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Chapter

The University as an Scenario for the Continuity of Ethics Education

Enrique-Eugenio Pozo-Cabrera and Silvio-José Castellanos-Herrera

Abstract

This work addresses three fundamental issues: First, the rescue of the ethical reflection for which civilization unknowingly cries out, starting from conceptions that, having been disdained in favor of extremely liberal approaches, left basic anchors of society without foundation. Secondly, a new conception of ethical formation—which must impact all manifestations of civil existence, with particular emphasis on the family, including the entire framework of pre-university education at its different levels—is posed as a must. Thirdly, the role played by the university in a community in which the fear of the reversal of values or the presence of anti-ethics could threaten the existence of the State. In this last aspect, and taking as an underlying theme “The New Latin American Constitutionalism,” we will show a proposal that goes beyond the simple assumption of students’ and teachers’ training in professional ethics since the problem goes far beyond a merely deontological view, becoming the impact or social transformation in the true desideratum of university education.

Keywords: education, ethics, constitutionalism, society, state

1. Introduction

It is evident that university students have acquired an ethic synergistically from the family and the environment that we call civil society, the latter made up of all the institutions contemplated in our legal system. We ask ourselves: Is there a line of ethics teaching in the formal pre-university educational process? If it exists, how much has it influenced the student? Is there a reinforcement of ethics other than professional ethics in undergraduate education? Can the students integrate these ethics into their academic development? To what extent can they develop, in their university career, an ethical basis beyond the deontological one, which allows them to influence the strengthening or reconstruction of the State from the ethical point of view and of a new conception of a popular culture contrary to corruption?

All these questions lead us to affirm that our most urgent problem is not to underpin the oil industry or the national electric system but to rethink the State in its educational role with emphasis on the university system, especially when we speculate that we are facing a structure of social thinking, where individualistic behavior is exalted. It brings, consequently, the destruction of the ethical culture, which had been gradually built since the post-war independence in the last third of the nineteenth century and especially in the twentieth century.

As a result of the devastation, it would seem that this is our Latin American problem, an ostensible lack of civil and civic values, with ominous indigence regarding the observance of any principle of public or private justice, where even the most desperate thing is not the violation of the norms of any kind, but that those who are victims and victimizers do not even realize that they are, because they simply ignore what could constitute a decent behavior adjusted to a civic and ethical principle.

By way of reference, says Sime-Rendón [1], it is unacceptable how, in one of our Latin American countries, for example, the slogan *“He steals but does work”* enabled a particular character to ascend to essential spheres of power, taking advantage of the level of axiological orphanhood of certain social strata. With the same perverted framework, León [2] analogically reminds us that some members of an important political group of another country popularized the saying: *you have to vote for..., because they steal, but let them steal, while those of the party..., steal on their own*. The party that promoted the nefarious electoral budget won the elections. Not to mention the popular thought when someone states: *look, (such a person) served as a minister and left office with nothing in his pockets*, alluding to his honesty as a foolish behavior. At the same time, some famous Latin American sayings that praise corruption are mentioned by Tapia [3]:

- How do we deal with it?
- I can do more than you, said Money to Justice
- Money opens all doors
- For money, the dog dances
- Money doesn't stink
- Every man has his price, what is needed is to know what it is
- Money makes the bad good
- Money is power
- Money does not matter in life, but money is not trash
- How much is there for that?
- Let them put me where there is money

Therefore, this work aims to motivate a reflection on the field of education as a whole and in the various manifestations of civil society. This, with emphasis on citizen participation as an ethical control of the rulers, so that the university professional, together with the new Latin American constitutionalism, can better link with the community to eventually reverse the damage that radical economic liberalism has done to us with its premise of let it be done, let it pass. Moreover, with the pseudo-ethics of having, expressed in the aphorism, so much you have, so much you are worth, you have nothing, you are worth nothing. Along this path, we will verify the conditions in our legal system to achieve the proposed objective, given that there are

ideal scenarios for this purpose. For example, we will compare citizen participation between Venezuela and Ecuador to confirm the equality of interests associated with incorporating the constituent power in the constituted power.

From the methodological point of view, we will anchor our considerations on some classical and modern thinkers who have always placed ethics as a necessary condition for any social progress about citizen development. Along this line, we will propose some solutions that could imply, in university teaching, some ontological and axiological variations.

2. Development

In our opinion, it is essential to highlight that if we move toward new conceptions of the educational system, according to Arendt [4], we would be closer to the social justice advocated by Socrates, who saw as the purpose of politics and government, that the soul of the citizens would become sublime, which would induce an educating role both in politics and in governance, anticipating the sage, Plato's idea of the Educating State. In this process, it was natural for virtue to emerge, inducing in each person self-government by the cosmogony and with oneself. Plato [5], in agreement with Socrates, would say that this can only be achieved if the State promotes education as the only and indispensable means to achieving it. Thus, according to Jaeger [6], Plato shows himself to be an educator rather than a legislator in *The Republic*. It is clear then that the Platonic State was a gigantic pedagogical abstraction, in such a way that he conceived it as the ideal framework for the education of the just man, who is the true man. He saw that if in the ancient form of the Greek polis, the law was the educator of the citizens, in *The Republic*, the education of true men replaces the law.

As can be seen, in his turn toward teaching, he tried to crystallize a political philosophy containing the true desideratum of justice. Contrary to past generations regarding the written law as a panacea for all social ills, he endeavored to demonstrate that only through an optimal education could true justice be verified in the individual soul, from where it had to diffuse into all facets of community life. Hence his sentence: The ideal state can only emerge from the state in us if it can ever be achieved on earth. Hence, the first step toward its advent is an education, constructive of the human personality.

Given the above, both Greek thinkers are relevant since they aimed to modify the current legal system and possible constitutional reforms impacting the educational system. At this time, this perspective would imply the creation of legislation that would enable the reinforcement or redesign of a system of education, not only in the formal structure but at the level of all its social development, tending to the citizen to approach its relationship with the regional or state government differently in the understanding that, this new pedagogical approach without religious influence, must adequately include, in the manner of Plato and Socrates, a solid philosophical, ethical, and political content, so that it is verified that the social order, is nothing more than a triad component: harmony with nature, inner harmony, and social harmony. In the words of Puig [7], the above is stated without disdaining personal growth as a genuine effort of individual construction guided by an ethic that integrates historically established principles and values.

Now, as a corollary to this brief sketch and without wishing to go through the millenary path of the term "ethics," we cannot avoid the fact that ethics, as part of human nature, has always existed. However, according to Ferrater [8], Aristotle gives life to

the term when he defines it as the philosophical discipline whose object of study is morality, establishing an infinite field of study. As the father of ethics, Aristotle [9] left a whole treatise of obligatory reading for humanity with his splendid and transcendent illustration, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

As a manifestation of his thinking, the Stagirite, as Aristotle was called, never ceased his long search for a corrective and stabilizing force, which he embodied in his great work *Politics* [10], such as the figure of control, thus consecrating the Stagirite as the precursor of accountability at the end of the mandate, a meaningful way to monitor organizational behavior. For him, a good democratic system had as its natural substance the strict monitoring of the magistrates by the citizens, that is, popular intervention, insisting that its abandonment would promote the destruction of the democratic system. He emphasized that the sovereignty of citizens came from their quality of *euthynoi* (auditors), in other words, from controllers to form a shared power that he called *Ephorate*. It can be deduced that, in ancient Greece, the people's experience of corruption in progressive governments led to the constant vigilance of the rulers as the most effective method to prevent it.

Aristotle then alluded, as a great visionary, to the attitude of *being alert*, which the people should exercise over all the acts performed by the government to achieve increasingly intense political participation that limits or avoids the ravings of power due to inefficiency, abuse, or lack of ethics. In addition, the administration was thus obliged to design public policies with an order of priorities signed by the people, which would regulate governmental activity. The vision of a civil society looking out for its interests went beyond the simple image of the voting citizen. A similar figure, comments Démeunier [11], would be instituted in Roman antiquity with the *tribunes of the people* as the magistrates charged with protecting the people against the oppression of the *grandees*, as well as defending their rights and their freedom against the initiatives of the consuls and the Senate.

The Liberator Simón Bolívar nourished from this with three of his allusive phrases to the subject that concerns us, the first one: "Morals and lights are our first necessities;" from our point of view, here the great man established a sequence of priorities as follows, the first thing is morals and then education; that is why, as a wise continuation of this phrase, he also coined: "Talent without probity is a scourge." His visionary clarity also advocated something that corrodes us and that we are called to remedy: "An ignorant people is the blind instrument of its own destruction."

In this magnificent succession, it is the Liberator who, as a pioneer in Latin America, lays the foundations of control as an organizational principle through the creation of *moral power*, following in the footsteps of Aristotle in terms of the citizen's observation of the due performance of the rulers, in order to consolidate democracy. On this point, Rosanvallon [12] and Fernández [13] consider that this practice is called upon to guarantee the ethical behavior of administrators in the service of the State. About the latter, being consistent with his line and in the face of the administrative disaster of the Republic, in Lima on January 12, 1824, he decreed the "death penalty" for the corrupt. Decrees of the Liberator. Bolivarian Society of Venezuela [14].

It is conclusive, therefore, that the ethical issue must be addressed in the entire social framework; however, we consider it fundamental that the required reinforcement should start from the beacon of light called the *Educational System*. This enlightenment must be such that it moves civil society to decisively assume the paths provided by the new Latin American constitutionalism embodied in our legal system, a democracy of control where the supervisory power over the management of public finances is in the people's hands.

Now, it is surprising to note that the provisions of the guidelines of the new Latin American constitutionalism are constitutionally foreseen in Ecuador [15] as follows:

Art. 85 (Provisions governing policies and services), numeral 3.

Art. 95 (Citizen Participation), headed.

Art. 100 (Objectives of the participation exercise), heading and numbers 1 and 3.

Art. 101 (Participation in sessions of the autonomous governments).

Art. 207 (Purpose of the Council for Citizen Participation and Social Control).

Art. 279 (National Planning Council. Attributions) second part.

Art. 398 (Community consultation on environmental impacts).

At the time, the Organic Law of Citizen Participation [16] provides for a clear assurance of the presence of the people in their affairs, essentially through the constant precepts in articles 68, 69, 70, and 71. This is without detriment to the fact that both the Organic Code of Territorial Organization, Autonomy, and Decentralization [17] in its articles 5, 6, 186, and 192, and the Organic Code of Planning and Public Finance [18] in its articles 8, 10, 12, 106, 108 and 111, establish provisions that reaffirm the complete autonomy of each level of government to implement the procedures and mechanisms that guarantee citizen participation.

Equivalently, in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela [19], the protagonist participation of the citizenry is ensured as follows:

Art. 62. (Free participation of citizens and their organizations in the formation, execution, and control of public administration).

Art. 66. (Right of the electorate to demand accountability).

Art. 166. (Obligation to create a Public Policy Planning and Coordination Council, chaired by the Governor and composed of mayors).

Art. 182. (Mandatory creation of the Local Public Planning Council, chaired by the Mayor and composed of councilmen and councilwomen, the Presidents of the Parish Councils, and representatives of neighborhood organizations and other organizations of the organized society).

From the legal point of view, in the case of Venezuela, three normative instruments contemplate forceful protagonist participation of the people in their affairs through the following:

Law of the Local Planning Councils [20], when it assigns to the plenary of the organism the power to guarantee the protagonist participation in all its manifestations, not only in the Municipal Development Plan but also in its permanent follow-up.

Law Against Corruption [21], which binds the different agencies of the Public Administration in the following terms:

- To publish the assets, they manage quarterly with a description and justification of their use and expenditure. (Article 9)
- To inform at the request of any citizen about the administration and custody of the patrimony. (Article 10)
- To submit the preliminary draft of the Budget Law to public consultation prior to approval by the National Assembly. (Article 11)
- To incorporate individuals and organizations of society in the formulation, evaluation, and execution of the budget following the corresponding territorial public level. (Article 12)

Organic Law of Social Comptrollership [22], development of popular power to prevent and correct behaviors, attitudes, and actions contrary to social interests and ethics in the performance of public functions. (Articles 1, 3, and 5).

It can be observed that both countries contemplate the same approach to citizen participation, in the sense that the one who controls should be the one who grants the power. Moreover, the normative devices of these countries incorporate mechanisms and procedures to monitor management and join the principal and the mandatary, as far as the management is concerned. In other words, Castellanos-Herrera [23] points out that, as a people, they not only grant power but also merge with the government to manage public money. It is more than evident, therefore, a clear concretization of the protagonist and participative democracy when this right and guarantee is foreseen in the budget, the planning, and execution of all matters associated with the community's interests. Under this scheme, it is clear that the people have power over the president and can force him to behave ethically and administratively as the community wants. Then, the most popular concept of power is perfectly materialized, with the novelty that now establishes the will to be followed, who initially was the addressee of the coercive action; additionally, the people have the power and the faculty to verify with the periodicity they wish, that the instructions assigned to the mandataries constitutionally and legally are being fully accomplished.

Without wishing to develop the process of citizen formation, it will only be said, with the same conception of Habermas [24], that the upturn of social constitutionalism is directed to the fact that there cannot be an actual democratic model without a valid agreement of redistribution of wealth between the dominant and dominated classes in which, for Viciano and Martinez [25] if constitutionalism is the mechanism by which the citizenry determines and limits public power, the first problem of constitutionalism must be to guarantee the faithful translation of the will of the constituent power (of the people) and certify that only popular sovereignty, directly exercised, can determine the generation or alteration of constitutional norms.

In light of the above, once the bases of the triad of education, ethics, and society have been established from the point of view that interests us, what should be the university's role in its consolidation? Above all, to promote in students—at the different levels of their student life—an ethical model that includes principles and values such as human dignity, freedom, equality, fraternity, justice, solidarity, respect, and tolerance, constantly bearing in mind the integration of constituent power in constituted power. This will imply stimulating a personal and collective lifestyle to achieve individual, family, and social happiness as a desideratum of existence. In this new university environment, it will be necessary to take into account the fact that both students and teaching staff come from a society that may suffer from certain moral shortcomings in the sense of what we have discussed; it is vital, therefore, to design some indicators that will allow the authorities to monitor the conceptual development of all those involved in the process.

Consequently, it will be necessary to revolutionize the syllabi of the subjects so that they naturally include the topics mentioned above; ethics, then conceived, will include the deontological issue as just one more item. The proposed model must automatically include the student's involvement in the environment to transform it through problem-solving linkage programs, but with the necessary condition of high moral content. These projects must be susceptible to monitoring by the faculty to verify that the ethical approach adopted by the university and induced in the student is indeed being verified in the relationship with the community. As a way of control, the university should be dedicated to designing a battery of impact indicators that

make it possible to visualize the resolution of problems and the evolution of the moral vision of the environment in which it operates. Only in this way will it be possible, from the academy, to open a door that will allow us to straighten out the possible deviations that could be brewing in society regarding its stability.

3. Conclusions

It is our opinion that there will be no recovery of the country, no matter how much oil is produced, no matter how much electricity is generated, if we do not build again a cultural system based on norms of respect for shared values; if we do not rebuild our subjectivity with a civic and moral foundation of mutual respect, with solid principles of justice, which makes us reject and condemn any practice contrary to the principles of political, civil, and moral coexistence based on the easy way out, the evasion of our civic and political duties. This is our most demanding task because it depends on ourselves and the educational system we are willing to rebuild soon. A task that, if we decide to start it, will take decades and is fraught with enormous complexities because it is a matter of doing it from preschool to university.

Reaching an agreement and achieving solid consensus across all sectors is inexorable. Specifically, the introduction of ethics in the entire formal educational program, from elementary school through high school and ending at the university level, can no longer be postponed. On this path, the redefinition of ethical training in the university in such a way that it transcends the deontological is an urgent need to satisfy if we want professionals with an outstanding role in modifying society.

Therefore, it is crucial to rethink education and turn our gaze toward “The Educating State,” increasing without contemplation the budget allocated to this social pillar, even well above other areas that, as a priority, do not compete with a country’s education. The expression “Morals and lights are our first necessities” must become the banner of this crusade.

Consequently, it is an arduous task because it involves high social and technical complexities, with immense challenges since it must address problems that were not considered in our country for a long time, leaving aside critical intermediate subsystems, such as education for work, to give the most emblematic example. Along this path, we are discussing redesigning an education characterized by virtue ethics, which allows us to understand differences; exercise critical thinking; and stimulate complex thinking to generate criteria that allow the development of scientific, socio-economic, cultural, ethical, ethical, and humanistic issues in general. It is concomitantly promoting a behavior prone to otherness and a life characterized by justice, compassion, friendship, and solidarity as qualities that can neutralize the negative personal development for the market under the premise that the essential thing in life in society is to produce and earn money. We believe this last criterion is the malignant origin that stands as the main impediment to the ethical welfare of society.

In another vein, it is a fact that although we have both constitutionally and legally a solid framework for implementing the unshakable figure of controlling civil society, with the capacity to attack any attempt at administrative corruption, in reality, we are very far from that scenario. This is since the ignorance, apathy, or indifference of the people about the benefits of our legal system to achieve this state of affairs is crass and supine, presumably stimulated by obscure interests that do not allow this information to permeate to the strata that have the power without knowing it, that is to say, the people. In an almost unmodifiable way, our population considers that

political participation is exhausted in the vote, leaving all the freedom of action to the constituted authorities without the necessary control. In short, it is a matter of breaking with the apathy and indifference of civil society and consolidating the irruption of the masses in public life as a popular desideratum, through the educational system, with the university as the mainstay.

If we do not act in the terms referred to, the corruption indexes will remain without significant variations even though we can reduce them. The promotion of popular power is practically nil. It is therefore urgent, as a direct way to minimize corruption, the cultural elevation of the masses based on the provisions of our Magna Carta and the laws derived from there, to crystallize the amalgamation of the Constituent Power with the Constituted Power. This work is our main priority in order to be a country that can become the support for the future we all desire.


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