

## THE ROLE OF APPLIED ETHICS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MODERN SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** The paper focuses on the role of applied ethics as an academic science and its contribution to society. We cannot agree with the claim that the current crisis related to humanities is due to the fact that they are "not profitable". We want to point to the importance and usefulness of humanities and confirm that their current crisis is not caused by a lack of their profit. As today's social demands start calling again for building values and a good name, we are sure that applied ethics is able to provide an expert service, develop values and skills including moral imagination, empathy, and critical rationality. As an example of ethical service and the development of ethical culture, we present briefly the academic ethics at the University of Matej Bel.

**Keywords:** ethics, applied ethics, values, academic ethics.

### 1. Introduction

The academic ground fulfils a specific role, student education and scientific research. There are some obstacles in fulfilling the given tasks and it is necessary to maintain credibility and success. "67% responded that they see academics as credible spokes persons, a particularly highmark in comparison to other groups. It is important for academics to be cognizant of this, and not to damage this reputation" (<https://experientialcomms.wordpress.com/...>; Anselmo, 2018) which is difficult, because at present, we can reflect several tendencies attempting to suppress the importance of the humanities. The requirement for profit and profit may cause action that is inconsistent with academic ethics (plagiarism, non-cooperation, discrimination, bad interpersonal relationships, ...). They must defend their special stand and emphasize their usefulness and contribution to society, that there are usefulness without proof of profit. There are different values that are important in society that creates quality life and good practice.

## 2. Crisis of humanities and problem with profit

Not only profit and money is important. There is more to life. The definition of a better life on the OECD's Better Life Index website confirms our thinking by the words: "There is more to life than the cold numbers of GDP and economic statistics" ([www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/...](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/)). The Annual Report of 2017 (Kesebir, 2016; [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/media/...](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/media/...)) points to improvements in material conditions, but OECD's measured life satisfaction is slightly decreased. Following researches showed that increasing GDP may not always have an impact on greater life satisfaction ([https://hbr.org/...](https://hbr.org/)). When we start from this argument, it can be said that profit is not the most important part of human lives. Most of the decisions motivated by profit do not produce a demonstrable profit and are neither beneficial nor favorable. Problem of profit in academic is in the field of M.C. Nussbaum.

This phenomenon is not significant just for Slovakia, we can meet it also abroad. The author, Martha C. Nussbaum, devoted to this issue the entire work "Not for Profit, Why Democracy Needs Humanities," and confirms our statement by saying "The humanities and the arts are being cutaway, in both primary/secondary and college/university education, in virtually every nation of the world"(Nussbaum, 2010, p. 2). It is caused by economization and economic rationality where the value of the profit and financial benefit has become priority. However, long-term business orientation and achieving long-term results are neglected. But there is more to life than a profit or yield like we mention upper. In some activities it is not possible to prove immediate profitability because it appears after a long time or it can be manifested in several partial factors. To determine parameters of these activities or prove their direct impact is rather difficult. The rejection of humanities as unhelpful and non-profit sciences or their devaluation brings various risks to society. At present, more and more authors and thinkers rely on the old forgotten values and also look for new values and ideals that people should follow. For example, nowadays, societies increasingly require and emphasize corporate social responsibility and the life sustainability. A wider lay society as well as advertising products reiterate and emphasize values related to the desire for good and quality life. In advertising spots we can watch references to the values of certain tradition, return to quality (different original recipes, less artificial substances ...). All these challenges are a testimony that present civilization is interested in something more than just in a profit or profitable purchase. Moreover, the price of some products involves declaration about company's contribution to charitable purposes or environmental returns (part of the product price is used for the allowance for children in need, tree planting, regional projects support or firms inform about the completely decomposable packaging ...). People are interested in a product environmentally favoring, produced in the pursuit of sustainable development, or want to know that employees producing the goods are treated in accordance with respect for human rights. People are already aware they must have control over their own action in order to search its values, its positive direction needed for

building a better life. The change of value systems is confirmed by L. Tondl: "An undeniably positive feature of value changes is the increased attention to the quality of the environment, culture and quality of housing..." (Tondl, 2014, p. 19). In this context, it is necessary to find mechanisms to help people achieve their goals.

As to the humanities, and especially from the view of applied ethics, the above-mentioned procedure is perceived positively. "Developing an understanding of what to do is always a more challenging prospect than issuing edicts about what is not right. This demands that any discussion about research ethics is located in the complex and ambiguous context in which it takes place" (Macfarlane, 2009, p. 3). At the same time, we should consider whether the behavior related to the products is due to the interest in sustainable development and higher quality of human activity, or it is only a response to the requirements of the legislation or a form of marketing. We should look for the motives and values influencing each action. Every human activity is affected by the value chart. Value is an essential and important part of human life fulfilling and a form of motivation. Attempting to a quality life or a good life is a complex area of research where transdisciplinary co-operation is needed. According to Tondl (2014), values can vary in different situations and contexts, but the important and priority values are life, safety and health. The Oxford Dictionary ([https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/...](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/)) gives several definitions of the value. For example, value means usefulness, meaning/importance of things, but also principles, standards of behavior, judgment on what is important in life. "We are not confronted only with individual, totally isolated values, but regularly with certain sets of values, with values forming elements of certain value complexes or systems" (Tondl, 2014, p. 18). One must follow both the values relevant to his social roles and social generally recognized values. These values should not be in conflict. Therefore, we argue that the values should be clearly and comprehensibly formulated so that individuals can be oriented more easily.

One of the focus areas of applied ethics is orientation toward values and work with them. Defining values, their clarifying and implementing contribute to building the organization's good name, promoting ethical strategies, and creating ethical programs. Defining values is one of the basic steps of ethical implementation. Along with the vision, they are an important part of the ethical program, help to establish common values for all concerned. The implemented ethical values ensure that "declared values can always be referred and addressed" (Fobel, 2013, p. 51). Values are organizational instruments used for creating the image of the organization – its good name. The advantages of the ethical program are the unification of employees' behavior, a motivating effect, a sense of fellowship, a reduction in conflict, and its contribution to other positive factors. Forms of the ethical program vary on the basis of various organizational factors such as organization size, focus, industry, culture, and others. The main objective is to create conditions for a non-competitive ethical environment promoting human relationships, cooperation, good, justice, and responsibility. These factors and indicators cannot be accurately measured as economic ones, but have an added value for the organization. However, it is problematic to prove their direct impact. This issue is also related to the

humanities and causes a so – called crisis due to their controversial profitability. But the impact of ethics is reasonable. At contemporary challenges we can state this opinion “The importance of acting “ethically” is now widely recognized as an essential element of conducting research in any context or environment. It is an injunction contained in the many books on research methods, across the sciences, the arts, and the humanities. Very few of these books exclude at least some consideration of ethics as an area of concern. Indeed, there is a plethora of titles purely devoted to the ethics of research, often focusing on the particular concerns of different disciplines“ (Macfarlane, 2009, p. 1).

As we mentioned at the beginning of the paper, Martha C. Nussbaum in her work "Not for Profit, Why Democracy Needs Humanities" points to the reduction of humanities. Although the branches forming and demonstrating profitability hold leading positions, their overall profit orientation has a short-term nature. Such an action causes a retreat from critical thinking, independent thinking and empathy. Nussbaum (2010) considers these features to be important for the preservation of democracy. Economic benefit is not a goal, but a means, "strong economy is a means to human ends, not an end itself. Most of us would not want to live in a prosperous nation that has ceased to be democratic" (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 10). Profit is not an essential thing in life. Separate and critical thinking along with empathy are important components of human decision-making and the preservation of democracy. Individuals' acting on their own will tend to take responsibility for their own actions and consequently, they are more aware of the consequences of the proceedings. A negative phenomenon is the bureaucratization of life that does not create the conditions for independent and critical thinking (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 54). “The bureaucratization of social life and the relentless machinelike character of modern states had deadened people's moral imaginations<sup>1</sup>. Imagination/empathy are important, but they do not develop logic-based sciences working with facts. That's why we see the importance of applied ethics that works with moral imagination and case studies supporting empathy and imagination. Citizens can not relate well to the complex world around them by factual knowledge and logic alone. The third ability of the citizen, closely related to the first two, is what we can call the narrative imagination” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 95)<sup>2</sup>. The author points to the abilities mentioned above, such as independent thinking, critical thinking and empathy, which can be labeled as a narrative imagination helping a man feel into the situation of the other person.

Applied ethics, in the context of post-foundationalism, is oriented to techniques of "moral imagination and imaginative sympathy (the art of embodying the idea of better life and the

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<sup>1</sup> That means, that deadened people's moral imaginations leads to acquiesce in atrocities with no twinge of conscience (Nussbaum, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum proposes a transformation of the educational system, points to Rabindranath Tagore's success and the innovative approach in his experimental teaching. His experiment was based on reinforcing a student through Socrates' argumentation developing critical and individual thinking along with empathy.

feeling in the situation of others)" (Fobel et al., 2017, p. 18)<sup>3</sup>. It is necessary to develop the thinking when people do not prefer just profits but accept a broader view with seeking common solutions that will benefit everyone and create good society. And applied ethics is able to fulfill such a task. Its methods and procedures help to support ethical decision making, increasing ethical sensitivity, empathy, justice, and thereby contributing to a higher quality of ethics and a higher quality of life. Better workplace relationships, a more tolerant and fairer society, well-functioning institutions are all the factors enhancing quality of life. Why we need ethics? It's because „all issues in ethics have a personal dimension in that they have effect on individual lives and call for some kind of judgment on the individual's part. In addition, most ethical issues have a social dimension in that, for their resolution, they require some sort of group action by the community at large...and rules and codes are another important starting point in ethics (L. May, J.B. Delston, 2016, p. 2). When one is making decisions, which isn't typical, it's helpful to have some rules, codes, standards, which helps with the final decision. Academic researchers and students can have many problems in their research or everyday practice. To help them and increase the organization culture there is applied ethics with specific tools like codes of ethics, ethical committee and many others.

### 3. Conclusion – practical demonstration

An example of building values and promoting the ethical environment is the academic ethics at the University of Matej Bel (UMB) in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia ([www.umb.sk/...](http://www.umb.sk/)). Academic ethics itself is one of the applied ethics. Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics at the Faculty of Philosophy have implemented academic ethics into the structures of the UMB. Academic ethics is considered to be an appropriate instrument provoking an interest in the development of wise, moral, authentic and socially responsible persons at the whole university.

Academic ethics is characterized by a professional and organizationally institutional motive, "it is a sum of moral values, principles and rules regulating the behavior of all the members of the academic community, starting with academic, scientific and pedagogical staff as well as non-pedagogical staff and students" (Guitcheva, p 9).

The above-mentioned author, M. Nussbaum, considers the humanities to be important because of the development of wisdom and tolerance based on empathy. "Knowledge is no guarantee of good behavior, but ignorance is a virtual guarantee of bad behavior" (Nussbaum, 2010). Education itself does not guarantee good behavior, so it is necessary to promote openness and tolerance toward other opinions.

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<sup>3</sup> Teachers use case studies. Actors themselves introduce their moral dilemmas. Their solution and its consequences are made outright in the class.

Institutionally, academic ethics of the UMB is covered by two following committees: the Ethics Committee of the UMB employees (EKZ) and the Ethics Committee of the UMB students (EKŠ) with their own inferior statutes. Ethical codes are created both for employees and students. The core is the EKZ, which acts as an independent, expert advisory body of the Rector of the UMB, and the same independent and consultative status belongs to the EKŠ. The implementation of ethics in practice is ensured through the Code of Ethics for the UMB employees, which has been formed gradually, in line with the comments. After its formation and the first feedback, it was necessary to create the Student Code of Ethics at UMB, because the problems of the UMB student section were different from the UMB's staff section.

The ethical codes of employees and students include a preamble and expressed desirable values that help to meet mission and vision. Behavior of each member at UMB depends on respecting more detailed values. Commitments to these required values is a prerequisite for building the good name of UMB and working on a higher quality of interpersonal relationships, and finally, improving the quality of work and organizational culture. However, ethical codes are not the only form of ethical implementation. Both the mentioned committees have the certain assigned task in this field. They monitor compliance with the Code of Conduct, address all the possible violations, provide consultations in the case of ambiguities, work for improving ethical culture at UMB. They have representative members due to voting at the sessions. Moreover, UMB members can take part in ethical online training. Its intent is to enable them to train and improve their decision-making in line with academic ethics. The content of the training consists of appropriate answers related to basic decision-making questions and specific model case studies. The case studies consist of a description of the situation, alternatives to the solution, and subsequently have an ethically most matching solution in accordance with the Code of Conduct. The UMB's ethics culture service also has the opportunity to use the CETIP – Ethics Advisory Center, which works at the Department of Ethics and Applied Ethics at the Faculty of Humanities, UMB. UMB members and practitioners can contact the Center for consultation or professional ethical service. Applied ethics has a social and contributing significance because it works with a long-term orientation, is interested in good life, supports the values that have to improve the quality of life in accordance with modern trends and creates a more pleasant environment.

Ethical strategies are one of the possible steps to help stop the consequences of bureaucracy in the form of loss of sensitivity and self-esteem. The Code of Conduct determines the appropriate behavior, but the individual has to consider the consequences of his behavior. Applied ethics can be one way of halting the consequences of bureaucracy in the form of loss of sensitivity and self-esteem. Ethical programs help define the appropriate behavior, but the individual has to consider the consequences of their actions themselves. Ethical programs can help increase ethical sensitivity and thus develop their own opinions and support individual decision-making. Good interpersonal relationships and good practice are important for efficiency of the work and also for academics institutions. We need to prove that humanities

and also applied ethics can increase the profit, but in different indicators (relationships, integrity, values, long term orientation, ability to make decisions...). We don't need only profit, we need also good relationships, have quality institutions and services, not only access.

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