In its psychological reality virtue is an appropriate measure, in the order of morality it always represents a pinnacle. The author takes over and carries on the tradition *of the right or middle way*, present in numerous ethical systems (from the exhortations of the Seven Wise Men to the philosophy of Plato or Pythagoras, from *the Analects* of Confucius, to the Buddhist ethics or to the work of Horace) that prescribe moderation, harmony and balance, the avoidance of deviations and traps from any direction. During *the Nicomahic Ethics*, the philosopher performs remarkable analyses of the ethical virtues: justice, grandeur of mind, generosity, moderation, thrift, magnanimity, courage.

The dianoethic virtues are no longer mediates however, which for moral virtue signifies the just measure, for them it represents the truth. Their object is constituted by the prime principles, they are in fact righteous rules of reason that condition the existence of any ethical virtue, ensuring its moral rectitude. Dianoethic virtues (speculative wisdom, intelligence, practical wisdom) are norms with the value of imperative and law.

Emphasizing the importance of the distinction between the mere possession of virtue and its actualization, Aristotle shifted the emphasis to the moral act, the object of ethics thus becomes action and not theory, its usefulness consisting in indicating how to implement it. It has increased the value of morality and ethics, raising their prestige and endowing them with practical functions, and putting them in a indissoluble relationship with social practices and thus giving them a decisive role.

In recent decades we are witnessing a growing interest in the ethics of virtue (Baril & Hazlett, 2019) which has come to be considered one of the "three great" approaches to ethics, along with deontological and consequentialist approaches. The resuscitation of interest in virtue began with Anscombe's critical observations of utilitarianism (1958) that notions associated with the term morals (duty, obligation) had lost their meaning and influence. To restore the normative role of ethics we should go back to the previous way of thinking about the notions of right and wrong. Using philosophy and psychology, we can figure out what things are good for humans as a species, just as we can figure out what things are good for other living creatures, such as plants. Good plants get the rays of the sun (for example), and good people behave honestly (for example). We can focus on what is right and wrong, courageous and cowardly, wise and unwise. From the perspective of a human virtue theory, based on psychological and philosophical investigations into what a good human life means, Anscombe believes that we can come up with valid answers to the concrete problems

we face. This method of investigation will not consider the legal meaning of "must". Instead of "should," we could use more detailed descriptive terms such as "right" and "unfair." Justice is one of the virtues of a man: a good man is (among other things) just. (Anscombe, 1958, pp.14-16)

In the early 80's MacIntyre came to a similar finding: "in our culture there is no longer any rational way to secure moral agreement" (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 34). He thus signaled the establishment of a crisis of moral theories, consisting in their inadequacy in relation to the problems whose solutions they were supposed to facilitate. Modern society inherited according to MacIntyre, fragments of several contradictory theories (Platonism, utilitarianism, theory of rights and freedoms, Christianity, Kantianism). The cause of the crisis is, according to the author *of After Virtue*, the failure of the Illuminist Project which rejected the teleological (Aristotelian) view of human nature. According to Aristotle, virtues are those qualities of character that allow man to realize his own *thelos*. As a result, the idea of Kantian origin was established, that morality refers exclusively to the strict adherence of some rules, and therefore, to be virtuous is limited to strictly following a set of rules and principles (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 219). Thus the real cause of the crisis is the departure from the Aristotelian ethics, and the solution is bringing back to the space of public and philosophical debate, some key issues that were abandoned with the alienation from Aristotle. He proposes a neoaristotelic approach to human honesty, based on the set of qualities that provide a conception of the meaning of life. In MacIntyre's conception, " this sense of life conferred by the virtues (...) arises when the individual belongs to an *ethical tradition*: this makes possible the *narrative order of a unique life based on the practice of certain virtues* on which the whole existence of the individual depends" (Pence, 2006, p. 279).

MacIntyre's analysis and suggestions could not fail to arouse disputes, rejections and controversies, but above all remains his successful attempt to re-develop the Aristotelian idea of an ethical teleology. He reminds us that the central question of morality has to do with how to live a good life. Being a good person is not limited to seeking to follow formal rules. Good judgment and moral action emanate from a person's good character. We find in his program echoes of Nietzsche's thinking, which criticized the morals of modernity because it led to the situation in which being moral came to be reduced to being obedient to the laws drawn by ascendants. The individual was sacrificed to moral laws... and morality turned into pure compulsion (Nietzsche, 2002). He proposes the replacement of this morality, which denies authenticity, with a moral that promotes the spirit of integrity, the virtues that favor self-knowledge, self-control and mastery. (Nietzsche, 2006)

MacIntyre, however, does not intend to replace or exclude moral rules, but aims to complete them and place them in a broader theoretical framework in which virtue becomes the fundamental concept.

Instead of conclusions

A decade ago, Romanian universities committed to the road to moral compliance and have already taken the first steps towards integrity. The process was hampered and slowed down by the interference with the political factor, and on the other hand by the inherent limitations of deontological theory. Education based only on standard normative ethics theories (reduced to compliance with the rules) proved insufficient and deficient, contributing to the continuous increase in the integrity deficit in the university space. This translated into the proliferation of deception, favored by high tolerance for flagrant violations of honesty and political interference in the management and sanctioning of misconduct.

Crisis situations, such as the one we are going through, should force the members of a group such as the academic community, both to reassess their own values, principles, occupations and practices, as well as to seek and identify the opportunities and resources necessary for change, to overcome the problematic situation (low reputation). Achieving the objective of integrity would be easier to achieve if the deontological approach were complemented by the resources that have so far not been considered offered by the ethics of virtue. Only sustained efforts for the development of ethical education in which the theory of virtue has been integrated at all levels of the education system, by introducing into the curriculum new ethical content, modules, disciplines and courses, can support and favor the formation of a sense of obligation and personal responsibility.

Development and accomplishment / moral fulfillment involve overcoming conformism, completing and strengthening ethical education by engaging and using in the educational process the resources of the tradition of virtue ethics. Since the moral life does not reside, as we have shown, only in conforming and obeying the rules, but primarily in the cultivation of virtues, instead of worrying about how to identify and punish dishonesty, we must immediately build ways of cultivating personal excellence according to the Aristotelian model and considering the suggestions of MacIntyre.

Are there any deeper reasons to come back and focus on Aristotle's moral conceptions? Why should we go back to this ancient theory to restore the place of ethics in our current teacher training programs, for example? A compelling, very topical suggestion is provided by researchers in the education sciences Back, Clark & Phelan (2018) who demonstrate that Aristotle's vision, based on the central role of character traits in ethics, provides a reasoned response to how to deal with and remedy the current moral disease. Thus, the introduction of the ethics of virtue in the education and training programs, along with the implementation of current teaching strategies and methods (e.g. casuistry...) would be a good start. It is inadmissible that one of the most important ethical traditions should be missing from the European and Romanian cultural and academic space! All

the more so as the Aristotelian tradition reminds us that we can consciously choose the kind of person we want to be, that "we can always shape what we are" (Greitens, 2017, p. 111). We have the opportunity to put at the center of the formative approaches the identity, the concern for what our students become as individuals. Before the achievements, the expertise, let's support them in forming their character, and the achievements will not delay to appear. Along with the cardinal virtues, already mentioned, there are many other virtues - politeness, fidelity, prudence, thrift, the spirit of justice, generosity, gratitude, purity, love, sense of humor, etc. (Comte Sponville, 1998), which along with deontological norms, practitioners of a profession should develop in order to achieve excellence in their work.

More than just conforming and obeying professional rules and norms, it is imperative to discover and promote practical ways of cultivating personal excellence. Let us identify and comply with our obligations to ourselves and to others, which transcend and at the same time accomplish their duties to the profession that we exercise!

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