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## The Moral Life and Its Theory in Romania. A Subjective Panorama

Valentin MUREȘAN<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*An international conference on education, professional development and ethical values is the ideal place to make a panorama, unavoidably subjective, of the main trends in Romanian public and institutional morality, and the way we could influence its evolution.*

*First, let me design a general framework for my subject. Two researchers (Rossouw and van Vuuren) elaborated a study where they endeavour to offer a scale of moral development of institutional morality in five stages. 1) The first was labelled “immorality phase” (having as defining slogan “Immoral conduct is the most profitable activity” or “The business-men’s goal is profit, not the soul of his employees”). 2) The second was called “reactive stage” (its slogan is: “Let’s create the impression that we have some interest towards ethics; in reality, we don’t need it”). This sort of mentality is accompanied by a plethora of formal ethics codes and ethics committees – never used professionally - as well as by the tendency to substitute the term “ethics” with the more comforting one of “integrity”. 3) the third stage is designated as the “compliance phase”. (At this level ethical conduct is assured by giving moral rules and punishments). 4) The following stage is that of “integrity” (the ethical conduct isn’t assured anymore through regulation, but by creating an institutional climate and guiding-values favourable to morality). 5) The last stage is that of “full integration” (in this case the integration of ethics within organization’s life is organic, its presence being perceptible in organization’s strategies, internal operational fluxes & in relation with stakeholders).*

*Assuming all risks, I shall extrapolate this institutional model to society at large. I will ask you in which phase of moral maturation the Romanian society of today is?*

*I will say that we are somewhere between the first and the second stage. We indulge in praising our “traditions” without improving them; we do not hesitate to claim that we are the most “pure” people on this planet, but in the same time, some of us horrify Europe by their immoral behaviour; we like to say that morality is an important thing but we do nothing to study and manage it to diminish the moral risks of immoral behavior.*

**Keywords:** *editorial, moral life, subjective panorama, theory.*

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Finally, we are delighted by our traditions of peasant breeding, especially when it involves the Christian morality, the only one the laymen heard of. But there are other moral systems too, and traditions should be improved: as a matter of fact they need a lot of improvements and nobody made a map of them.

The same happen within parliamentary commissions. Here the debates regarding the establishment of new laws, involves often an almost inexistent moral foundation, due to the fact that the ethical dimension is considered a second hand side. The parliamentary activities involve jurists, economists, doctors etc. but not ethicists. Morality is important only for TV shows. It will be said that we are trapped in a *temporary* impasse, all revolutionary epochs being characterized by a turmoil of values and sedimentation of new norms requiring an extended temporal horizon. Actually, we were always a society with few or incomplete laws. We were rebarbative to norms and regulations and we even fought against them. This could be an explanation for our relatively backwardness. We use to solve the problem of gifts and parental incentives practiced in schools through a public scandal, that in the end amuses us, we are surprised by the presence of such maleficent attitudes, and the final outcome is preservation of the previous situation. In the same time, within American or Australian governmental structures, companies, schools or universities, institutional gifts are brought under regulation trough ethics codes, and generals, professors or clerks are following formative ethics trainings, being asked even if their pen, that are holding in hand at that very moment, is a “gift”. Instead, we consider ourselves much too serious, in order to trouble our schedule with such trivialities.

However, we teach in schools ethics during religion classes, it could be said– this means a lot of ethics. No, it doesn’t mean this. For 11 years one studies a lot of dogmas and ecclesiastic practices, not ethics. And then, the systems of ethics are many. In spite of their theoretical multiplicity, they were *evacuated* from educational curricula. Except the Christian one. Not even the chance to choose amid ethics courses and religion classes is available anymore. And then, it subsists a blazing difference between *study of ethics* and *ethic formation*. Study of ethics was replaced in our educational system with religion classes, where children are learned hastily to sing funeral chores, as a school director told me. Moral formation (*character building*) is however something else, something that we never practiced in Romania. It is learned through specific activities, starting from military and physical training to the study of music, education in condition of isolation and ending

in the refinement of communication skills or assimilation of social etiquette rules. This process simultaneously involves school, Church, family, local officials, state institutions. We experience a deficit of national programs regarding this topic, as we generally lack moral training programs, at a broader social level and concurrently in institutional standards.

I also believe that we live in a society where the major problem is represented by “small corruption”, not by the “big” one – as the officials say. And we totally and chronically have ignored this fact. Even now, when EC programs solicited us to get more focused, as a prevention measure, on ethics management within institutions, the echoes of this pressure were difficult to perceive in our daily experience. In my opinion, the TV shows of big corruption, never convincing, means an illicit substitution of the real target: the small corruption – much difficult to approach, because it extends diffusely, among us, on the entire country. Not to confront it means to encourage it.

There is another major phenomenon, completely ignored. There are certain cultural zones in which robbery is a virtue, wife beating a confirmation of manhood, rape an action that could be amnestied, as gestures of virile amusement, house’s robbery a right, beggarliness a profession. Do you know any program that propose solving (in a professional way), those cases of values inversion? Or to intend to drain the micro delinquency cultures? We don’t have such programs and I don’t think that we can build them in a professional way. This happens especially because in our peculiar case, the officially recognised professions list does not comprise the occupation of “ethicist”, “moral consultant” or “ethics manager”. We don’t have educational structures, in which to train such specialists. If we think now to Romanian society’s reform (including economics, politics, education, army, health services), we can see that the dimension of *moral reform* is practically absent from this list. Methods, theories, tools, specialists, strategies in service of this claim – we possess almost nothing. And then I ask: is the moral reform of Romanian society a truly governmental objective? I don’t think so. It is mentioned in the mission of Romanian institutions the objective of becoming moral institutions. Do they have politics oriented toward this goal? I didn’t see convincing elements in favour of such a hypothesis. What is the budget associated to moral reform in strategic national plans, in order to achieve some results? The answer is: zero. On national level it wasn’t made any decision for a strategy connected to that purpose, as an example, a strategy for a procedural model or for the integrity frame, or for a combination of those two, or in the end,

for a new original formula. It doesn't exist a unitary legislative framework, able to constrain state's institutions and private ones to create ethical infrastructures (without mentioning any details). It doesn't exist any long-term vision in this regard. It is considered that morality evolves and improves by itself – what a mistake!

Let's descend to the society's level, seen in a broader sense and including entities as companies and institutions. Immoral behaviours are present in all places, in public schools, in companies, within family or in hospitals. They represent a major institutional risk. In a university, malversation of exams through plagiarism or selling of results, sexual harassment, bride, conflicts of interest, verbal aggressiveness of professors against students or the other way round, inadequate behaviour of administrative staff, etc., foster the risk to compromise the institution, as a whole, in front of its potential stakeholders. In companies, the situation is similar. Is there anybody dealing in a professional manner with all of these? The answer is no again. We have only amateurs.

But, could it be the case to change ourselves? Since it is quite factitious to ascertain that in a world put under assault by problems of business ethics, of medical ethics, of research and public administration ethics, of professional ethics, the cooperation amid various professionals or company managers and ethicists is (in Romania's case) quasi-inexistent. An un-written rule tells us that if a company's management doesn't truly accept the installation of an ethics management mechanism inside its structures, and doesn't show such an appetency, it is better to give it up.

From my point of view, the general condition of applied ethics within Romanian organization's lives is extremely precarious. We don't possess training schools dedicated to the formation of ethics experts, namely the formation of professionals with double specialization, which are in charge of ethics management of public hospitals, research institutes, city halls or companies. In every of these cases it is necessary a distinct professional. We don't have such "artisans", although, by a common effort, we could train them. Because, it is important to admit it, for such assignments we must prepare a new kind of "professionals" – as an example, moral consultants. Doctors, jurists, engineers, generalist philosophers, involved in study of morals (as myself), aren't prepared for this new challenge. Among other things, this happened because we detain, by virtue of profession, other priorities. We have another job. Besides, it is considered dangerously often – even by educated persons - that ethics, contrary to medicine or law, doesn't imply a genuine professionalization, that ethics

could be assimilated to “primary home education”, that everyone, thus, is a potential ethics “master”, and could be a member in an ethics committee. All you really need is some grey hair. For me it’s difficult to demonstrate that this is not how the things stand; but for those that still embrace this perspective, it would be sufficient a visit to a moral philosophy library, in order to be disappointed in their beliefs. Lack of collaboration between ethicists and various professionals is owed, probably, to both parts: disinterest of specialist for ethical topics, labelled as minors and marginal compared to other professional issues, is doubled by a certain “guru attitude”, practiced by ethicists that sometimes pretended that they possess the monopole of ethic solutions and verdicts. The firsts say “we also are able to know what’s moral to do”, the others came to teach Aristotle’s ethics to the technical staff of a hospital, or even to the doctors. An improper way.

Admitting the existence of a moral life specific to an organisation, the deliberate neglect of this aspect could generate important risks. In this case it is mandatory to a society that wants to prosper to take action to prevent the escalation of those risks. Endowment of all organisations with an “ethical infrastructure” (using OECD and EU terminology) could be one of the solutions. Instead of ignoring superciliously the institutional ethics or faking the interest towards it, it is time to reach a serious approach. And this thing it necessary to supervene at European level, where European Commission’s example is discouraging not only because it did not built an ethical infrastructure of this European organism, despite a huge moral scandal, but also because what was done was done in a superficial manner, following the saying “let’s mime we like ethics”. European Commission implemented various components of an ethical infrastructure, but avoided the problem of administrative ethics as a holist and coherent factual approach. (Cini, 2007). Also in Romania, the absence of a *system* of ethics management is considered by the author as a fundamental source of new failures<sup>2</sup>.

I will use thenceforth the term “ethical infrastructure” as a synonym with “system of ethics management”. But in what would consist of such a system? First, it is necessary to mention that we don’t possess a unique recipe. Everything is decided having in view the organisation’s specificity (size, structure, what it produce, education and training level of the employees). Even universal ethical principles (as dignity, justice, integrity and

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<sup>2</sup> *Communication from the vice-president Kallas to the Commission on enhancing the environment for professional ethics in the Commission*, Brussels, 2008.

so on) must be integrated within organisation's structures, as an inherent part of organisation's body. But, they still need to remain visible, not to make the subject of a silent substitution with other "ethical principles", ad-hoc invented. Also it is necessary not to hesitate to highlight the major error of those who imposed in Romania by law, in various institutions, the ethics committees and ethical codes: probably they intended to give a positive signal, but in the same time they ignored the fact they could not function until they have assured their flexibility and autonomy (ethical codes need to be changed every time when it is necessary and ethics committees must do this, being completely independent); all these aspects require the integration in a system of ethics management or within an "ethical infrastructure".

An ethical infrastructure represents a system of ethical tools and bureaucratic internal structures, which have the aim to assure the efficient management of moral and immoral behaviours, that generates risks for the organisation (as corruption and other types of immoral behaviour: private use of workplace's facilities, conflict of interests, harassment). An ethical infrastructure presumes before all the presence of a systemic thinking, a holist and integrative approach. What was built in Romania – a couple formed by an ethical code and an ethics committee – is far to be identified with such a complex system. This is the reason why it doesn't work. In order to have an ethical infrastructure in our state and private organisations, it is also required at least one element, as a dynamic moment: a convinced political will, expressed both at national and European level. Without this, the change will not occur. Heretofore this step was not materialized. The change must of course be asserted by a local administration, integrous, manifesting a genuine interest for organizational ethics and ready to show explicitly this fact, trough laws and regulations, which to formulate and impose standards of moral behaviour, adapted however to local specificity. There are also needed Ethics Offices, formed by ethics experts, specifically trained and professionalized, which know how to coordinate the "ethical programs" of the organisation. But what does it means "ethical program"? An ethical program of an organisation contains its policies in the sphere of institutional ethics; it also contains certain periodically diagnoses of the moral situation within that organisation, the objectives established according to these diagnoses, instruments and means for solving those problems, a schedule of activities, a monitoring process, seasonal reports, and budget. As we proceed in matter of Quality Assurance (QA), we could make the same steps in the new space of Ethical Assurance (EA).

Still, one of the unavoidable questions is: how can we make those ethics programs function well? The answer offered by specialists is this: they require to be integrated into an institutional system of ethics management. This also will require:

- *Managerial support* for the ethics program on the part of society and company's management: All the specialists tend to underline that this aspect is a mandatory condition for the success of the undertaking, despite the fact it doesn't seem so obvious. The society must initiate a national unitary process for institutionalization of ethics management, through a flexible and detailed legislation. The unitary and compulsory character of the program is necessary in order to assure the exclusion of unfair competition, which can appear by the agency of a so called "ethical discrimination" (some people tend to restrict their initiatives, taking in account the ethical code, while others ignore it). Also, the board of directors must openly and sincerely manifest a favourable attitude to integrity.
- *Institutional structure*, having the capacity to cover all the organization's levels and which also need to include: an *Ethics Office* (can be integrated with the one of QA), that will be in charge with ethics programs management, an *Ethics Committee*, built distinctly from the *Ethics Office* (implied mostly in assuring the development of ethical code and the design of ethics policies), an *Ombudsman Office* (for solving the litigations), an *Ethics hotline*, (created as a separated institution and framed by "ethics consultants"), an *Internal Audit Bureau*, etc. As regards the relations arose amid these components, and as to their number, all those features will differ from one organization to another, due to the local specific. Many recommend also the creation of an *Ethics Surveillance Committee*, connected to the level of superior management of the organisation (this structure will be formed by the most important managers).
- *Standards*: an *Ethical Code* based on explicit ethical principles (not a *Conduct Code*, or a *Code of good practice*), specific moral rules, that cover all the activity domains of the company and are also applicable *in all cases* and they are accompanied by sanctions. Hereunder we will capture other regulations and decisions, disciplinary procedures, organizational structures, juridical and moral casuistry, trainings for internalization of those values and rules. A continuous effort is



needed in the direction of innovating in sphere of regulations; a correct implementation is also a vital issue.

- *Communication*: the standards became futile if there are not acknowledged by the employees; a whole communication programme is necessary: ethical trainings, brochures, films, personal letters, deployment trainings, etc. The creation of the *Ethical Code* need to be operated conjunctively with the personnel, because its acceptance needs to be “autonomous”. It is not a coincidence that in some organization the genesis of the *Ethical Code* lasts 2 or 3 years.
- *Means of implementation*: a well-designed *sanctions system* (in which prevail the ethical landmarks and extended ethics training programs (ethical education). Genesis of an institutional culture favourable to ethics which exerts a normative pressure upon personnel. Closely related with the communication process is the *ethics training*; organized in various formulas, this had as a major aim the promotion of mora) standards, their internalization and the formation of an independent moral reasoning and intuition.

Where should we start – you will ask confused by my cavalcade? I don't know - probably from a point where we can make together some concrete steps. For instance, by organizing “common formative programs in ethics managements”. We could organise, by mutual agreement with other specialists, intensive post university courses of this kind. We already shelter such doctoral and master programs. Today we find in the city courses on “How could we be unsuccessful persons?” focused on questions as: “how to cheat your clients?”. These short courses do not confront with lack of participants. If you really want to do something else, something related to normality, we remain at your disposal. But please keep in mind (if you want to shake hands) that any of us will tell you: we are not here to substitute your work, to write your Ethical Code and to build your Ethical infrastructure, but to help you to achieve that with you own forces, eventually in a common effort. Supposing that potential beneficiaries will not provide the signal that they honestly engage themselves in such enterprise, I am afraid that nobody will insist on begging them. Only after this stage it makes sense to build ethical infrastructures. The recognition of those new ethics related to professions is also imperative. Fight against corruption and against associated risks induced by immoral behaviours is therefore more

complicated than the TV show of some “big fishes”. In the same time, it is much cheaper, but by no means free of charge.

To conclude: if the Romanian businessmen have as a slogan: „We want greater profit at any price”, I shall say: “Good, you deserve greater profits, but not at any price. For example, not at the price of ignoring the institutional morality, the environment, the food security of mankind, the satisfaction of work in the workplace, finally, the democratic system and the ideal of freedom. All these values are much more important than the profit, because the profit depends on them. If the Romanian businessmen will not protect these values, the day will come when the profits will not exist but in books only.

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### Biodata



**Valentin Muresan** is professor of moral philosophy and applied ethics. His research interests cover various topics, from praxeology and philosophy of science, to ethical theories and ethics management (during the last 25 years). He published extensive commentaries on some basic works by Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Mill, as well as studies on analytical moral philosophy and ethics management. He translated or coordinated the translation of a great number of works in the analytic tradition (R.M. Hare, B. Williams, H.Prichard, G. Moore etc.) and edited a great number of volumes in Romania and abroad (Japan, USA). Prof. Muresan is a former Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Honorary Director of the Research Center of Applied Ethics and of the *Romanian Journal of Analytic Philosophy*. He is *Distinguished Research Fellow of Oxford Uehiro Center for Practical Ethics* and member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Applied Ethics and Philosophy* (Hokkaido University, Japan).