

## The Reflection of the Moral-Civic Education in the Pedagogical Literature from the Totalitarian Époque

PhD Assistant Caciuc Viorica – Torii  
Teacher Training Department  
„Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați

**Abstract:** *The pedagogical language plays a special role in the training of future teachers. Its formative value is given both by its socio-cultural values and its pragmatic ones. Besides all these, there are also the ideological values that reflect the political conception which, at a given moment, dominated the society’s educational policy which was applied at the level of schools. Even though the effects of the curricular reform were felt at the level of the pedagogical discourse, there are still some reminders of the “wooden language” of the communist political discourse. All of these make the true educational message hard to be perceived by the future professors, and many times it seems to be inadequate for the nowadays school system and thus it looks hard to be put into educational practice.*

**Keywords:** *moral-civic education, pedagogical language, totalitarian age.*

Even though the effects of the curricular reform were felt at the level of the pedagogical discourse, there are still some reminders of the “wooden language” of the communist political discourse. The ideological and propaganda elements of the communist type are best seen at the level of the educational dimensions, where the condition for creating stereotypes “is to define the situations in such a way that it will allow only two possible solutions. This duality corresponds partially to the nature of stereotypes which offer only two answers: either one accepts without second thoughts the topic or one refuses it totally.” [1] At the level of this dimension, the stereotypes of the pedagogical language cause sometimes the total refusal of the educated. The situation is more and more difficult especially when the educated are the future educators. I would offer here as an example the content of the moral-civic education. This is the reason why, this paper tries to identify and to analyze the effects of the totalitarian ideology over the process of morally building up the personality of an individual, by at the same time offering a solution to diminish these effects by introducing the messages of the ethics of virtue into the content of the moral-civic education.

### 1. The effects of the totalitarian politics over the moral-civic education

Reminders of the today’s moral education can be found in the influences and orientations of pedagogy from the totalitarian period which had multiple influences from the Marxist- Leninist philosophy. So, one of the explanations for the appearance and development of the pedagogical science can be found “in the end in the development of the material base of society, in the changes which took place in the relations of production.” [2] The progressive pedagogical ideas, which defend the interests of the proletariat, and implicitly, those of the oppressed people, make up a new qualitative pedagogical science, to whom the Marxist philosophical conception gives its superiority by “the truthfulness of the theoretical thesis, and also its practical objectives by means of the way in which it solves the tasks which lay in front of it in educating the young generation in the communist manner.” [3] From this perspective, the basic concepts of pedagogy have an ideological significance. For instance, if in a narrow sense, education must be understood as an assembly of educational influences of the lesson, as the educational work among pupils, in a broader sense, education is concerned with the process of training the young generation, which means “to offer them all the knowledge needed and to shape them around the Marxist-Leninist conception about the world and to build the communist features of their personality; to develop their intellectual and physical abilities, and also their aptitudes and skills for a productive work.” [4] Following this direction, the author mentions the honorary place that moral education occupies in “the multilateral development of the young generation”. In fact, by morally building up the personality of the pupil,

the school must create “people devoted to the cause of building the socialism in our country, people that think and act in the spirit of the communist moral.” [5] As a result of the thesis according to which the scientific pedagogy is just the Marxist pedagogy, the ideological ideas are reflected in the presentation of the moral education, even from its essence. The author illustrates the history of the morale emphasizing the elements of inferiority and the antagonistic ones of the society’s morale divided into classes, which generates new orders of conduct and features specific for a progressive morale (the aspiration towards freedom, the love towards the country, the devotion and the feeling of duty towards the battle comrades, the hatred towards the exploiters, the despise towards the parasitical elements of society, etc.) heading towards building up a rightful social order. [6] The superiority of the communist morale derives from its features: the collectivism seen as subordinating the interests of the individual to those of the collectivity, the active character which is based on the active attitude to remove the conceptions of the old regime, the optimism given by the conviction that the future belongs to the socialism and communism, the link between the communist consciousness of people and the materialist conception about the world and life. [7] In this context, building up the features of the communist morale represents the major purpose of the instructive-educative activities from school, or, in other words, the shaping of the new man, which means: a) building up the morale notions and convictions; b) shaping the morale feelings; c) building up the skills and the habits of the morale conduct; d) building up the features of will and character. The communist chromatic elements emphasize the consistency and the unity, the systematic planning and organization of the educational activities by means of which the purposes of the communist moral education are to be fulfilled, these being a preoccupation which “must cross the entire instructive-educative activity like a red thread”. [8]

The entire activity and educational work with pupils is directed by the principles of the moral education. The ideological elements are a part of the structure of every principle of the moral education, but one of them represents the nucleus and the main guide of educational work at the level of school, this being the political-ideological orientation of the moral education. The author mentions and gives ideological arguments for the necessity of the communist orientation of the moral education and that “all this educational work must be organically linked to the practice of building the socialism.” [9]

The content of this dimension is also a part of and built on the elements of the political ideology of those times, which includes: educating the pupils in the spirit of the socialistic patriotism and of the proletarian internationalism, the education by means of work and for work, building up the communist attitude towards work, educating the attitude for respecting and taking care of the commune good, educating the conscious discipline. [10]

Even though the ideological elements have been eliminated from the contemporary pedagogical courses and papers, the stereotypy of the pedagogical language is still present in the educational process. I would offer here as an example the content of the moral-civic education. It is true that the main objective of the education for patriotism is “the interiorization of the content and of the defining notes of patriotism, their transformation into pupil’s internal aims and behavioral manifestations in his relationships with the geographical, economical and spiritual environment of his country. This objective is intended to form the patriotic conscience and conduct. Thus, throughout the entire school period, the pupils are familiarized with the beauties and richness of their country, with its historic past, with the sacrifices which took place in order to protect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity, with the people’s cultural and artistic legacy, they are thought to respect the material and spiritual values of other countries and nations.” [11] In the nowadays context, the patriotic education of young people is virtually impossible because, on the one hand, all the sectors and domains of the social life are underlining the process of becoming Europeanized, and on the other hand, the young person feels always discouraged by the unstable economical situation of the country, the increasing rate of unemployment, the decrease of the natural resources, the corruption manifested at all social levels, the acculturation and the process called “manelism” manifested at every step of the way, etc.

Another dimension of the moral education which is doomed to failure, to the individual's refusal is the attitude towards work. It is true that "work is first of all a right and a duty of the man towards himself and towards society" [12], but on what concerns the respect towards the different professional categories manifested by means of retribution or the restraining of creativity under the form of taxes, all of these lead towards the assimilation of some theories or concepts which do not have a basis or a link to the social reality. The message according to which "all the material and spiritual goods are the result of work, and that only through work a person can satisfy her personal needs" [13] is an empty one, with no fundamentals, it seems to be addressing to a different period. The young professors of today find it hard to get ride of all the negative models of people who have got rich in a fraudulent way and who do not seem to obey the law.

The same rejection is encountered when dealing with the education of pupils towards discipline. All the norms and rules which have to be followed seem so communist for the young generation. To wear a uniform, to have a certain outfit and conduct specific to the educational institution one is part of, is not an idea always accepted by the pupils because it is perceived as a dogmatizing, a constraint of their free way of expression.

In this context, the mission of the future trainees becomes extremely difficult because even for them it is hard to understand and to accept the stereotypes of the pedagogical language. This is the reason why I propose an opening of the content of moral education towards Aristotel's virtue ethics which could restore the power of the moral values and virtues, the returning to their abstract significance and to the concrete reality they express. [14]

## 2. The role played by virtue in the revival of the moral education

"What makes us good is for some, the nature, for others, the habit, and for others, the teachings" (1179b, 21) [15]. The quote leads us to the idea that a special contribution is held both by nature (the heredity) and by education, be it practical (the habit) or theoretical (the teachings).

The nature shows us that the ethical virtue is a changeable predisposition which depends totally on us: "the virtues do not exist in us naturally or unnaturally, but we are born with the capacity to have them, in order to perfect them by means of habit." (1103a, 25)

The ethical virtue cannot be obtain from books, because it is not an intellectual virtue, but one of the irrational part of the soul (which takes part at the thinking process): "in order to obtain (ethical) virtues, knowledge means little or nothing" (1105b). The author actually mentions that „the present paper does not have a theoretical purpose like so many others, because we do not seek to examine the nature of virtue, but to become virtuous." (1103b, 28) An exaggerated conclusion was drawn, that according to which *The Nicomachean Ethics* does not investigate *the nature* of the ethical virtues and thus does not play a role in the moral education.

In the moral education, the systemic theory and the rational argument are not important because "the habit" plays an overwhelming role in the conceiving of the behavioral habitudes by means of doing repetitive actions which are good and of avoiding the bad ones, until these are turned into automatisms (a second nature), using the most usual method in education – reward and punishment.

From Aristotel's point of view, the subject of the moral education refers both at what virtue is and at the problematic of obtaining virtues by means of habits. Even though earlier he upheld the idea of the diminished role of the rational arguments and explanations, the author recognizes that they do have an influential power over "those who have already built up a moral character by means of habits, by assimilating the behavioral habitudes from the social environment, under the influence of the family, the educators and the law:

*But, in the way things look, the arguments [...] seem to have the power to influence and encourage those young people who posses a generosity of the spirit and maybe to render sensitive at the virtue a character that is good breed and which truly loves what is noble "* (1179b,7-10 – translation Crisp- apud. V.Mureșan, p.144) [16]. For the great uneducated masses, the rational arguments and explanations have no power, because, on the one hand, "virtue is incapable of perfecting their behaviour, they do not know what shame is, but only the concept of punishment"

[17], and on the other hand, they do not know *what virtue is*, and they cannot learn it. The educator's role is again underlined by his contribution "to the pre-preparing of the soul" and the forming of some moral habits, so as to allow the educated person, no matter the age, to study the nature of virtue and even to morally act in a conscious way.

The moral education can be achieved in two ways: either by starting from principles, or by heading towards them (1095b). From M. F. Burnyeat's article it follows that the starting point for moral education is "that something", those things which are familiar to us, and the second dimension is that of "the because" [18]. Thus, he underlines the contrast between "to know or to think one knows <<that>> a thing is like this or like that, and to understand <<why>> it is like this or like that, or putting it differently, between the man who has a practical wisdom (the <<why>> man) and the man who has shaped his moral habits by means of social education, but that, not possessing the science of morality, cannot understand why what he was thought is really good." [19] The principles, the starting points or the "why"-s of ethics are not just the preoccupations of the scientists, but also of the practical ethicist and the practical wise man, a thing that is mentioned also in *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotel "offers us a course in practical thinking who's role is to allow people who want to become virtuous to better understand what they have to do and why in order to achieve just that." [20]

For Aristotel, the cognitive dimension of the moral education aims at the clear and explicit understanding of the meaning of the moral terms, these being cognitive preoccupations *sui generis* oriented towards a practical purpose, the building up of the character. This is why he claims that the ethical virtue cannot be learned from books, and the moral education is made first of all by shaping the moral habits which are conditioned by reward and punishment (he supports the Spartan model based on laws).

In Aristotel's vision, the moral education is divided into two: 1. the building up of the character with the help of the habit, according to a socially guided adaptation 2. the access to principles by means of a moral science which would reflect "the universal knowledge of what is good" (1180b).

If the first-class education can be given even by those that do not possess such knowledge (the illiterate parents), at the level of the entire community the moral education must be given by "a firm legislator, which actually means to incorporate the practical wisdom" [21]. From this point of view, Aristotel's ethics can be seen as a course for young people that have political ambitions, having as a purpose the development of the legislative capacities (1180b, 30).

By underlining the lack of precision in the evaluation of individual actions, he wants to pinpoint to the fact that "the moral evaluation of actions is not simply done by reporting to the exterior moral rules (the duties), because they would give only a rigid standard that does not take into consideration the variable circumstances and, in addition, the criterion of the ethic action is, as we have seen, *the cause* of the action, and not the social standard"(1144a) [22]. Thus, we have as an evaluation criterion "the practical wise man" and we relate to what he might have done. (1105b, 5-10).

Aristotel upholds the Spartan model of morally educating the people by means of firm laws (which also have a punitive character) given by a wise king and he deplores the phenomenon of leaving the moral education to chance, as he thinks it happens in other walled cities. But he is also the upholder of the individualization of education which takes into consideration every individual's characteristic features.

The aim of Aristotel's ethical research is to identify the conditions and structures of the moral character which should make a person capable to lead a good life and to determine the ethical value of an individual action according to the circumstances. It is a sort of theoretic basis for the legislation and the moral pedagogy.

Far from being a moral code and an explicative theory of the moral phenomenon, *The Nicomachean Ethics* offers the model of a practical wisdom useful in the building up of the character and mind, and even in the understanding of the moral phenomenon.

V. Mureșan presents four theses regarding the nowadays applicability of Aristotel's ethics [23]:

1. Aristotel's theory is not a really ethical theory in the narrow and modern sense of the word, but one concerning the *rationality* of the human life in general (it is focused on the question: what does it mean a happy and successful life?).
2. Aristotel's theory cannot offer and it does not even intend to offer a *decisional formula* for the judging of concrete cases.
3. Only *phronimos*, the man that has well developed ethical and intellectual virtues can be the ideal standard for evaluating some concrete cases.
4. Aristotel's theory is a possible explanation, maturely articulated, of the functional and educational mechanism of a *phronimos*, a human ideal that we can get close to asymptotically: it offers a sort of guide through life.

The school's role today, like back then, is that of forcing and guiding the young people, by means of tutors, to assimilate the good behaviors. Virtues cannot be obtained by means of study or of nature, but especially by means of habits. The character is built up by practicing, both inside the family – the parents, inside school- the teachers, and inside camps –the military commanders and inside the walled city (society) – the political people. Besides school, the family plays a very important role in the moral education. In Aristotel's vision, "the good breeding" occupies an important role in education, because the family is the one that must take care of the building up of character with the help of the habits, so as to allow school to make the passage to the second level of moral education, which means accessing the principles by means of a moral science.

### Instead of a conclusion

Today, from the social point of view, we frequently ask ourselves: "who must receive the task of moral educating the young people?" The answer is also given by Aristotel: first, the legislator, second, the public authorities by means of the public surveillance, and third, every citizen because the author underlines the fact that a public education is good if it is based on good laws (1180a, 25-30). Even though nowadays the Romanian curriculum has created the opportunity to achieve moral education by presenting its objectives, values and attitudes and its content, some aspects remain to be decided upon by the teachers so as to put them into educational practice.

By studying *The Nicomachean Ethics*, the future professors must learn how to focus on the practical – applicative aspect in order to achieve the moral education and not on the informational one, because judging things only from this last point of view will not implicitly lead to the interiorization of the ethical virtues. Only through practice one can create a learning experience. The use of the strategies focused on the pupil offers the possibility to practice the ethical virtues, thus gaining a positive experience. If we were to see *The Nicomachean Ethics* as a methodology of teaching moral education in schools, we would identify the competences and the principles that a good educator should have and respect. In Aristotel's vision, the educator must know the law and possess an universal knowledge. He considers the individualization of education to be superior to the public one.

Having as aim "the finding of the correct way to act" in order to live happily, and the building up of a virtuous character, *The Nicomachean Ethics* seems to be "a sophisticated research concerning the moral pedagogy dedicated to those that are advanced in philosophical reflections upon the character and in achieving its complete building up" [24] and the revival of the content of the moral education by adding the elements of the virtue ethics represents a necessity and an opportunity to improve the training process of the young generation.

### Notes

[1] Betea, Lavinia (2005), *Comunicare și discurs în „limba de lemn” a regimului comunist*, in *Argumentum*, nb. 3, pp. 36-65, The Fundației Academice AXIS Printing House,

[http://philosophy.uaic.ro/site/philosophy/Argumentum\\_nr\\_3\\_2004-2005\\_Cap.III.pdf](http://philosophy.uaic.ro/site/philosophy/Argumentum_nr_3_2004-2005_Cap.III.pdf), p.40.

[2] A. Dancsuly (1960), *Obiectul, sarcinile și metodele pedagogiei*, in Dancsuly, A., A., Manolache, A., (editors) – *Pedagogia pentru instituttele pedagogice de învățători*, Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, București, p.5.

- [3] A. Dancsuly (1960), Op. cit., p.6.  
[4] Ibidem, p.7.  
[5] Ibidem, p.37.  
[6] Idem., Esența și sarcinile educației în spiritul moralei xomuniste, in *Ibidem*, p. 203.  
[7] Ibidem, p. 205.  
[8] Ibidem, p.217.  
[9] D. Salade (1960), Principiile și metodele educației în spiritul moralei comuniste, in *Ibidem*, p. 218.  
[10] A. Chircev (1960), Conținutul educației în spiritul moralei comuniste, in *Ibidem*, pp. 204-305.  
[11] Barna, Andrei and Antohe, Georgeta (2006), *Curs de pedagogie*, vol. I, Europlus Publishing House, Galați, p. 80.  
[12] Barna, Andrei and Antohe, Georgeta (2006), Op. cit., p.81.  
[13] *Ibidem*, p. 81.  
[14] Betea, Lavinia (2005), Op. cit., p. 44.  
[15] Aristotel (1988), *Etica nicomahică*, IRI Publishing House, București – the pages from where I have quoted will be present in the text.  
[16] Mureșan, Valentin (2006), *Comentariu la Etica nicomahică*, Humanitas Publishing House, București.  
[17] Mureșan, Valentin (2006), Op. cit., p. 144.  
[18] Burnyeat, M.F. (1999), *Aristotle on Learning to Be Good*, in N. Sherman (ed.) - *Aristotle's Ethics*, Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Inc., p. 207.  
[19] Mureșan, Valentin (2006), Op. cit., p. 145.  
[20] Burnyeat, M.F. (1999) - Op. cit., p.218.  
[21] Mureșan, Valentin (2006), Op. cit., p. 146.  
[22] Ibidem, p. 148.  
[23] Ibidem, p. 346.  
[24] Ibidem, p. 347.

### **Bibliography**

- Aristotel (1998), „Etica nicomahică”, IRI Publishing House, București;  
Barna, Andrei și Antohe, Georgeta (2006), *Curs de pedagogie*, vol. I, Europlus Publishing House, Galați  
Betea, Lavinia (2005), *Comunicare și discurs în „limba de lemn” a regimului comunist*, în *Argumentum*, nr. 3, p. 36-65, The Fundației Academice AXIS Printing House, [http://philosophy.uaic.ro/site/philosophy/Argumentum\\_nr\\_3\\_2004-2005\\_Cap.III.pdf](http://philosophy.uaic.ro/site/philosophy/Argumentum_nr_3_2004-2005_Cap.III.pdf)  
Burnyeat, M.F. (1999), *Aristotle on Learning to Be Good*, în N. Sherman (ed.) - *Aristotle's Ethics*, Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Inc.  
Dancsuly, A., Chircev, A., Manolache, A., (redactori) (1960), *Pedagogia pentru instituttele pedagogice de învățatori*, E.D.P., București  
Mureșan, Valentin (2006), *Comentariu la Etica nicomahică*, Humanitas Publishing House, București.