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TABLE OF CONTENT

Editorial	5
Liviu Warter	
A Treatise on the Jackass in Academe: How Arrogance and Self-Centeredness Destroy the Credibility of Higher Education	9
Hershey H. Friedman, Linda Weiser Friedman	
Necessary New Competencies for the Future Generations at Work	29
Fons Trompenaars	
Plagiarism in Scientific Articles. A Brief Review	47
Oana Isailă, Hostiuc Sorin	
From Knowledge Enrichment to Career Development: The Case of Higher Education in Israel.....	53
Tamar Almor, Avi Shnider	
Insights Into Plagiarism	65
Bianca Hanganu, Beatrice Gabriela Ioan	
Empowering Changemakers for a Better Society: The Case of Iéseg School of Management, France	73
Grant Douglas	
The Role of Medical Higher Education in Promoting Nondiscrimination - The Sibiu Experience	81
Silviu Morar	
Building a Culture of Integrity.....	95
Thomas D. Zweifel	
A Brief Conversation on Quality and Ethics in Higher Education	105
Ioan Chirila, Iulian Warter	
The Nexus Between Ethics and Quality in Higher Education. Case Study	113
Iulian Warter	
Cold War Ain't Over Yet (Political Correctness and the Academic Caste).....	143
Slawomir Magala	

Authorship Criteria for Scientific Articles	153
Hostiuc Sorin, Oana Isailă, Maria Aluaș	
How Perceive the Students on Political Sciences the Academic Performance and Integrity? Exploratory Case Study	159
Silviu-Petru Grecu	
The Impact of Organizational Culture in Higher Education. Case Study.....	173
Liviu Warter	
Letter to the Editor.....	201
Cristian G. Curcă	
Letter to the Editor.....	205
Hershey H. Friedman, Frimette Kass-Shraibman	
Book Review	209
Aurelian Virgil Băluță	

A BRIEF CONVERSATION ON QUALITY AND ETHICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

An Interview with Professor Ioan Chirila by Iulian Warter

Introduction

Professor Ioan Chirila was contacted for a brief conversation on the culture of quality and ethics in higher education.

Interviewee: Ioan Chirila PhD, Professor, President of the University Senate, Babes-Bolyai University (BBU), Cluj, Romania (IC)

Interviewer: Iulian Warter PhD, President, Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism, Iasi, Romania (IW)

The interview took place in Iasi, Romania, June 21, 2019.

IW: Thank you Professor Ioan Chirila for allowing me to conduct this brief interview with you on the culture of quality and ethics in higher education.

IW: How would you define the concept of quality in higher education?

IC: Higher education is by nature the source of quality. I think it is a tautology to use higher education and quality in succession, meaning in the same sentence in a succession relationship because when I speak of Higher Education I already speak of a high level of both content and elements, which gives universities the ability to create characters.

We have the idea of virtue in the logo of the Babes-Bolyai University, we are one with Europe not through virtues, not with polemics, not with the troubles that are now taking place in Europe, because in order to form a character it means to stabilize a person in a field of virtue that confers competence, gives sufficient responsibility to assume certain issues that ultimately give us the right to intervene in a crisis situation and try to fix it.

That is why when we talk about quality in higher education, we are not talking about the scientometric ways in which we want to identify in what way the teaching or the structures of the higher education in Romania even achieve their goals, which, as I said, are intrinsic to their nature.

When we opened the Romanian university in Cluj, 100 years ago in November, Vasile Parvan said something interesting about the Romanian university: "It is the duty of our life," that it was the duty of our lives that this Romanian people also reach this level of university organization.

You see that I'm talking about Transylvania, and then when the universities opened up to these survey, highlighting, quantification activities, we did nothing else but to put up the bodies that make these rankings, the necessary elements to say that we are indeed higher education.

If you want, we can get into the logic of modern psychology and see above and below. See, the very idea of the higher one takes us to the superlative of the curriculum, it is superlative in terms of the method, it is superlative in terms of the demonstration and then if it is the case to give all of these quality assurance catalogs regarding leadership, in terms of governance, in terms of this entrepreneurial spirit that we need to develop, but of course management and marketing are essential to each university.

Therefore, quality for higher education is not only informal or not realized when a student who has passed through our institutions gets a paper, but when our graduate can be integrated into society as a factor capable of restoring, stabilizing society to its natural, not to other peaks.

IW: What do you think are the fundamental elements of ethics in higher education?

IC: Many times I have to speak on this ethics theme because of my profession, I, being at the base theologian dealing with the Holy Scripture and those who deal with the Holy Scripture as I, the Old Testament, I do not think it's really about talking there about morality, we are talking about the Old Testament ethics and then everyone expects me to talk about ethics.

But I noticed by doing some research and reading, that in the Western world there was a distinction between ethics and morality, and while trying to follow the footsteps of Michel Foucault and others who have debated this subject, I have come to say the following: ethics is an individual matter, morality is also an individual and interpersonal issue, but with another horizon, the universal horizon.

Therefore, when I talk about respecting a commandment or a law of God, the horizon is not just individual, as far as I am concerned, or the one in my immediate neighborhood, but universal. It is for all.

That is why the equation expressing an ethical relationship is always an equation consisting of two elements: S1, S2 and their relationship a contractual one, so I do not do anything wrong on S2, if I am S1.

While in moral is S1, S2, and S3. S3 is the one who reveals you, it discovers to you that God who reveals the commandments by which if you come to organize your relationship with the other, surely the other will give you what is more than ethical, which is moral, because not always a contractual relationship is sufficient.

In the inter-human relationship, many times, if you excel in mathematical retributive formulas, you can not help the other, but only reward him for an effort, or in a society that can often go through the crisis, it is not enough to give him just the remuneration for work, but give him the support so that he does not put society in a state of crisis.

Probably, if evaluated in this sense, many of the social policies, even the contemporary ones, would be with another consistency and with another structure. Just that today the hiatus between the university world and the consumer society is very high.

Yes, they talk in their area and we live in our chaos, so something like that. Ethics in higher education is related, if you want, to one term, the term of justice, and this term of justice refers to our nature, to the nature of human.

It's not right, it's not fair-play to use anything other than what is my own temper. Then you see, is the ethics or the justice of the way of relating to the other. If they take something from the other I say I take it from the other, and then I have to create this image of communion.

The image of communion in a scientific report or revelation is an intrapaginary note and bibliography. And then this is in itself the image of scientific communion and university ethics is also in keeping with the process of building the characters.

I will not be able to shape characters if I am not a character. And then a more delicate side, we have the Universities' Charters where we have the principles outlined, including those that aim to the moral ethical plan of our existence. We are still in favor of using freely the term morality, we prefer to stay in secular terminology or lexic.

I'm wondering why? Because sometimes the words become the treasure of their past. And then you claim for a certain exigency. The word itself if a word is secularized, I see here this I-pad and tell you the "icon", that is the secularized icon, we change little the meaning, the rigor and the demand.

It is the correct relating to the scientific world, but here I am going to do something: relating to the world we live in, moral relating, responsible to the world we live in. I always say that when you shape a character, you also create the ability to identify and assume the responsibility of that character.

Because we are in Iasi now and from here Titu Maiorescu started with his critical direction, I agree with the critical attitude because I work in the Greek language area and from there comes the critique and always say that a critical attitude has a part of solving the problem not only of identifying the problem, because the judgment must be integral and then from this point of view, the university environment needs to achieve leadership, to achieve the necessary elements, the elements necessary for governance, to carry out where necessary specific issues in the the life of a citadel.

We are still trying to build around our universities these alumni associations, former graduates who come to share an experience, come to show the young students that it is possible because today we need it, but we need and ethical reporting to large companies, large societies, major cultural events that are being promoted.

Why? Because you cannot make a human to be extremely useful to society in an ivory tower. Readings in prisons may be elements of relief for detention, but reading outside freedom is not automatic freedom.

And then for this reason we say that we will have to open up our cooperation with the economic environment, with the business environment, even with the political environment, but we are distant from the political environment, for the younger generation who is preparing to take over the responsibilities of this society to be a generation not only of criticism, but of solving contemporary problems.

IW: Do you think there is a close link between quality and ethics in the university?

IC: There is. Please note, as in all universities, even the smallest, Committees of Ethics have been set up, and there is inevitably such a thing. They, ethics committees are made up of representatives of all structures in universities, the educational environment, the training environment, the research, the administration.

Absolutely everyone are represented in this Ethics Council or Ethics Commission, as it is called, and on the one hand show the university's choice for a certain ethical standard, but on the other hand it shows to those who are interested that the university itself, as a whole, as a unit, intervenes if deviations from ethical norms are reached.

That is why, we academics did not totally agree with the small or big scandals surrounding some university education slippings that were made where it was not supposed to be done. Everything starts from the department, and I am starting to fuss at the ministry; no, we have start down from here, we still have a lot of problem to adjust.

Because it is possible to restore the parameters of an ethics, for example publishing without any problems. Very rare you will get a work that has a similarity of 0.0 and therefore are some limits that are admitted, they are dictated for each thematic area in a special way. Then, here is the relationship, how universities are relating their total openness to ethical principles.

Social ethics, to take it as a more general concept, assumes the existence of codes of ethics. There are also deontological codes at universities level. At our university level, that is big, there are 21 faculties and there should be 21 codes.

We went on general regulation of the ethics committee and that is applicable to all faculties. But as an example, we started to go down, we are now talking about the degree of similarity or the plagiarism coefficient not only for doctoral theses. We have faculties that apply the test including to degree thesis.

Why? You have to teach one from there, to know the rigor of quoting, the rigor of identifying the sources, and all the rest. Therefore, in the academic world, there is a satisfactory opening for this area.

I am not a Puritan, I will not speak in terms of 100%, but for us who work in education 20% of 150-200 students or of 1000 students that are superlative is satisfactory.

IW: In all international rankings, BBU ranks first among the Romanian universities. BBU competes from equal to equal with many prestigious universities in the world. Which do you think is the "key to success" of BBU?

IC: The key to success is to open on time to these rankings, to these confrontations. It can blow the quiet wind out, if you do not open the window or the door, it will not come to you.

So, thanks to some distinguished personalities who held the position of rector of the university after 1990, I would mention only a few names: Ionel Haiduc, president of the Romanian Academy, who taught abroad and wrote internationally recognized works, Andrei Marga, Minister of Education, who was the engine of reform in higher education, which continued, but he as a personality was an open man, extraordinary dedicated to international collaboration.

After Prof. Marga we had the historian Bocsan, now we have the current President of the Romanian Academy, Ioan Aurel Pop. All of them are of international amplitude people. They opened the university internationally. How was the connection made? We had Tempus, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus and we have Erasmus +, even if they are small. But all this has created the possibility of mobility for students and teachers, and the result of the mobility was that all of them have entered a scientific production that is relevant in the international environment, not only nationally.

From here began to develop then projects with ministerial or governmental funding, with European funding, which gave us the opportunity to currently have around 62-64 research centers in the university.

But we have research centers with an an enviable endowment, when I go for example at Nanoparticles and Nanotechnology Institute with visitors from abroad they ask me, " but you have to get money with these?"

We have not yet reached that culture to produce really money, but we realize and understand very well that we have everything we need. In other words, we have entered this area because the money that was obtained in these grants, which are not destined to the current salary of researchers, was not only spent on wages or laptops.

We bought the best MRI and we do research for all medicine in our area. We have bought this base for nanoparticles, we have the most developed center for natural disasters and diagnosis. We are in touch with the UN and other forums to report what's happening in geophysics in this area of the world. These have dynamized and created the necessary elements to get us higher.

But now to be honest we are between 600-700, we had individual assessments on disciplines or faculties, one was in the top 100. But this, on the one hand, it flatters us, but makes us more responsible because unlike the others we pass from a cold shower to a warm one and vice versa.

Why? Because you get upstairs, fall down again, you realize what you need to stabilize, that you have to develop further. We are in this place in the Shanghai ranking, because there are some parameters that we are going to achieve very hard: one is the budget parameter and the other is the parameter of the "nobelists", so the ones with the title of Nobel.

I give you an example: only our neighbors who have detached from the University of Cluj, the University of Szeged have four "nobelists". Of course they are above. Formed after 1919, when the Romanian university was formed, they did not take the oath of faith to the

King and went to Szeged and made a strong university, which competed all the time with Budapest.

And then that's the situation with our position. Or I can tell you from the perspective of theology, the theologies were not at university. After 1992, 1993 they were accepted as faculties of the university.

You know how much the level of research has changed in the area of theology, extraordinary, everyone went with the application of clichés there: "Believe and do not search." Disciplines in theology are not de facto like this, we have philosophical discursivity, we have this thematic-historical side, the ethnofolclor analysis and all the others that apply very well.

We have come to make a technology transfer project in Orthodox theology, because I have a sacred art section and not only the painting, I also have restorers. We had to create a material basis for identifying the materials, substances and all the others that now allow me to interact in a project with restoration companies in the country to whom we offer practical technical solutions.

That is why the university grew up and I hope to grow because now it is challenging this entrepreneurial opening, the dialogue with the citadel and we started, we created some programs, we have an MBA with Hale University in UK, and I hope to establish some more that bring you CEOs and students.

These are the concrete actions that strengthen the relationship with the citadel. The people coming into your program see that there is real competence, not a story, but I emphasize two concepts: autonomy and responsibility. Autonomy and responsibility in the university environment must be at home.

IW: Being a priest and professor of orthodox theology will help in the important mission of President of the BBU Senate?

IC: It helps, because everybody finds in me a man willing not only to analyze critically but to listen. Everyone sees you as a man who is fundamental aiming at a peaceful solution. But the fact that I was elected president of the Senate of the University shows how great is the freedom of thought and experience in this university.

We can see in this, the fact that the principles we have enunciated in the university charter are strictly respected, that is, we are somewhat in a position where we can say: we are liberated from ideologies because they have convinced themselves, I am at second mandate, I have not come up with any ideological weakness here.

That is why I took my second term, but I repeat it is an extraordinary thing to be in my position although in a position of such a responsibility. But I would see in your question a reminiscence of the cliché and I tell you why. Because I am not, by virtue of being a priest, president of the university senate, but by virtue of being a university professor, a doctoral supervisor and all the others, on the basis of which I was employed at the university.

At university, I was not hired to be a priest. I do the priesthood because of my freedom, I have no responsibilities at the parish and at all else. I even laugh with my colleagues and say that until Friday I work at BBU, Saturday and Sunday at the church. I have never had community responsibilities. No, I serve at the cathedral, serve in different places where they need me. I make a living from my teaching work and from my research work.

For the image, there is a factor that can be a stabilizing element in a university when a right person gets to the right place. Next to us is the Technical University and I think of a metaphor: when the nut fits into the screw, you do not have to put the washer. That means being the right man in the right place.

IW: How do you see your role as President of the BBU Senate in creating a culture of quality and ethics in BBU?

IC: As the education is now organized, many academics believe that the last instance is Senate or Senate President. And then many of the causes that come under the responsibility of the Ethics Commission come to me.

And then it is a factor of guaranteeing the legality, the correctness and transmitting of the sufficient coefficient, not the excess of humanity. I have a rule, I offer a high coefficient of humanity to others when I found that the others have not been insolent.

When they are insolent, I do not apply it, then it means they consider you stupid and it does not make sense. Therefore, the function of president is a mediating function, but it is also a function of strategy. Senates have a duty to do both long-term and short-term strategy.

The rector's offices have the duty to implement, but they also have the right of initiative. However, the approval belongs to the Senate, and then from that point of view it is a matter that in BBU was a positive matter, the option to choose in this position a character with a theological aptitude.

IW: In your opinion, what would be interesting to investigate more deeply in the field of quality and ethics in higher education?

IC: Right now, the man, because if today Diogenes would resurrect, I think he would walk with 10 lamps to find a man. So anthropological issues are fundamental to the society in which we live and I am heading to the expression of Gadamer and Vogel in the German environment that speak of anthropology: the body and the soul, not only the body.

We greatly develop our body and forget the soul. And then from this perspective of the anthropological emergencies will also result the scientific components. Psychology will regain its completeness, that is, it will respond to the name psyche meaning soul, in the psyche logos, word about the soul. Sociology is not just society, it is an obvious communal structure and it gives us a restructuring.

But there is an American researcher, Philippe Alot, who wrote a story about the reconstruction of humanity and ended it with some 5 dilemmas, and because we are in an interview I only say one thing: today we need to get out of the sphere of self-sufficiency and see real need of the other's need for him to be me.

IW: What advice would you give to a person doing research on quality and ethics in higher education?

IC: Be of quality, just be of quality or at least meditate when he meets a situation that you enjoy in achieving a quality target, how can he get to quality.

Always doing research in the area of quality challenges you to a new moral horizon, your own existence and from there the circumstance and the balance in evaluating others or ending with a maximum as in the Old Testament: it is not enough to say to someone you are stupid if you are indeed a professor, you must love him until he learns to love you and then he is no longer stupid.

IW: Would you like to add something related to culture of quality and ethics in higher education or about Babes-Bolyai University?

IC: BB University on November 4 will celebrate 100 years of Romanian university education in Transylvania and wishes that at the completion of these 100 years, it will take a look at the way in which 100 years ago Pirvan's speech was fulfilled: "the duty of our life" and of course to see how the future of the next 100 years is projected, because we think that universities must become some forums in which not only the intellect engraves, but also the

man in his entirety, in order to become a restorer of the balance between beauty and goodness in creation.

To the extent that we will be able to get out of the area of dominus ac deus temptation to consider us Gods, we will probably be more balanced in terms of quality culture both in the university environment and in the existential environment. We do analyzes and research on small pieces, on small samples, on institutions, even on individuals.

I think it should be the reverse process and go to the universal, to the existential environment, to the environment of creation, to the universal eco, so not only in these small sections. Then let us not delude ourselves, our placement in a ranking on a certain position may not always be caused by objective factors, it can also be caused by factors like: better people have not enrolled.

And then let's have a balance in how we relate to ourselves. The mirror in a personal balance is the joy of the other, not the fact that you sit and look in the mirror.

IW: Thank You Professor Ioan Chirila