MORAL DISAGREEMENTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD VERSUS INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: *The current paper aims to highlight the indestructible connection between ethical education and intercultural education, whose shared goal is to cultivate humanity,* homo humanus*, in the meaning prefigured by the German existentialist Karl Jaspers. Among the defining traits of the humankind, we chose dignity that urges respect, regardless of people's belonging to a specific ethnic group, race, culture etc. Rehabilitation of the human being in a society characterized by mercantilism entails revitalization of Kant's categorical imperative, adjusted to the contemporary individual's condition and educational endeavors able to go beyond the institutional framework. Culture and morality (perceived as a component of culture) may offer, through a conjugated attempt, approaches to solving the existential distress of the contemporary individual.*

Keywords: *moral crisis, ethical education, dignity, intercultural education, values, categorical imperative,* humanity.

1. INTRODUCTION. MODERN TIMES AND HUMAN CONDITION

Philosophers of Late Modernity warn of the menace that may affect the human condition:

The idea of humanity has lost its entire force and prestige. Should a deep change not occur in our souls, then we will face decades, or even centuries of massacres (von Keyserling, 1996:7).

The thinker Hermann von Keyserling, upon analyzing the effects of the discrepancy between the progress of people's external lives and that of their inner lives, reached the conclusion that "The human being is literally going to dehumanize itself" (von Keyserling, 1996:8).

The conception of civilization imposed itself throughout the Enlightenment, it being associated with the industrial or the technical-scientific advancement. For that time, the development of rationality and the thirst for progress were the main goals of the humankind; nevertheless, these very ambitions would turn into modernity's tyranny. Society's modernization received the shape of "a set of cumulative processes" (Habermas, 2000:20) that supported and consolidated one another: forming of capital and mobilization of resources, development of production force and increasing labor productivity. The cult of money and the exhilaration of progress create new mentalities and behaviors, a new lifestyle. "To possess" becomes the expression of supreme happiness.

Effectiveness, productivity, success and prestige become the life's main goals, whose leveling effect annihilates the very individuality and liberty of individuals.

Humankind feeds on the illusion of emancipation and domination of nature, processes that secretly accompany the regress of people's inner lives. We witness the dissolution of axiological milestones, erosion of traditions and the relativity of values, phenomena that hold a huge impact on agreement and social cohesion, which become more and more fragile, and which will soon be replaced by individualism.

The individual, fed on the vanity of his privileged position in the world, reduces the world itself to a quantifiable object that may be entirely under his control. Similarly, the same fate expands over his own body, which builds itself within the individual's creation. Herbert Marcuse invokes the "one-dimensional man", whose liberty, emptied by any content, is administered under the auspices of a "total administration" (Marcuse, 1977:285). Having his personal life amputated, the man finds himself alone, in a hostile and unfriendly environment. Praised but collectivized, without an identity, he is totally a vassal to his society. This is how an absurd world comes to life, together with a crisis of the sense, as a breach between man and the world, between man and his very own existence. The man's increase of his capacity of discovering and dominating nature occurs at the cost of his incapacity to look after his own life.

Existentialist philosophers criticizes vehemently the alienation of the human being, under the impact of science and technology development. The individual is reduced to a mere role, a social function; he ceases to be a person.

> If we do not attempt to transform the others into objects, we at least defend our right not to be objects for the others. We attempt to make possible a world of people (…), the only world in which we can really enjoy life,

the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater argues (Savater, 1997:93). The modern civilization offers us a totally different perspective, it is oriented toward conquering the material supremacy, which gradually suppresses the authenticity of our existence, dehumanizes. To an extreme, "what we possess, it also possesses us" (Savater, 1997:93). In a show-world, whose directors are named appearance and not essence, quantity, but not quality, there is an overturn of values: the dethronement of man as a supreme value.

The Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica describes the appearance of the *number-man*, as a consequence of the ruling of numbers (quantity), both within social sciences (see the fever for statistics) and within each individual's life. The number, emptied of its Pythagorean mystique, becomes the factor that allows for a chain-reaction: man's quantification (by transforming "I" in "we") is followed by a slide of "we/us" into statistic analyses.

> Numbers divide and separate things and people. <The new> logic is the reflex of the extension initiated by the number and of exteriority of rapports and relationships between people within society <of the others> (Noica, 1993: 164-165).

Nonetheless, the philosopher assumes an optimistic position and hopes for our redemption through addition, although "this disconnected form of connection brings about vacuity upon people and things" (C.Noica,1993:164-165). Following the same trend of thinking, the Romanian thinker Anton Dumitriu describes Europe's crisis as being a reality characterized by "disorientation of people of all walks of life, by the panic of incertitude and the demon of destruction" (Dumitriu, 1991:66).

2. FROM THE MERCANTILIZATION OF CULTURE TO MORAL CRISIS

All schools of philosophy admit the exceptional existential status of the human being,

as a cultural being and the substance, eminently cultural, of its existence. The man is culture-creator, whereas culture offers its society behavioral models, values, norms, mentalities, thus contributing to the achievement of an organized social life.

Paolo Calcagno, in his work, "Culture and Being"(1969), operates the distribution between the metaphysical and functional concepts of culture. He appreciates that the traditional form of culture, perceived as "cultural patrimony", represents an absolutist, ethnocentric, europocentric, aristocratic concept, whose validity has begun to erode throughout the two world wars. The actual meaning of culture, the functional one, established after the war, revigorates its original meaning, of a forming and educating manner. Thus, culture becomes the model for the basic personality of a community's members (as a source inspiring attitudes, behaviors, skills etc.), as well as a connecting bridge, a meeting place for humans. It is the "system of ideas and values that holds the man at its core, if not the entire humankind, seeking their development at one or all levels" (A. Dumitriu, 1991:154-155). Moreover, culture becomes a discipline meant to bring up the individual and his collectivity.

Therefore, the social meaning and the moral significance of one's behavior are determined by the cultural context: "The integrity of the meanings system depends on the stability of the cultural system" (G.Silberbauer, *apud* P. Singer, 2006:52) By analyzing ethics of small-sized societies, George Silberbauer discovered that any alteration of behaviors/culture zones produces significance modifications. At the same time, the frequency and nature of changes accepted by the contemporary society affect the "cultural coherence". The omnipresence of commercial "culture", the cultural globalization erodes the world's cultures, but mainly, they affect the stability of the traditional order and of the moral and social significance systems. Although respect for the human life and dignity represents a universal value, the degree of their recognition and the behavioral registers that accompany it vary from one culture to another. The same cultural imprint is to be found in relation to the importance given to interpersonal relationships or rapports established among circles of friends: "The tolerance threshold is culturally determined and subjectively perceived" (Silberbauer, *apud* P.Singer, 2006:53) These aspects, revealed by cultural anthropology studies, are accompanied by the ultra-dynamism of the

contemporary world and by the phenomenon of de-encapsulation" (Anthony Giddens, 2000), which confer a feeling of cold and tragic indifference toward the others, fact that contravenes the authentic ethics. The liberal perspective, contract-based, specific to post-modern Western countries, also sets its imprints on primordial ethics that increases disagreements among various societies or, within the same pluri-cultural society, through the cohabitation of some diverse moral traditions. The ethical relativism ends up in nihilism, at the cost of moral convictions' degradation.

Depreciation of ethics represents the social anomy symptom that is reflected by the man's interiority:

> under the pressure of anomic moods (breaking of traditional norms, which lose their authority), there appear spontaneous alternatives, through which individual seek for new models, adequate for their altered lifestyle (Bellu, 1989:29)

Meanwhile, as if they were inside a vicious circle, the two phenomena find their resources and support each other: the crisis of moral values "erodes the soul of a society, disturbs and even annihilates its inner balance, finally casting it into anomy, into anarchy" (Enăchescu, 2005:52).

From the perspective of moral philosophy, the human crisis, the restlessness of a person is the expression of the moral conflict of existence. Similarly, modernity and post-modernity cause and maintain tensions between the man's singularity and the repressive mechanisms of society. Traditional instances of social control (church, family, school) are replaced by a culture that is vassal to economic interests, which praises modernity, selfishness, entertainment and human right to happiness and welfare. Gilles Lipovetsky identifies the causes of the ethical minimalism of the modern era in the explosion of human liberty and in the promotion of liberal policies. Technocracy produces rigorous normative systems so as to obtain performance in man's nature domination. At the same time, hyper-normativity of the human life reflects the tendency of escalating the domination of the human nature. Social development manipulates relationships of life in all its dimensions, whereas the control mechanisms intensify:

> These mechanisms pervert and atrophy the very immanence of social life and individuals' relationships, the content and manner of expression of direct rapport among people (Bellu, 1989:246)

The interval between the two world wars forecast the beginning of culture's decline in Western countries and the human decadence. The trigger of these processes consists of the values crisis: old values are dropped without any replacement, thus creating an axiological void. To the same extent, although there was a sort of replacement, new values do not manage to cover the man's needs, nor his humanity. Hence, improvisations are resorted to, and principles of particular value appear only to eliminate the unifying, integrating factor.

Furthermore, the post-war time is characterized by a disparity between individual rights and moral obligations of the citizen. The latter gradually lose their credibility and are replaced, given the collective frenzy of the time, by the seductive urges for happiness, pleasure and particular interests. We witness an escalation of individualist and hedonist values. On this new axiological map

> value is too often (…) confused for kindness, and this causes so much unhappiness to the individual and society in nowadays world" (Noica,1993:59)

Under the circumstances of serving progress, there is appreciation of the human qualities that come to man's service. Moreover, humans act with a "clear conscience" even when they behave inhumanly, an amplified tendency after the experience of the two world wars. There is evidence of a gradual distortion of the humans' mentality: if, at the beginning there was antinomy between humans' values (the inner ones) and effective that lead them, without their being aware of this fact, afterward, there appear a new mentality, based on which, it is not worth consuming energy for something, if only one's soul takes advantage of it, or if that thing does not produce any profit or prestige. A fine analyst of the feeling of love, Erich Fromm found that:

> In a culture in which orientation toward life is preponderant and material success is the primordial value (…) the human feeling of love follows the same rules of the exchange that also govern the labor and goods markets (Fromm,1995:11).

The new hierarchy of values is dictated by the economic structure. Attachment to things provokes estrangement from humans and it causes fragility in people's moral feelings for others. Likewise, the excessive power of money makes out of it the only valuable measurement of life. Morality loses its power of ordering the human condition. Qualitative differences and differences in humans'

acts diminish up to the point of disappearance, leaving place for ethical nihilism or ethical minimalism, for the better. Neutrality and indifference become the expression of moral petrifying, so as the torment of despair is the expression of the modern man's crisis. The man is dominated by the conscience of failure, of any of his acts' futility. The man behave chaotically, he becomes a sort of energy in permanent exhaustion, who lives at the core of a perpetual restlessness, drained by his demonic preoccupation "to make" and" to have", through his actions freed from the restraints of any principles.

At times of crisis, like the one we currently live in, at the ethical level, the ethical principles that are imposed are the ones dictated by selfish interests. The moral myopia (the lack of discernment), the comfortable and lazy ethics of non-engagement are supplemented by deontological codes that reflect a preoccupation for the assurance of some minimum moral rigor, necessary by all means, for the functioning of social life, without involving the moral consciousness. Post-war thinkers are placed among the opponents to the deontological attitude and consider that humanity has entered the post-deontic epoch, characterized by freedom from oppressive debts, demands or obligations. Following the same tendency, Gilles Lipovetsky speaks about a new era in the history of modern ethics, "*the epoch of post- debt*". There are more and more voices to argue that the time of theories and moral principles has passed and that humanity witnesses the birth of a post-theoretical epoch or even post-principles.

3. CULTURE AND MORALITY

Morality is a component part of culture and, together with the other cultural creations; it comes to life and evolves to satisfy human needs. Also, it bears the imprint of the cultural pattern within which it appears and functions. Yet, no matter their paternity, ethical principles are meant to satisfy two of the fundamental human needs:

a) They solve conflicts of interests between people;

b) They solve inter-individual conflicts that appear as a result of different desires and that cannot be satisfied at the same time (David Wong, *apud* Singer, 2006: 476).

Solving these two categories of conflicts is possible through the conception of some rules of conduct, expression of social values. Within the management of the rapport between individual welfare and the collective one, authentic ethical principles promote the engagement and non-indifference toward others' interests, toward the community's interests.

Under the conditions of the contemporary world's cultural pluralism and dynamism, there is need for a new approach to ethics, through the discovery of some topics of minimum morality, accessible and acceptable from the broad scale of the moral doctrines diversity. Even the cultural anthropology studies, although they are in support of their identity and cultural specificity, re-orient their interest toward finding a common foundation for the world's cultures and ethical principles, which means that the identification of values, valuable judgments and axiological criteria, generally applicable, without amputating the identity of each of them. It is evident that the diversity of moral traditions may become the source for some social tensions between different societies or even within the same multicultural society. In order to surpass such difficulties, there must exist a new type of moral reflection that implies a doubled effort: on the one side, there is the effort to reach an agreement with those who hold substantially different values, on the other side, there is the effort to remain loyal to own values. People's clearly defined cultural identity is completed by their capacity of being open toward diversity, and of operatively evaluating the multitude of cultural stimuli that affect the contemporary world.

In this context,

> ethics is no longer a series of various things, lacking sense, for various people, at various times and places. Rather, given the background of diverse historical and cultural approaches to the question about how we should live, its convergence degree is amazing. The human nature has its regularities and there is a limited number of manner in which the human beings may cohabitate and progress" (Singer, 2006:573).

Accordingly, the key to the problem, its common denominator of the world's cultural and implicitly, ethical diversity it the MAN and his dignity. Humanity represents the supreme cultural value that imposes a perfect morality and the revival of the consciousness of the human "to be". Beyond theory, the current realities prove the fact that people are guided, manipulated many times, not by the values of humanity, but by "particular and mischievous ideologies, small and equally useless interests that divide the humankind rather than to unify it" (Dumitriu, 1991:70).

4. INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION – MORAL EDUCATION CONVERGENCE: COMMON SOLUTIONS

Both educational endeavors seek for reactivate the Socratic mission: to make people better citizens. For their achievement, they use values, the only capable to rehabilitate the sense of life and human dignity. From a humanistic perspective, the recovery of the sense of life consists of living in a dignified manner for a human being. Consequently, the foremost value promoted, or the supreme value, is the man himself. The two educational components follow the path of the human being's humanization, offering it a content and reliability. Their role is overwhelming in transforming the objective status-quo (the genetic potential specific to a human being) into engaged subjectivity, through the activation of those conducts accordant with cultural/moral values and social normativity.

In the actual context, there is an attempt to launch a project for reconstructing humanity, for creating the "*homo-humanus*" invoked by Karl Jaspers, for reinvigorating humanistic values and for humanizing of technology. Re-humanization of the quotidian climate and the removal of indifference among people mainly presuppose a re-education of the human sensitivity, through primary groups perceived as nuclei of life (family, school, work group etc.). Social psychology and micro-sociology are also preoccupied with the "new humanization" and promote the projection of some forms of group inter-relationships, stimulating and highly positive, which are able to create a new human understanding. In the educational area created by intercultural and moral education, the fertility of the human being's transformation into a MAN is maximal. They will apply the ways and progress of knowledge belonging to socio-humanistic sciences, activating the man's efforts of reflecting over his existence in the world and of creating his own practical philosophy of life. Furthermore, they cannot reach their proposed goal by means of abstract discourses, through "lessons" or advice. Knowledge is necessary, yet, it is not sufficient. What matters is the active learning, the life instance lived by man, in which he discovers the other as a being, and helps him to discover himself. The communicative competences involved in this educational context imply a moral strategy at all times. Ethics must be present in all forms of human inter-relations, excluding the neutrality of values.

Lipovetsky pleads in favor of I-the Other balance, Levinas is pro an ethics of dialogue, of responsibility and equilibrium between freedom and solidarity. Jurgen Habermas highlights the fact that the Other is a dignified person who deserves respect. All of these perspectives lead to a change in attitude toward man, no matter his belonging or his qualities. This is the common nucleus of intercultural education and of moral education, as well. There is need for a repositioning of man as the supreme value, who subordinates all the other values. "The economic machine has to serve the man, and not the man to serve the economic machine" (Fromm, 1995:118).

There are also formulated some false solutions to the contemporary man's dilemma. One of them is the culture for success, regarded as a substitute for the crises of sense, and which is specific to the American society, inside which appears the idea that success is the key of morality: the moral/immoral character of one's action is being judged subsequently, based on the obtained results. An action leading to failure is considered immoral. This is a suggestive example of alteration of the moral appreciation criteria that affects the entire axiological system. It is obvious that alterations, accelerated changes imply a certain degree of insecurity and disorder. However, a limitation of disorder to a bearable amount is necessary for the maintenance of order and for the human beings to be able to live humanly. The reality experienced by each of us shows that

> the planetary expansion of the scientific and technical civilization exiles the moral strengths to a microsphere (family, couple, and neighborhood) in which consequences related to the very destiny of humanity can no longer be controlled (Macoviciuc, 2000:482).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, although the necessity of a new approach to ethics and morality is generally accepted, discourses are delivered at an excessively theorized level; they are taken away from the concrete existential context and the contemporary man's interrogations. The perspective most closely to the contemporary world could be the contextualist ethics. In reply to those who oppose the general rationalist perspective (universal moral principles ignore diversity of life) she proposes an approach that is related to the characteristics of those who react to social circumstances and ideals defining a variety

of real human communities. This sensitivity of the contextualist ethics to particularities of the moral actors (individually and collectively) makes possible for it to meet the exigencies of interculturality, to a greater extent.

All the same, even though the topics of interculturality are intensely debated on in political and academic environments, those related to morality are exiled to obscurity. This is the very cause of many failures in the area of intercultural policies and intercultural management. We find the same situation in case of educational policies, which give insufficient importance to moral education. Pragmatization of knowledge, its excessive bureaucratization, the omnipresent manipulation, formalization of interpersonal relationships etc. justify the interrogation to which any of us should give a thought:

> To be good or to be non-good?" – this is the strange dilemma of this millennium. The answer we may submit to this question will influence the destiny of an epoch, the destiny of the whole planet (Mircea, 1995:7)

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