

Ethical-deontological education need of higher education teachers—subsidies for a debate

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Research scholarship of the *Ethical-deontological Thinking and Training of Teachers*

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ABSTRACT:

The changes made to higher education in response to globalisation and “informationism” (Castells, 1997) bring with them the need to re-question its purposes. Documents such as the “World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action” and the Bucharest Declaration stress the ethical role to be played by these institutions in today’s world and in the ethical training of students for this world. Despite some theoretical reflections on several aspects of university life, there is a clear lack of empirical studies concerning how teachers see the ethical dimension of their functions, how they encourage the ethical development of their students and whether or not they feel they need for ethical training that would help them better perform their professional functions.

An exploratory study based on 14 interviews of polytechnic and university teachers aims to contribute to constructing this knowledge. The data obtained constitute material for a debate on these issues.

KEY WORDS:

Ethics, Moral, Deontology, Ethical development of students, Ethical training of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

In a globalised world and at a time in which post-modernist culture helps bring into question the principles and values conveyed by modernity, shaking the very foundations of ethical thinking by denial of the “twin flags of universality and reason” (Bauman, 1997, p. 13) ethics has become paradoxically a centre of interest in various areas of social activity. In effect, we understand today that the problems threatening the survival of human life on our planet and the social balance and peace are underpinned by ethical issues. Scientific and technological progress has brought previously unimaginable problems, giving rise to new fields of reflection such as bioethics and environmental ethics. The return of ethics hence seems to be searching for stable principles and values that guarantee social justice and cohesion. Universities, whose prestige has been shaken as the benchmarks of intellectual and moral order, cannot distance themselves from this movement of uneasiness and ethical reflection. Partly due to the economic and technical pressures exercised on higher education, there is a certain emptying of the cultural and humanist dimension, which establish the connection between its different missions. If higher education wants to be a critical social conscience, above all else the teachers are invited to rethink their professionalism in relation to their new roles, redefining their ethics and their responsibility in the ethical education of the students.

NEW ETHICAL ROLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Rethinking the ethical role of higher education leads to multiple questions covering for example the science that it produces, its social effects; disclosure and access to this knowledge, which can potentially lead to social inequalities and abusive forms of power; the ethical education given to the students; the ethics and deontology of the teaching/research professionals, a crucial aspect of their professionalism; the ethical training of the teachers that gives meaning to their scientific, technological and pedagogical training and calls for awareness of collective positions about the new needs in terms of greater social intervention.

Not having a monopoly on research and education, bringing the first two aspects into question goes beyond the realms of higher education, involving university and non-university populations, scientists, philosophers and even writers (Marcuse, Habermas, Morin, Jonas, Morávia, etc). The last aspects listed, without excluding other segments of the population, are chiefly concerned with higher education institutions. Reflection on them is pressing, given the multiple changes that occurred as a response to the transformations of all kinds that has led to globalisation and “informationism” (Castells, 1997).

Marginson (2007, p. 35) considers that, with variations in space and intensity, they can be summarised as such: “Globalisation and internationalisation, mass participation and vocational credentialing;

more diverse institutions with mixed funding; more business-like administration and internal product and performance regimes; quasi-market competition between institutions; the part marketisation of teaching, research and services”.

These changes lead to new ethical issues such as the use of new technology in the real world and in virtual worlds, the relations between universities and within university, globalisation and the market, between research and the economy, etc. These issues were of little interest when the universities were “ivory towers” or “temples of wisdom”. Mass participation brings other problems, already experienced in other levels of education, that bring into question the principle of justice and which appeal for equity. At an optional and meretricious teaching level, how can we understand, for example positive discrimination in relation to some less gifted students, the possible conflict between justice and productivity/efficacy...? The institutionalisation tutelage in countries where they have no experience raises some ethical issues, which may lead to professional dilemmas.

The “World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action” (UNESCO, 1998) is a contribution to the redefinition of ethics linked to the new roles of the institutions.

The document breaches the comfortable ethical-axiological neutrality maintained by most of the institutions. It is especially enlightening in article two. On the one hand it outlines principles such as autonomy, ethics in meticulously carrying out the various scientific and intellectual activities, independence and awareness of social responsibilities; on the other hand it attributes to higher education institutions a clearly ethical mission. Therefore, they are stimulated to use their intellectual capacity and moral prestige to defend and disseminate universally accepted UNESCO values (peace, justice, freedom, equality and solidarity), and are charged with identifying and searching for solutions to problems that affect social well-being on a local and global scale. “The Bucharest Declaration concerning Ethical Values and Principles for Higher Education in the Europe Region” (AA. VV, 2004) also stressed the ethical and axiological dimension of higher education in Europe, which is attributed new roles and responsibilities.

Although the compatibility between the aforementioned principles and values raise doubts, it is important that these goals are clearly stated. However, we question whether the policies, the institutions and the higher education teachers are guided by these goals. Above all, are they aware of the scope of the ethical demands entailed in being members and main players in these institutions? The Bologna Declaration points out the need to “raise awareness of the shared values and the sense of belonging to a social and cultural common space”. However, at the same time it conveys an essentially economic concern: the paradigm of supplying education to acquire skills that can be used in the workplace seems to outweigh the general and humanist training, broadening perspectives and horizons (García & Ruiz, 2006).

On the other hand, save for rare exceptions, it seems that higher education institutions have not encouraged an internal debate (Macfarlane, 2004) on the ethical dimension of the professionalism of teachers and researchers and on the ethical training of the students. Esteban and Buxarrais (2004) point out that in Spain the relation between university education and the ethical training of students is one of pure chance, doing nothing to promote an ethical life experience and moral development. The curricular aspects of this training are interconnected, at best, to some deontology subjects or modules in the professional courses (Vicente, 2006). The same goes for Portugal.

LACK OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON THE ETHICAL THINKING OF TEACHERS AND THE ETHICAL EDUCATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

Another indicator showing the lack of attention given to ethical problems is the paltry empirical research on the matter, while the same cannot be said about the individual reflection on some ethical problems linked to the missions of universities. Research in databases (EBSCO Host, EJS, B-ON, Eric, Eurydice) proved disappointing, confirming what Willemse, Lunenberg and Korthagen (2005) said about the scarcity in the databases they consulted of material on the ethical thinking of teacher

trainers who, in higher education, are supposed to encourage the ethical-deontological development of future teachers.

Even so, some themes can be identified: the teachers' and students' representations about plagiarism and justice; relations between ethical code and behaviour; representations of the students as regards their preparation in relation to the deontology of their future professional work. Only extremely rare references are made to empirical research on the ethical training of higher education teachers. To sum up, there are big gaps in knowledge, among which we point out: the teachers' views of the ethical dimension of the profession and their role in the ethical development of the students.

AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND FIELD OF STUDY

Given the new challenges that have arisen, finding out the thinking of higher education teachers concerning their professional ethics is of crucial importance. The study we describe is part of a broader project (focusing on non higher-education teachers) and is merely exploratory. It aims to ascertain how a group of polytechnic and university teachers respond to the following questions: how do they perceive the ethical dimensions of their functions? What ethical principles guide their professional activity? What is their attitude regarding the possibility of a deontological code? What ethical dilemmas do they experience in exercising their profession? Do they feel it is necessary or would be beneficial to have ethical training?

The study covered 14 higher education teachers, to whom we express our gratitude for their generous collaboration. They were selected on convenience, based on availability, but making sure that they came from different subject areas (social and human sciences, science and technology, excluding in this phase the areas of arts and law, owing the specificity of their relations with ethics), if possible from different institutions. Therefore, 7 came from universities and 7 from polytechnics; 8 are male and 6 female; 11 teach in the region of Lisbon and 3 in the region of Bragança (zones of residence of the project team).

The qualitative methodology, inserted into an interpretative paradigm, aims to give a voice to these subjects and discover the meaning they attribute to their everyday lives. Within the presuppositions of this methodology, the researcher should silence his voice so that the voice of the others can be heard. To do so, his conceptual frameworks should be pushed into the background, not using them as the starting point but rather letting them emerge from the data. This is a difficult mission when the researcher is not limited – as many advocate – to being a mere receptor and discloser of data, but seeks to interpret the meaning attributed by the subjects to arrive at second-order concepts (Schütz, 1987) or the construction of a theory based on the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). However, although guided by the data, the researcher learns what he is prepared to learn, and therefore our reference frameworks, of a multidisciplinary origin, end up being implicit in categorising the data and in the comments they engender.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The technique used was the semi-directive interview. The script, guided by the topics corresponding to the aforementioned questions, was open enough to allow the free expression of the interviewees. Each interview, transcribed in its entirety, was assigned a code.

To analyse the data a categorical content analysis was used. In reading the results one must bear in mind that the text of each interview results from an oral reflection, made on the spur of the moment in response to the interviewer and constructed and verbalised during the interview, but could express different degrees of previous reflection on the topics raised. In accordance with what we wrote about the interviews carried out of non-university teachers (Estrela, 2008), each interview can be read as an inter-text where wide-ranging cultural references and experiences overlap one another and where convictions, doubts and feelings appear, at times, to outweigh the argumentative logic that usually underpins the ethical discourse. The discourse of each subject was deconstructed in units of meaning that, through semantic comparison, gave rise to indicators, categories and subcategories.

The thinking of the interviewees does not reflect, in the vast majority of cases, the influence of the

general ethical systems of which professional ethics would be only one application. It may, nevertheless, fit into categories that, without the unity, reasoning and interconnection of a system, meet some categories used in Western thinking systems (philosophical, psychological, sociological and educational), without being able to affirm its direct influence from there however. In other words, if by chance the discourse of the interviewees fits into the ethics of duty or the ethics of care, this does not mean that the underpinning references do, e.g. the philosophy of Kant or Noddings or the psychology of Kohlberg or Gilligan, unless such influences are explicit or the terminology or context of the answers lead one to this conclusion. To sum up, with the limitations mentioned above, an attempt was made to seek an emerging categorisation that inevitably weakened individual expression and diminished differences and inter-individual hues. But it simultaneously allowed a different indelibility to be conferred to the discourses of the interviewees, through the understanding of the common and the different.

Due to space restrictions, we limit ourselves to a concise summary based on the general categorisation found, towards which the interviewees contribute in different ways. The individual differences are situated above all at the level of the subcategories and the indicators that operationally define them.

THE INTERVIEWEES' CONCEPTS OF ETHICS, MORAL AND DEONTOLOGY

Throughout the history of ethical thinking there has been a coexistence of the terms ethics and moral used either as synonyms or distinct concepts. However, apart from one interviewee, who considered the terms synonymous (albeit considering that 'moral' has gained a pejorative connotation), most of them made the distinction, although during the interview one concept is sometimes confused with the other. The personal concepts of ethics are organised into two subcategories: one describes rationalist and essentialist ethics based on the reflection of human conduct; the other refers to a contextualising and consequentialist conception of ethics that calls for action, feelings and the consequences of action.

Also with regard to the origin of these conceptions opposite subcategories can be noted. For the majority of the interviewees they are acquired, resulting from a personal construction that derives from several influences. These include primary and secondary sources and forms of socialisation, among which the following stand out: family, religion, education and work experience, and to a lesser extent, the influence of authors, above all philosophers and psychologists. For a small minority ethical conceptions are innate and based on the biological basis of consciousness. Hence, although ethics suffer some social influences, "there are a natural ethics that are engraved in our history, in our mental structures (...) a natural ability to tell good from evil" – E13.

The category "notion of moral", expressed through different indicators leads us to standards of behaviour in particular situations. As for the category "relation between ethics and moral", the indicators pointed to the fact that ethics outdate moral, contrasting her general, abstract and universal nature to the more regulatory and particular character of moral. As one of the interviewees said, "moral have to be conjugated in the plural" – E7.

Deontology is seen as the regulation of action in professional contexts, i.e. as a guiding regulatory framework which derives from professional ethics. It is applied in any situation that may or may not be covered by the code of the profession. As it does not exist in Portugal, there is some ambiguity as to the concept of professional ethics: more than ethics reflected and shared by the professional group, it is personal ethics applied in work situations. Nevertheless, according to a minority of the interviewees there is no total coincidence between personal and professional ethics. There may be principles or degrees of different demands, depending on whether dealing with work situations or others, such as family issues. As one interviewee said, provided that teachers strictly comply with their professional duties, nobody has any business interfering in their private lives, and the same can be said of the students.

Most of the interviewees are in favour of the ethical regulation of the profession through a written code, stating there is a need to regulate the profession and highlighting the preventive and cautionary role this document could play. Only 3 interviewees were against the idea, for different reasons: pointing

to the ineffectiveness of other codes, the formality of the code, which could lead to exterior morality. This opinion matches others expressed in the international literature that question the ethics of the professional codes: usually they do not go beyond a pre-conventional or conventional set of moral, giving rise to exterior uptake that would be the very denial of ethics.

The favourable opinions regarding the code surprised us in this time of individualism that Lipovetski, cited by Bauman (1997), calls the “post-deontological era”.

THE PROFESSIONAL ETHICS OF THE TEACHER

Professional ethics is present in the teacher’s whole activity and show itself in two different but inter-related aspects: in the principles that make the professional conduct ethical and in the task of encouraging the ethical-moral development of the student.

ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT PRINCIPLES/VALUES

With the exception of one interviewee mentioning management functions, the others describe the traditional missions of higher education, although the cultural dimension is less talked about. An example: “firstly, a scientific task, secondly – but we are not talking about a hierarchy – a cultural function and thirdly action in the community” – E7. Although some interviewees change the order of research and education, they generally acknowledge that these two functions cannot be separated from each other.

The ethical dimension of these functions is consciously accepted. Some say it underpins all they do: “I have no doubt that the university teacher, and any teacher at any teaching level, exercises a function to educate humans for society (...) the university teacher prepares in the name of the current technological society” – E8; “the work of imparting any content, teaching, guidance of work, is always an ethical experience because it is never limited to didactics or merely the transmitting of information (...)” – E7.

However, ethical issues may come to the fore in specific domains: in the relation with the pupils,

with any listener, with colleagues, in the educational act in general, in the teaching-learning process, in research, in the community (in decreasing order with regard to the number of subjects who mentioned these aspects).

The ethical dimension also shows itself through the principles and values – terms which are generally used indiscriminately – that guide the professional conduct of the teacher. Few interviewees distinguish them clearly (the objectivity of principles *versus* the subjectivity of values).

The principles/values outlined can be typified in relation to others in general (respect for others, for the opinions and values of others, solidarity, responsibility for others, etc); to oneself as a professional (responsibility for solving conflicts, intellectual honesty, quality of work, the teacher as a learner, etc); to the students (honesty, justice, responsibility, information, liberty, respect, etc); to colleagues (liberty, support, respect, respect for their work, acknowledgement of their abilities, sharing and honesty); to the research (values of truth, validity, honesty and scientific rigour); and to the community (loyalty to the culture of the past and attitude of projecting the future, regional development).

CONCEPTS OF THE GOOD OF THE STUDENT AND JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Subordination of personal and corporative interests for the good of the student and compliance with the principles of justice are general principles included in the deontological codes of the teachers in the various countries. It is precisely the concepts of good and justice that, according to Rawls (2001), best define a moral personality as having the ability to define good and having a sense of justice. These are, however, complex concepts whose definition is far from consensual in time and space. We therefore requested that they outline what they understand as the good of the student. A small part of the discourse of some interviewees focuses on the ambiguity of the concept: “... it’s an expression that can be marked by relativisation, particularisation and regionalisation. The good of the student cannot be divorced from a universal good” – E7. Another example of the relativity of the concept: “when we are exercising our profession, I think it is always our intention: the good of the pupil” (...) but “with

a variety of students in front of us it is impossible to know what is this ‘good of the student’, because for student A it may be one thing and for student B something else” (E14). Despite these reservations, attempts were made to specify factors that gave rise to three subcategories: one, geared towards the person of the student (“being a person in relation to others”, “great growth at a personal level”, “self-esteem”, “well-being”...); another, towards the process of professional preparation (the good of the students, e.g. “... is teaching them to play the game, in other words, to work creatively, to question everything, to be able to ask questions, even when things seem to be a closed box” – E7); another towards the teacher, given that the good of the student depends on the good of the teacher (“I endeavoured to do what I believe to be best, giving complete freedom. The students would benefit from this”, “the good of the student emerges from the competence of the teacher...” – E8). The difficulty in identifying the greatest good of the student potentially leads to dilemmas, as mentioned by two interviewees: opting for more authoritative methods or granting freedom to the students bringing the principle of the teacher’s responsibility and the principle of the student’s freedom into conflict; expressing their values or not in order not to influence the students.

The concept of justice gives rise to two categories: one, focusing on the general principles of justice, which can be grouped into principles that safeguard fair action (equity, respect, reciprocity, duty to respect rules, non-discrimination, exercising balance of power, etc) and corrective principles (denouncing injustices, seeking ways to correct them). We can call them principles of retroactive justice, while the others are principles of active and proactive justice; the second category involves principles of justice in assessment, which themselves can be split into two subcategories: general principles (retribution of effort, objectivity in assessment, based on work, etc) and specific principles: processes and procedures (diversification of strategies, parameters, complete assessment of the path, etc).

Whether referring to the principles of justice in general or those of assessment in particular, two positions stand out that tend to contradict each other more than complement each other: justice as equality, appealing to the universality of the principle and

justice as equity geared towards individual needs. The following extracts show this contradiction: “The issue of justice is not about dealing with everybody in the same way, because we are all different, therefore students have the right to be treated differently” – E5; “my concept of justice does not believe that equal opportunities for all is just” – E12; “Levels of classification are attributed as objectively as possible. If you feel the need to carry out any interpretation of the assessment data, do it at the end of the process” (recommendation that one teacher gave his assistants).

In comparison to other studies, we find, albeit without this terminology, the 4 kinds of justice of Chryssides and Kaler, mentioned by Macfarlane (2001): procedural, retributive (based on punishment), remedial and distributive and the 6 rules that Leventhal, cited by the same author, found in higher education: consistency, elimination of biasness, reliability of the information, correction of mistakes, ethics and representations of the parties. This last rule is less obvious in the interviews carried out.

It is difficult to conciliate these two conceptions of justice that give rise to most of the dilemmas that were reported to us. For example: to pass a student who is on the borderline or fail him/her; to give a good grade to a student who has the knowledge but who the teacher believes will not be a good professional; to fail a student who does not achieve the specific objectives of a given subject, implying the loss of a year, or to lower the demands to let the student pass.

THE TEACHER’S ROLE IN THE STUDENTS’ ETHICAL-MORAL DEVELOPMENT

The ethical dimension of the profession is expressed in another way in the ethical-moral development of the student, although not all interviewees explicitly and fully accepted this. In the opinion of one interviewee, the ethical dimension has been greatly neglected: “I think that little value has been given to human training, relational training, ethical training and this necessarily ends up having repercussions on professional development” – E6. But, in contrast, others believe it is outside their responsibility. As stated ironically by E13: “the function of university is not to make the students saints. Or reduce their stay in purgatory... The function of the

university environment is to impart skills useful for the career that the students choose (...). The acquisition of other ethical competencies, according to him, should be taught through university activities that are not the responsibility of the teachers.

When this educational facet is accepted, it aims to: educate the person (“development of the other as a person” – E1; “the ethical perspective in training is crucial and important in relations of the self with others, as the student is somebody who builds a relation with the teacher, on the one hand, but has relations with others that are around him” – E2); to educate the researchers (“I do this, for example, in my exams. Plagiarism is unacceptable in science, therefore it is unacceptable in the exam” – E4) and above all it is aimed at the ethical preparation for the profession (“draw attention, almost maternally, to what they will be like in two or three years as future professionals, and therefore the respect they must have for their professions” – E9). Some interviewees reduce the ethical teaching of students to this last aspect and the example teachers give in fulfilling their duties.

These aims referring to the contexts (classroom and outdoor spaces) are based on general and specific strategies that entail difficulties. The former consider ethics all-encompassing to the express school curriculum and especially the hidden curriculum (“there is certainly circumstantial training, one can say, a hidden curriculum” – E1; “I am always transmitting values, although at times I don’t realise this but I think that I’m transmitting them” – E9), the interactive methods that respect the freedom of the other, the creation of collaborative contexts, monitoring and guidance, the definition of regulations, and above all the teacher’s example:

(...) the teacher helps the student also as an example with regard to research, relations established, an open attitude towards interacting with others, being flexible in a supportive demeanour, encouraging co-operation, showing assertiveness, going that extra step forward and wanting to make progress and contribute to the common good (E5).

As for specific strategies, these include, for example, reflection on ethical issues, seminars, the exercising of competencies, etc.

The obstacles are mentioned only by two subjects. As well as the lack of time and curricular spaces mentioned, there is also the number of students per class: “I give modules in which I have one hundred students, so what can I do with one hundred students? I often make a historical comment, but I don’t mean to say that I want to transform a small incident, sometimes even an anecdote, into a La Fontaine fable” – E4.

To sum up, the ethical education of the students, above all in professional courses, focuses chiefly on deontology and the future profession. The goods are distinguished from the good and are essentially instrumental, with the complete ethical training of the person pushed into background by some interviewees, as a job of teachers from a lower education level.

This gives rise to a question that led to an animated online debate held in 2001 by an Ibero-American journal on the role of university in the education of values, which would be interesting for us to discuss.

DO TEACHERS REQUIRE ETHICAL TRAINING?

The concept of need is a polysemous concept. Most commonly considered as a shortfall by reference to desirable standards, this concept can also be seen as a desire and aspiration (Mesa, cited by Rodrigues & Esteves, 1993). There are subconscious and conscious needs that are triggered or are confirmed through work situations and the problems and dilemmas they give rise to. Their assessment leads to problems of power and legitimacy relations. Hence, we let the interviewees respond.

The discourse on the ethical training of the teachers is linked to their initial training and in-service training and gave rise to the same subcategories: attitude and kinds of training.

While 4 interviewees are against ethical training because they consider that a teacher, when entering university, is already ethically educated, 7 consider it important in the initial training and 8 in the in-service training. But ambiguous attitudes are also present, e.g. “I’m afraid (...) to be too paternalistic (...) on the other hand I feel (...) it would be healthy if we began to think about these issues. I think so, that it would be very useful in terms of a

broader discussion, to exchange experiences” – E4. Others make it dependent on conditions (e.g. not given by philosophy teachers).

The general methods suggested for this education are similar, very much based on reflection of everyday situations, although emphasis is given to the idea of ethics running through the curriculum in the initial training:

I agree with the ethical aspects running through all the subjects and that they should be valued and worked on in all fields of study, but I think that it is also useful to have a specific time and place for these ethical issues to be debated, clarified, deepened and therefore reflected on (E5).

The specific methods tend towards formal education moments, case studies, reflection on incidents. Reflection on ethical codes and the seminar are included in the in-service training only by one subject: “it’s very beneficial not to be just one area because one area becomes funnelled (...) and that is why there are inter-disciplinary seminars given by people with different training whereby somebody coordinates but there is also the teamwork...” – E12.

REFLECTION ON RESULTS

The results brought to the fore different sensibilities concerning professional ethics, based on different forms of their construction. In general, we can define two groups: one, the minority, structures its thinking on philosophical (e.g. Aristotle, Kant and Jonas), psychological (Kohlberg, etc) and biological (E. Wilson and Dawkins) presuppositions; another, the majority, bases its thinking on practical wisdom deriving from their personal biography, sometimes with sporadic references to some author or other. Looking broadly at the data one can detect some coherent lines of thought, e.g. conceptions that contextualise ethics, deriving from experience based on reason and feelings, in harmony with the relational nature of education and ethics, a leaning towards care, justice, equality, multicultural values; the innate conception of ethics, in line with devaluing the initial or in-service training, with the separation of roles between personal and professional ethics,

reducing professional ethics to a deontology of duties, linked to the professional roles. Hybrid thinking can also be detected.

Situating the thinking of these teachers into trends of contemporary ethical thinking encounters twofold difficulties: due to the fluid nature of this thinking in most of the interviewees; due to the variety of currents that express tensions between the illuminist rationalisation of modernity and the post-modernist positions. Some, “focusing on the rational grounding of the ethical source of moral and moral values and on the universality and perenniality of fundamental human principles and values; others contesting the possibility of this reasoning and focusing on the contextuality and ephemeral nature of the principles and values and stressing the caring side instead of the reasoning of moral experience; some, the legacy and constructors of new systems of teleological or deontological ethics; other destroyers of any system that is different from relativism raised to a system” (Estrela, 2008) but, paradoxically, seeking to safeguard some values such as solidarity (Rorty, 1988), tolerance within a “minimum morality” (Lipovetsky, cited by Bauman, 1997). We also find positions that, linked to critical modernity or post-modernism, present alternatives (e.g. Habermas, critical in relation to illuminist reason, tries to avoid relativism through communicational act and interpretative communities; Bauman, a confessed post-modernist, creates an ethical system based on moral responsibility – “being for the Other before one can be with the Other” (1997, p. 9), as the first reality of the self and condition of social life (the disguised form of universality of a principle?). The philosophy of education has been subsidiary to the major systems of ethics, but we find attempts today that, reflecting on some post-modernist influences, try to construct ethics on the relational nature of the educational act and inherent responsibility (e.g. Houssaye, 2004 or Preyrat, 2007). However, this philosophy was not reflected in the thinking of the interviewees.

The thinking registered in the interviews seems to take us on the whole to rationalist positions that fit into the spirit of modernity and, in one case, critical modernity. However, we can distinguish two kinds of rationalism: one, of a more technicist and instrumentalist nature of ethics, pragmatically guiding one for professional preparation as a concept

geared towards particular good of the student; the other, of a more humanist nature, aimed at personal fulfilment within the concept of the universal good. Only a minority neared post-modernist ethical positions, through the consequentialist nature of ethics geared towards the results of action, based on the spirit that Noddings (2001) called the ethics of care.

From the analysis of the interviews, the notion of responsibility seems to lack depth. As the meeting point of several contemporary movements, albeit with different foundations, it could constitute a teacher and student training object and the basis of constructing an ethical theory of higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

The results bring to the fore different sensibilities and ethical stances that represent only a few possibilities within a multitude of possible responses. Although there is unanimous agreement by these teachers as to the lack of an ethics debate among colleagues, we cannot consider this issue a “lost dimension”, as stated by Macfarlane (2004). It is, in truth, a hidden dimension, but partially unveiled and with plenty of potential for debate.

If professions are not static and are driven to keep in step and often to anticipate social change, the concept of professionalism as a service ideal is a concept in permanent reconstruction by its professionals. Reconstruction will always be difficult as it implies the redefining of interiorised ideals and the reconfiguration of personal and group identities. This uneasy reconstruction, especially at turning points, corresponds more to the pressure of outside forces than inner factors, as seems to currently be the case in the profession of the higher education teacher.

Despite the importance attached to the teaching and research functions and some principles and values common to some teachers, above all in relation to research, we cannot find a clear ideology of professionalism that mapped out a union among the teaching class or, at least, among the teachers of each institutional group. Two main visions of the profession can be drawn up however: one, more geared towards technical-scientific aspects, instrumentalises ethics, tending to reduce professional ethics to deontology, in considering the person in the multiple

identities given by their roles and an attitude of rejection or ambiguity as regards the need for ethical training of teachers; the other, more geared towards training of the person and in favour of the ethical training of teachers, outweighs personal and professional ethics as the outpouring of the self. It seems to us that through the wanderings of the complex articulation between personal and professional ethics two kinds of ethical identities are configured. However, through different logic, they converge in the role of the teacher as an example and partially in the concept of professional responsibility that can be restricted to the students or widened to society, but the dimension of planetary responsibility, theorised by Jonas, is almost absent. This is where we believe there is a need for training.

If, as stated by Dubar (1997), the construction of identity derives from biographical factors in interconnection with work situations, one can expect some visible differences between university teachers and polytechnic teachers, given the difference in their traditions, goals and student bodies that each institution serves. As far as a qualitative analysis enables us to ascertain, the discourse of both seem to cite more the inter-individual variations than the inter-group variations. However, one has to prosecute the hypothesis of differences (to be verified by another kind of analysis) regarding the consequentialist conceptions of ethics and, logically, the ethical education of the students and justice as equity, apparently more explicit in the polytechnic teachers. Nevertheless, one cannot exclude that more than the institutional differences, they can be attributed to the professional areas or even the female and male genders – a hypothesis that we are testing through the AQUAD computer program.

The answer to the question about the need for ethical training of higher education teachers is yes for the majority of the interviewees. But, precisely because we found such big discrepancies in such a small sample of subjects, we believe that a debate involving the teachers that want it or would like to participate in it, inside or outside their institutions, is required.

We believe that it is the teachers who are responsible for defining their ethical responsibility in reaction to the transformations taking place in the world and in the higher education institutions. It is they

who should define whether, as well as re-focusing on some ethical dimensions of their profession, they are willing to accept responsibility for being and preparing the student to be “a voice for the voiceless” (Mayor, 2004, p. 493). Hence, two questions seem crucial to us: how can one define and affirm the ethical ideal of professionalism of higher-education teachers in view of the transformations that have come about? Is university responsible for providing the ethical training of their students that

goes beyond raising awareness of the deontology of the future profession? Reflecting on these questions is the start of an ethical training of teachers.

Remembering Castells (1997) and the role he confers to networks and the construction of “project entities” which, “redefining their position in society”, contribute to bringing about balanced change (1997, p. 7, 1^o vol. e p. 30, 2^o vol.), why not create on-line networks for this debate that require an inter-disciplinary approach and makes this construction easier?

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Translated by Thomas Kundert