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Applied Ethics in Interdisciplinary Contexts.

Ethical Counselling, Ethical Debates and Analysis of Applied Philosophy

Summary of the Habilitation Thesis

Ever since the beginning of my teaching and research activities I took an interest in the ways philosophy can be used as basis for other disciplines and, alternatively, in the philosophical means to approach several significant topics belonging to social, political and cultural life. One of the most important dimensions of my research is the one concerning ethics and ethical applications to various aspects regarding the human conditions or other particular aspects of bioethics and biopolitics. In my research I always paid attention to the elements that are at the core of philosophical approach and to the philosophical tools for analysis.

Going on with these research lines, during my postdoctoral activity I constantly reflected upon the ways in which philosophical discourse intersects with the discourses of sciences or with the socio-humanist discourse; respectively, I reflected upon the dialogue between philosophy and the socio-humanist sciences. I was constantly interested in the manner philosophy builds its own discourse inside this interdisciplinary dialogue.

My Habilitation thesis is structured in three parts and five chapters, that follow the structure of themes and topics of my publications and research, rather than their subsequent temporal chaining. Chapter 1 summarizes my studies connected with the philosophy of religions, a field I started to investigate at the beginning of my research career, a field in which I continued to study and publish occasionally, after finishing my doctoral dissertation. The following topics were of interest for me, either in my articles or in the projects I have been involved: the topic of religious radicalism, the topic of the “diffuse” religiosity, typical for the “New Age” movements, the topic of religious motivations found at the heart of several altruist gestures (following the case of religiously motivated living organ donation), and the topic of systematization of the interdisciplinary religious studies. In the same chapter, I mentioned my approach towards the institutional crisis of philosophy, a phenomenon that is visible not only at the national level (through marginalization of philosophy in the public space), but also at international level (through the limitation of its impact, with dramatic consequences, that can

lead to the closing of several philosophy departments from universities having a consistent philosophical tradition). I have analyzed this phenomenon in a research project and in several publications. I have noted that, even in this stage of crisis, philosophy finds the ways to revive itself, and the cultural context of post-1989 Romania may be called typical for a new wave of philosophical creativity.

During my search for solutions to this institutional crisis of the philosophy programs, one of the ideas I came across is the one concerning the importance of philosophy for the personal development of children. At the end of the chapter, I underscored my personal activities and accomplishments in the field of P4C (“Philosophy for Children”)/philosophy with children, during the last two years.

The second chapter goes on and explores the relations among ethics, ideology and communication. Immediately after finishing my Ph.D. thesis, I carried on my interest in political philosophy, by studying topics such as tolerance or multiculturalism. These reflections are a logical continuation of my investigations, started during the doctoral stage, on the topic of the ideology of liberal political feminism. What commenced in the doctoral thesis with the delimitation of “ideology”, through progressive closeness and distancing to several fundamental theoretical political concepts has been pursued through emphasizing the tensed relation between feminism and conservative ideologies, as well as through exploring the most promising area of feminist approach, at least through my lenses: the feminist thematizations in applied ethics.

I have analyzed several thematic areas situated at the intersection of feminism and applied ethics, that have made headlines to the recent public agenda: ethics of assisted reproduction and abortion ethics. To my view, I always considered that care ethics should have a privileged place among other feminist ethical theories. Among care ethics, those theories assuming care as a complement or supplement (instead of alternative, such as Carol Gilligan’s initial version) to justice were the ones that managed to shape the problemization of several dilemmas or conceptual frameworks inside applied ethics.

In the next subchapter I summarized several topics from the field of ethics of communication that I studied in recent years, such as: the topic of gender stereotypes in commercial communication (studied through the lenses of philosophy of communication, interdisciplinary religious studies and business ethics), the topic of citizens’ journalism and the topics of journalists’ responsibility.

The third chapter is dedicated to the philosophical research in applied ethics, a field that was developed in close connection with my teaching activity (that included specialized courses both at undergraduate and graduate level). A field that I followed in relation to Western developments is the one of ethical expertise that I attempted to develop, following especially the pragmatic opportunities for career development for the future doctoral students whom I will hopefully coordinate. The ethical expert, the ethics adviser, the ethics consultant, or the specialist in research ethics are professionals whose occupations have become routine in Western countries, yet infrequent in our country. I believe all these professions should become accessible for the philosophy graduates, provided that they manage to fulfill their professional standards. In my projects, my publications and my courses I defended the idea of ethical expertise, as a major part of the approaches in applied ethics. I considered ethical expertise to be crucial for the contribution philosophers may bring in the field of ethical counselling and consultancy, as well as for their own involvement in the field of research ethics.

I signaled out several case studies that I performed inside bioethics (abortion ethics, ethics of assisted reproduction, ethics of end-of-life decisions, robo-ethics). In chapter four I gathered the studies in the field of ethics of transplantation and organ donation. Here, I benefitted from the experience of working together with teams of specialists from disciplines directly involved with organ transplantation: from surgeons and lawyers to sociologists, pathologists or transplant coordinators. Thus, I could evaluate the role and utility of the philosophical expertise in an interdisciplinary team, as well as the importance of team work for validating the results of applied research.

In the second part I envisaged the lines of study that I wish to invite my future Ph.D. students to explore, in continuation of my present interests. Although the fields of research and the topics may seem diverse, their diversity does not hamper them to be part of a unique intellectual biography. That is why, having in mind both my research interests and my teaching obligations, I have to state that I will continue to study and research the fields I have already investigated: studies in applied ethics, interferences of ethics, ideology and communication, ethical expertise and ethical counselling, the development of philosophical foundations of gender studies.