

"Ethics in University Education"

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First, to think about the issue of "Ethics in University Education" is to think about what is taught, how it is taught and in terms of what is taught today in the academic careers, with public and private management.

We can see roughly that persists today a mercantilistic and economic valuation in much of the academic field and national education policies. Where, on one side, is given more budgetary and political importance to the "profitable" careers "for the Market", such as those related to economy, discrediting the Social Sciences and Humanities; and, on the other hand, the student is formed according to his insertion in the market and objects production that he or she can generate for the system. This is given as established, is not questioned but naturalized by the students, most part of the academic community and the society as a whole.

Thus, it is said to whom studies Philosophy, or Communication Sciences: "what will you do for a living?" as if it wouldn't worth to study something you like; and the parents often guide their children towards careers like business administration, public accountant, as to "have ensured the future", they say, and leaving their children's vocation relegated, so important when choosing a university career.

To understand how this mercantilistic valuation of higher education is shaped, we can make a brief historical context of economic and political situation in the 90s, when neoliberalism was established as an economic and political system.

During the 90s, it consolidates a profound social transformation that was born in the late 70's, promoted by the major capitalist powers and its financial institutions, where a new order based on neoliberal is born based on exclusion, competitiveness, efficiency, effectiveness and pragmatist quality, thus favoring a few and harming many.

In this context, in Latin America a discourse about the "crisis of university quality" is constructed and disseminates, mostly due to a downgrade in teaching methods, poor study conditions generated by the massiveness, lack of libraries and laboratories; the same speech was used to privatize all government agencies, such as telephony, transport and energy, arguing that the State was no longer efficient to manage "quality" in public things, so the private sector has to take over; the private sector that knows how to manage everything, but forgot to say that it is based on their narrow economic interests, of course.

This neoliberal discourse about the crisis in university quality considers that the registration increase, coupled with the lack of resources, is causing a decline in quality. In other words, the crisis relates to the university quality deterioration, the depreciation of certificates and the loss of excellency, all because of the overcrowding, the large number of students attending universities in Latin America.

In this framework of neoliberalism, the relationship between the State, Higher Education and Society is restructured, and in this process the international organizations play a crucial role, particularly the World Bank since their diagnoses have affected the vision built around the crisis of quality in the university system as in the direction assumed by the reforms in Latin American countries.

The World Bank, in its document *Peril and Promise of Higher Education in Developing Countries* (2000), improves the contributions of higher education to economic and social development in the peripheral countries: "*The University must provide to governments, to companies and improve the income of people through the exercise of professions*".

But, the World Bank believes that the crisis of the university system in the nineties is due to the heavy reliance on government funding as well as the adverse conditions in which the academic activities develop (overcrowding, lack of resources, others).

Then we wonder: Is the crisis of university quality due to the mass access to the University and to government funding as the World Bank says? Or is it that the international financial organizations developed this speech to justify its market-oriented policies for higher education? No doubt that the representatives and leaders of these organizations would be good for a workshop on Ethics.

Mollis argues that restructuration in the relations between the State, Higher Education and Society "produces an alteration of the identity of the universities by creating similar conditions to those of a 'supermarket', where the student is a customer, the knowledge is merchandise and the professor is a resource".

Besides, they allocate to public universities a purely economic basis, while appealing to the training of human resources as the new task, so we see the growing interest of multinational corporations to "sponsor" high-schools and universities, arguing they do a social good, to then take the best-average students to their own business.

However, the definition of quality of Mollis is in contrast to the purely economic vision of quality that encouraged international financial institutions. Says the author: "There is an urgent need to

decontaminate the concept of quality off the connotations of the total quality, off the financial logic of the performance and off the efficiency dissociated from the academic excellence (...) The university not only produces the expertise and scientists necessary for the development of the country, but most of all produces necessary knowledge for building a democratic, more just and equitable" (Mollis, 2003, p. 212).

To paraphrase the author, we can say that the concept of quality has a social meaning, ethical and humanist that have been lost in order to respond to the financial logic of performance.

Therefore, we argue that it is necessary to break with the instrumental rationality of the reforms in the University System of neoliberalism and the associated concept of quality performance to build a University in which to recover in its teaching process, a social, ethical and humanist meaning.

While it is clear that there must be a professional development for the graduate, we propose to consider this development in another direction different from the present. Today no one thinks from the university the society as a human collective, as a historical joint construction and, therefore, in the prevailing economic ethics, based on violence, the public and the common good is not primarily valued. But the development of each individual, his/her "success" and "merit" is what matters, so the human links and the social net is undermined day by day.

But if it would be transmitted from the Academy the value of "the public thing" as something that belongs to everyone, which is done through joint efforts, if it would be taught the value of human society as a historical building, another guidance and direction could govern among the university careers. Then each student may think to develop from his/her future profession a transformative and solidarity human action with other social sectors. No doubt that for this perspective to assess the public, the human and the construction of society as a whole, beyond the strictly economic, individual and meritocratic points of view, a strong "cultural change" has to take place. But that cultural change can begin inside the academic staff, be transferred to the student and graduate from an interdisciplinary job, and then expand that ethical and cultural change to the rest of the social sectors.

To think about this cultural change, in order to consolidate a humanist ethic, would strongly change the meaning of all the knowledge gained by students during their studies. Thus, a Laws student would think of how to train and work for the defense of Human Rights; a medical student think of how to develop public health campaigns; a Communication Sciences student would think of setting up media in different formats in order to transform the society to help others and to contribute to human evolution, particularly in communicating everything in that direction; a student of Economics would support cooperative networks for a more supportive economy; an architecture student involved with the design and construction of housing suitable for live in dignity for all human beings; a student of Political

Sciences would think in developing public policy proposals to create equal rights and opportunities for all persons without distinction; an Education Sciences student would work in a new educational paradigm where human development is the foundation... and so on, since it is possible to think of all the university careers and the entire production of knowledge, where the meaning and moral guidance is to contribute to human development and the construction of truly human society.

In this sense, we can refer to what Roberto Cañas-Quiros says, in his General Ethics and Professional Ethics, where the author asserts that "the occupation is aimed at the common wealth or public interest. Moreover, no one is professional in the first instance for oneself, as every profession has a social dimension of community service, which anticipates the dimension of the profession, which is the particular benefit that is obtained from it.

The author proposes that the term "profession" should be linked to the idea of "service", since when talking about professions, there is a connection between professional practice and the vocation towards it. The predominance of selfish interests and the blind profit motive are a way to degenerate and undermine the profession, something that we see reflected today in our society, where the student is made to believe that "someone" should get a good job in a multinational company or develop a legacy enterprise that will generate high profits.

If the profession was associated with the sense of creating a common wealth, this way, through working according to their vocation and skills, each individual would be transformed himself and would transform the existing reality, projecting human values. It must be taken into account that the real support of a profession is the human condition. At the time that we separate the humanity off our profession, that's when one ends to privilege only the economic and material, and generates an alienation in which the work becomes a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder.

Therefore, we propose that from the different degree programs, the student could be oriented about the ethical question concerning the sense of acquiring knowledge and the use and guidance that will give this knowledge in the world.

It is necessary that an ethical commitment to the graduate student was made, so such knowledge would be generated on the basis of human life, caring for the environment and the historical development and not in the service of destruction, war, exploitation and the greedy interests.

Many students wonder, before or during their careers, what they are studying for, what is the meaning of a university study. This choice is often given by that economical assessment, "to find a better job", "to fulfill a family obligation", or for any other strange reason that has nothing to do with the internal records of that person who decides to study.

Therefore, we propose that a subject would be established in all the careers, in order to help the student to think on the meaning of study and propose a humanistic ethic in every university careers, whether in the Social Sciences, Natural, and in all disciplines, if they want to contribute to the society transformation and to make a leap of mankind in this complicated historical context. All these disciplines should have the background and essence of a humanistic ethic that considers the human being as the central value, thinking about development.

We propose that subjects with human content were generated, so that the future graduates that the Higher Education forms, could build a truly human society.

We propose that the University Education contributes to generate a good knowledge, that knowledge that leads to Justice, to Reconciliation and to decode the signs of the sacred, as suggested Silo in his Message.