
THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALITY IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A NEW STUDY PROGRAMME ‘ETHICS’ AT THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE FACULTY OF ARTS, COMENIUS UNIVERSITY IN BRATISLAVA*

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Received August 16, 2011; accepted January 15, 2012

***Abstract.** The article deals with the scope of problems connected to creating a new study programme ‘Ethics’ at the Faculty of Arts Comenius University in Bratislava. The author is describing the situation in which the new programme and its contents development. She introduces possibilities of traditional philosophical and ethical approaches in this process. She also mentions the problem of dichotomy of sciences and humanities. The main goal of the author is to stress the need of rationality re-interpretation which should be understood as the ability to tolerate and perceive the opinions of others, as willingness to listen to and to rely more on persuading than on power.*

***Keywords:** study programme of Ethics, rationality, historicism, humanities, values.*

* The article was presented at Mykolas Romeris University International scientific conference „Academic Ethics and Improvement of University Management“, 28–30 June, 2011.

Introduction

When we started to work on a new study programme of ethics at the Department of Philosophy and History of Philosophy of FIF UK in Bratislava (specialization 2.1.5 Ethics), we tried to achieve a concept that will introduce ethics as a philosophical discipline and will offer a sufficiently wide space for the interpretation of morality. The process of deciding to open a new narrowly specialised study programme was not easy since its introduction demanded not only elaboration of the study contents, but mostly taking into consideration the social 'order' regarding the necessity of profiled experts in the field of ethics. An important impulse was the possibility of open cooperation with departments of well-known universities but, at the same time, also the objective need closely connected to introducing new subjects at elementary and secondary schools.

A new project of humanization of education has been opened in Slovakia since 1990. In the school year of 1990/91 ethics as an alternative to religious education was brought to elementary schools as an experimental education, since these subjects were established as obligatory in 1993 and at the same time ethics started to be taught at numerous secondary schools.

1. The Problem of Qualified Teaching

A content level of the subject itself caused numerous discussions not only among its creators, but also among wider public, who commented the issue of necessity of ethical education. These discussions were often characterized by little knowledge of the issue, a complicated social situation in itself; by a significant shift in the sphere of moral values, by an effort to introduce morality as an overall 'cure' to all social ailments. If we take into consideration the number of rising ethics committees, various forms of moral codes, presented by numerous social communities or honourable organizations, it might seem that the number of experts for Ethics is sufficient and the achievement of formal qualification should not be a problem. But in reality, qualified pedagogues were non-existent. However, the proficiency that the experienced pedagogues were improving step by step by either extramural studies in Pedagogical faculties, or the new teachers, who have graduated in the subject, showed did not provide either group with any additional lesson subsidy in the framework of their duty at individual schools. The reason for this was among others the above mentioned alternative of religious education.

D. Vargova, the lecturer at Pedagogical Faculty UK evaluated the situation as follows: "In the span of years and on the basis of experience we can state that this was a political decision. Alternation of ethic education and religious education (despite their common target) placed both of these subjects into opposition, polarized parental public as well as children at schools. A myth has been created, that pupils attending religious education are automatically better, more moral. Slovak school system was not prepared for the wide and overall introduction of the subject, neither on the side of teachers, nor on the side of study materials. Up to these days non-qualified pedagogues have taught

this subject. The reasons are numerous. At the beginning there has been a significant lack of qualified and re-qualified pedagogues. The myth is surviving that lessons of Ethic education are considered by wide public as ‘free lessons’, where pupils are ‘only playing’, without any target to be achieved and therefore anyone can teach it. Using ethic education, regarding its low time award in curricula, schools are filling up the duty of those teachers who are not fulfilling the standard amount of lessons. These are mostly the head-teachers, but also the teachers of sciences, PE teachers, etc. With regard to obligatory choice of ethic education in alternation with religious education there are schools (in the municipalities and small towns) with low number of pupils signed to ethic education, and, therefore, a teacher of ethics is useless for them. The situation is different in town schools and schools with high number of pupils.”¹

2. Contents Development of Ethic Teaching

The problem is not only caused by the expert level of pedagogues, but also by the target specialization. The contents of the subject itself (called either ethic education or ethics) has been reduced mostly to the education of pro-social behaviour, which is undoubtedly necessary, but, mainly at the level of high schools, the delivery of ethics as a philosophical discipline should not be overlooked.

These circumstances and resulting need to enlarge the number of truly qualified experts in the field of ethic issues guided our steps to introduce the new study programme of ‘Ethics’.

In the process of creating the study programme we have decided to create the programme of ethics based on developing the ability of critical reflection and argumentation, and on developing the ability to think about morality at the level of philosophy, therefore, to offer a programme of primary philosophical character. Bachelor programme with core specialization does not primarily prepare graduates for the pedagogical career. We have characterized the profile of a graduate as follows: “Graduates of the programme of ‘ethics’ should know how to analyse and solve ethical problems at the level of handling theoretical basis of the history of ethics and philosophy as well as at the base of initial knowledge of general and applied ethics. He/she should correctly define the space of ethical and human values in the life of a human being and make decisions in the space of moral conflicts not only in everyday practical life, but mainly in the field of his/her professional life. At the same time graduates should be able to handle the bases of psychology, sociology, axiology, culturology, logics, andragogics and communication skills through dialogical character of interpersonal communication. Graduates should, therefore, achieve the abilities to cooperate with managers and

1 Vargová, D. *Kompetenčný profil učiteľa etickej výchovy vo svetle kurikulárnych zmien slovenského systému vzdelávania. Mravná výchova v školách na Slovensku a v zahraničí*. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Pedagogická fakulta, 2009, p. 223.

specialists in other fields. All the above mentioned, however, requires the knowledge of main ideological streams of temporary theoretical, philosophical and applied ethics.”²

3. Possibilities of Traditional Philosophical Approaches in Study Programme Creation

But how should we achieve that our graduates gain sufficient amount of theoretical knowledge not only to be able to look for and to find their own position in the understanding of the substance and sense of morality, but also to possess certain practical skills necessary for both solving several moral dilemmas and leading ethical discourses?

As for the initial platform we have chosen philosophical tradition of European thinking, which we consider to be the most appropriate framework for providing various possibilities of building a philosophical ethics possibly resulting in various forms of applied ethics.

Theoretical reflection of morality in the context of European traditions is closely connected to numerous defining methods, ways of thinking and principles. Taking these principles into consideration played a certain role in drafting and arranging the subjects, and, particularly, their contents in the fields listed above. In the first place we have concerned the method of historicism (and principles of continuity and unity connected to it), principles of subjectivism and objectivism, universalism and sectionalism, absolutism and relativism in the field of teaching ethics in order to show their advantages as well as their limitations.

‘Classical’ approach represents the option to study history of ethical teachings. Historicism as a principle, by means of which we offer students not only historical forms of individual ethical concepts, but also typology of morality, we do not however claim historicism as universal and exhausting. Historical order, in other words, its interpretation presents the effort for continuous explanation of morality development representing fictitious unity.

E. Gál and M. Marcelli in their introduction to collection ‘Behind the Mirror of Modernism’ characterize Historicism as follows: “Historicism, of course, demanded an arrangement of events into diachronical queues, but its aim was far from fulfilling developing such genetic lines. Moreover, historicism came with a claim, that only disclosing the journey of origin we understand the substance of subject in research. The question: What is this thing? – is immediately transformed by historicism into: How did it come into existence? What brought it to life? What were the levels and phases of its process of becoming alive? This continuous creation of development chains is based on persuasion that this is the only way to achieve the hidden logo, by either understanding

2 See: Bohunická, L.; Plašienková, Z. Niekoľko poznámok k tvorbe nového študijného programu „Etika“ na Katedre filozofie a dejín filozofie FIF UK. *Vyučovanie filozofie: problémy, inovácie, diskusie v rámci krajín V4*. Bratislava, 2006, p. 121.

it as the world spirit, eternal and unchangeable law of history, superior purpose, tragic, or bright fortune of human beings, foreseen failure or rise, or as other ways.³

Historicism, without any doubts, possesses highly important place in philosophy and ethics, and it is represented in our programme. We do not accept it to be the only possible way of understanding and explaining morality, therefore we do not assign it the status of universal explanation. Historicism often brings us to the blind-end alley, forces us to interpret certain phenomena in a more easy way, or in other words, to pass them with elegance as they were (from a certain point of view) irrelevant, or not crucial in the situation. Logical reaction to these aspects of historicism has been structuralism.⁴

If consensus on ethics may be reached these days, it cannot claim that the values, standards and principles, are valid as absolute and for every period. It might be only the contemporary ethics, therefore, the ethics of our time. Through the analysis of history of ethic thought (in the framework of the four courses that we are submitting) we can also point to the fact that philosophical and ethical thought makes its way of radical asking, which requires to ask in the context of relations, that requires to doubt ‘certainties’, but at the same time think of all radical uncertainties to prevent arbitrariness and game of noncommittal destruction of every certainty.

We do consider several obstructions that rise against the background of historical and ethic thought during the interpretation of ethical theories, even the current ethic discourse doubts the concept, that people will act morally if they are provided with the right theory. In this context we consider relevant, for example, a discussion about modern rationality, or issue of value pluralism and relativism on the background of universalism. In such a spirit we only remind that for students of ethics it is important to be aware of or to understand the fact, that despite our various approaches and persuasions in the field of morality among many other it is necessary to look for responsible solutions of a moral problem of the current period. This is true even more so, because from the fact that opinion on certain things, or certain religion cannot be theoretically reasoned does not automatically result that in this issue a concord cannot be reached among people, who had different opinions, or religious faiths at the beginning.

4. Question of Dichotomy of Natural Sciences and Humanities

Therefore we think that the issue of universalism and particularism, absolutism and relativism, as well as other ‘opposite’ approaches which we meet in the field of ethics, cannot be presented as alternatives. We have tried to respect this fact in our study plan. Richard Rorty’s reflections published in the essay ‘Science as solidarity’ were also significantly inspiring for us. Rorty hereby clearly names the problem that many authors often mention intuitively and that is the problem of dichotomy of exact sciences and humanity disciplines. He emphasises that it is expected from exact sciences to provide

3 Gál, E.; Marcelli, M. *Za zrkadlom moderny*. Bratislava: Archa, 1991, p. 9.

4 See more: *ibid.*, p. 10–12.

'objective' truth as a concord with reality; science, thanks to its methodical character mediates knowledge of facts, but humanists are faced to a question whether they can consider themselves to be scientific enough or if the values presented by humanities (therefore also by ethics) might be considered the truth. Temporary method of scientific thinking forces us to join science with rationality, which proceeds according to logical, previously elaborated methods. "One result of this way of thinking is that any academic discipline which wants a place at the trough, but is unable to offer the predictions and the technology provided by the natural sciences, must either pretend to imitate science or find some way of obtaining 'cognitive status' without the necessity of discovering facts."⁵ In the effort to fight its light under the Sun in the academic world, humanists try to either support their thoughts and theories, unquestionable facts of other sciences, or "...they either describe themselves as concerned with 'values' as opposed to facts, or as developing and inculcating habits of 'critical reflection'.⁶

Both these tendencies have been clearly exposed to us also in the effort to create certain meaningful concept of ethic teaching. We have realized that 'scientific approach' is somehow represented by the effort to show genesis, development and functioning of morality on the basis of significant support of facts of other scientific disciplines in close relation to a human behaviour. The necessary part of the field of ethics has become the establishment of philosophical anthropology, part of which is also the comparison of philosophical research of human being with scientific knowledge of biological, cultural and social anthropology. Accent on the principle of value reflected in the interconnection of ethical, anthropological and axiological level, and all that in the framework of establishing the subject of axiology. The axiological approach is characterized by the effort (through the study of various sources) to emphasize the meaning and support validity of moral values. However, this issue also claims critical reflexion of development not only of morality itself as a social phenomenon, but in the first place of separate ethical theories, pointing at the mental wealth of the most significant thinkers and creators of ethical and axiological theories.

When teaching ethics apart from the systematic and historical explanation of ethic theories, the accent falls on standard ethics, on various forms of dynamically developed applied ethics and on the basis of career ethics.

Every mentioned approach has its own inherent logic, as well as limits, that point to the fact that morality can be understood in different ways. Moral criteria are present in everyday standards, in our behaviour, in cognitive strategies.

5. Rationality and its Possible Interpretations

The questionable issue is whether we expect something additional from the ethics incorporated into the teaching of philosophical courses of the study. Since the profile of a student has already been introduced, we might only add, that above all we do expect

5 Rorty, R. *Science as solidarity. Objectivity, relativism, and truth*. Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 335.

6 *Ibid.*

that a graduate of the university study should be a personality not only educated and goal-seeking, but also self-contained, able to critically and rationally reason every single moral attitude and follow it. The fact, however, is that the contemporary ‘ideal of a morally mature’ and ‘educated’ graduate might become an unnecessary vision in the short period of time. With regards to this we would like to remind the words of Richard Rorty, who writes in his reflexion about rationality: “If we thought we knew the goals of culture and society in advance, we would have no use for the humanities – as totalitarian societies in fact do not. It is characteristic of democratic and pluralistic societies to continually redefine their goals. But if to be rational means to satisfy criteria, then this process of redefinition is bound to be non-rational. So if the humanities are to be viewed as rational activities, rationality will have to be thought of as something other than the satisfaction of criteria which are statable in advance.”⁷

His warning of other possible explanation of the notion of ‘rationality’ according to which rational means more ‘wise’ (something like civilised) than methodical (in the meaning to have elaborated criteria of successful development in advance), is a promising challenge for us. We are trying to create a space for open discussions which, by means of exchanging opinions and arguments might lead to a peaceful concord.

Such sensibleness we can, in concord with Rorty, understand as the ability to tolerate and sense the opinion of others, willingness to listen, to rely more on persuading than on power. “These are the virtues which members of a civilized society must possess if the society is to endure”⁸ and about moral progress is according to Rorty possible to think “...as of a matter of increasing *sensitivity*, increasing responsiveness to the needs of a larger and larger variety of people and things.”⁹ Openness, ability to sensitively perceive others are the attitudes that we also expect from our graduates.

It is possible, that due to various interpretations of rationality, further goal of philosophical ethics will be in the short period of time elaboration of hypothetical ‘ideal’ and a ‘re-definable’ model, method and criteria of authentic realization of a morally mature graduate.

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7 Rorty, R., *supra* note 5, p. 37.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Rorty, R. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Penguin Books, 1999, p. 81.

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RACIONALUMO PROBLEMA, KURIANT NAUJĄ STUDIJŲ
PROGRAMĄ „ETIKA“ BRATISLAVOS COMENIUS UNIVERSITETO
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Santrauka. Straipsnyje analizuojamos problemos, su kuriomis susidurta kuriant etikos mokomąsias programas Bratislavos (Slovakija) Comenius universitete. Etika yra filosofijos disciplina, apimanti įvairias etines koncepcijas, kurios skiriasi moralės kilmės interpretavimu, analizuojamų problemų įvairove ir platumu, taip pat įvairių metodologijos principų taikymu. Šios sudėtingos etikos savybės kelia didelį iššūkį kuriant būsimų ekspertų bakalauro studijų etikos programas.

Autorė, analizuodama studijų programos turinį, pabrėžia kritinių refleksijų bei mąstymo vystymą, taip pat gebėjimo filosofškai suvokti moralės reiškinius ugdymą. Baigę etikos kursą studentai turi gebėti analizuoti ir spręsti etines problemas, remdamiesi bendrosios bei taikomosios etikos žiniomis, įvaldyti etikos ir filosofijos istorijos pagrindus. Jie turi būti pajėgūs pripažinti humanistinių vertybių vaidmenį žmogaus gyvenime, mokėti visais kasdienių praktinio bei profesinio gyvenimo moralinių konfliktų atvejais priimti etinius sprendimus. Jie taip pat turi išmanyti psichologijos, sociologijos, kultūrologijos, logikos, andragogikos bei komunikacijos įgūdžių pagrindus, tai yra tarpasmeninės komunikacijos dialoginį pobūdį. Kursą įsisavinę studentai turi pasiekti geresnių galimybių kooperuotis su vadybininkais bei kitų sričių specialistais.

Atskaitos tašku autorė pasirinko europietiškos minties tradicijas, į kurias žvelgia kaip į tinkamą modelį, įgalinantį pritaikyti įvairias filosofines bei taikomosios etikos formas. Pirmiausia aptariamas istorizmo metodas (siejant jį su vientisumo ir vienybės principais), objektyvumo ir subjektyvumo, universalumo ir individualumo principai, pateikiant juos absoliutizmo ir reliatyvizmo etinių teorijų kontekstuose bei parodant jų pranašumus ir trūkumus.

Istorizmas taikomas kaip principas, padedantis dėstant etiką perteikti studentams įvairių etikos konceptų istorines versijas bei moralės tipologiją. Tačiau straipsnio autorė jo nelaiko universaliu ir visapusiškai išsamiu. Istorijos plėtros procesas bei atitinkamos jo interpretacijos reikalauja pastangų nuolat interpretuoti moralės raidą. Reiškiniai, iš pradžių pasirodantys neįmanomi interpretuoti, nesuderinami su istorizmo logika, vis dėlto gali būti nuosekliai suprasti ir traktuojami kaip darnios visumos dalis ar virtuali realybė, kaip kažkas nerealaus. Tai aiškiai rodo istorizmo ribotumą.

Etikos programos autoriai aiškiai suvokė su kokiais sunkumais susiduriama interpretuojant etikos teorijas istorinės etinės minties pagrindu. Net dabartinis etikos diskursas kvestionuoja tą idėją, jog žmonės moraliai elgiasi, jeigu vadovaujasi („apsirūpina“) teisinga teorija. Šiame kontekste nagrinėjamos diskusijos apie šiuolaikinių racionalumą, tam tikrų vertybių pliuralizmo ir reliatyvizmo reikšmingumą. Studentams akcentuojama mintis, jog nepaisant pažiūrų ir įsitikinimų įvairovės, moralės srityje svarbu ieškoti atsakingų šiuolaikinių moralinių problemų sprendimų.

Taigi, straipsnio autorė mano, kad universalumo ir ypatingumo, absoliutizmo ir reliatyvizmo problemos, taip pat kaip ir kitos prieštaringos pažiūros, su kuriomis galima susidurti etikos lauke, negali būti pateikiamos kaip alternatyvos.

Dauguma autorių stengiasi iš naujo apmąstyti racionalumo idėjos reikšmę. Autorė pabrėžia, jog Rorty mintys apie racionalumą inspiravo jos refleksijas ir iškėlė tikslą sukurti erdvę atviroms diskusijoms, kurios – per reikšmingų idėjų ir argumentų mainus – gali lydėti į viešą idėjų ir veiklų / veiksmų konkurenciją.

Šis racionalumas, vadovaujantis Rorty koncepcija, gali būti suvokiamas kaip tolerancijos galimybė, kitų subjektų interesų suvokimas, noras išgirsti jų nuomones, daugiau pasikliauti jomis, o ne valdžia. Adekvatus žinojimas, taip pat atvirumas, galimybės jautriai suvokti kitų tikėjimus / įsitikinimus – tai yra tos savybės, kurias etikos kurse siekiama skiepyti studentams, kartu to tikintis iš jų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *etikos studijų programa, racionalumas, istorizmas, humanitariniai mokslai, vertybės.*

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