

# THE CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS OF PhD STUDENTS IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH

Bianca Elena RADU\*

## Abstract

*This study aims to analyse, through a transitional justice approach, the reparations granted by the Romanian state to the victims of the communist regime. The paper will examine the role of reparations in transitional justice programs, the main sources of international law and legal doctrine regarding reparations, as well as the evolution of the Romanian legislation on compensations for the abuses caused by the communist dictatorship. Eventually, we will try to assess the significance of reparations for the legal order of Romania. The present paper intends to present a series of moral dilemmas that can be lived throughout the period in which PhD students are elaborating their PhD thesis. To this end, the first part of the paper, which is based on documentation, will present a series of nuances that are subtended by the concept of moral dilemma, offering a series of examples such as Plato's dilemma, the student's dilemma, as presented by Sartre or Sophie's dilemma. In the second part, the differences that exist between the evaluation grids proposed by ethical theories and the manner in which they can generate various types of moral dilemmas in the lived life of individuals will be mentioned. In the last part, examples of moral dilemmas that can be lived through by PhD students throughout their doctoral programme will be presented following direct observation and self-observation.*

**Keywords:** doctoral research, PhD students, moral dilemmas, ethics, deontology.

## 1. Introduction

James Rosenau<sup>1</sup> states that while elaborating a PhD thesis, PhD students start on a search for *certainty* only to find that it resides in expressions such as “*apparently*”, “*probably*”, “*it seems that*”. Throughout this research endeavour they will understand that these expressions are goods that are much more valuable than the title of doctor that will accompany their name because they reflect *self-discipline*, *modesty* and *integrity*. These traits cannot be easily attained, since, in fact, they are acquisitions that differentiate adults from children and that mark professional and personal maturity. In this process of maturing, PhD students are confronted by a series of questions such as: how to do good? how to act right? how to make it so that my moral principles are in agreement with my choices? how to behave so that my actions do not generate negative effects on others, so that I have the feeling that I did what was right to do?

These questions put the PhD students in the position of choosing between two contradictory obligations. The present paper intends to present a series of moral dilemmas that can be lived throughout the period in which PhD students are elaborating their PhD thesis. The paper represents an incursion into the

analysis of certain ethical nuances, which are not very debated but are essential since they contribute to the re-evaluation of the responsibilities that the PhD students undertake throughout their doctoral programmes.

## 2. What are moral dilemmas?

*The moral dilemma* is that situation in which a person, found before *two contradictory actions*, is in the impossibility of accomplishing both, although they have moral reasons to fulfil each one of them.<sup>2</sup> The two contradictory actions represent moral obligations – requirements – that are identically stringent<sup>3</sup>. What are the particularities of a moral dilemma? Firstly, the person is asked to give course to each of the two actions (or with more contradictory actions). Secondly, the person can accomplish each of the actions *but* they cannot accomplish both or all actions at the same time.

The supporters of moral dilemmas appeal to arguments that are *phenomenological* in nature in order to sustain their explicative theoretical models. The phenomenological nature<sup>4</sup> considers as relevant the *feelings* of the person who experiences the conflictual situation generated by the existence of certain contradictory moral obligations. These feelings that follow the decision to act in a certain manner, to give course to one of the two moral obligations are called by

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\* PhD Candidate, Faculty of Law, „Nicolae Titulescu” University of Bucharest (e-mail:radu.biaelena@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> Telephone Interview with James Rosenau, *Teaching Political Science*, 1974, 1(2), pp. 266-280.

<sup>2</sup> Cecilia Tohăneanu, *Etică politică. Note de curs*, D.Cantemir University, Bucharest 2014, pp. 18-25; Ricardo de Oliveira-Souza & Jorge Moll, *Moral conduct and social behavior*, in Mark D' Esposito & Jordan H. Grafman, *Handbook of Clinical Neurology*, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2019, vol. 163, pp. 295-315; Philippa Foot, *Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1983, 80(7), pp. 379-398.

<sup>3</sup> Cecilia Tohăneanu, *Etică politică. Note de curs. .... op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Horgan, Terry & Mark Timmons, *Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory*, *Philosophical Issues*, 2005, 15, pp. 56-77.

ethicists *residues or moral leftovers*.<sup>5</sup> The feelings that arise from the decision can be of the most diverse sort, so that the person can feel regret, guilt for having done something wrong or for not having done what they considered they should have done or ought to have done, according to context and all of the variables involved. In what follows, I will refer to two moral dilemmas when, *in the same situation, more than one moral principle would apply*. For instance, Plato considers that *justice* presupposes *telling the truth* and *settling one's debts, keeping their promises*.<sup>6</sup> Socrates nuances this perspective, adding that the rule regarding settling one's debts is debatable and depends on context, on the actors involved: returning a weapon borrowed by a friend with mental illness could be a risk for the community as a result of the unpredictable actions that can result from their illness.<sup>7</sup> Which moral prevails? Settling one's debts or protecting others from harm? In the present situation, the two moral norms are in conflict.

Sartre<sup>8</sup> presents the case of a student who lost his brother in the German offensive of 1940. The student lived with his mother, being her support, as the only son left. The student wished to avenge the death of his brother. Sartre describes him as being torn between two types of morality. On the one hand, there is *the personal devotion* towards his mother, the expression of a restricted –but certain–, morality and, on the other hand, *the attempt to contribute to the defeat of an unjust aggressor*, which translates a more vast –but uncertain– morality.

*In other situations, the same moral principle represents the source of certain contradictory obligations.*

Such a case that exemplifies the manner in which the same moral percept generates contradictory obligations is presented by William Styron, in *Sophie's Choice*.<sup>9</sup> Styron tells that Sophie and her two children were in a Nazi concentration camp. A guard tells Sophie that *one* of her two children will be left alive while the other will be killed; the guard asks Sophie to *decide which child will be killed*. Sophie can prevent the death of either of her children, but only by condemning the other to death. Moreover, Sophie is told that *if she doesn't choose, both her children would be killed*. Sophie has a strong moral motivation to

*choose one of her children and just as strong a motivation to save them both.*

From what has been mentioned thus far, it can be deduced that moral dilemmas are situations in which a person, found before two contradictory obligations, does not know what to decide which of the two obligations is prevalent, which one they should fulfil. In most cases, moral dilemmas such as the ones previously mentioned are negated by utilitarians.<sup>10</sup> They consider that the obligation in such situations is to choose the best variant. Sophie thus *must* act to save one of her children, since this is the single and best choice in the given situation. However, reality's nuances are multiple, considering that individuals live in communities and are in a permanent exchange of information with their peers, in order to fulfil their daily tasks both personally, professionally and socially.

### 3. Possible explanations for moral dilemmas

*Duty-based ethics* -also called deontology- is based on the imperative of respecting norms, *virtue ethics* is based on moral valences that define a *good character*, while *utilitarians*, based on the selfish scope of individuals, consider actions that maximize pleasure as moral. By comparison to *duty-based ethics* which *a priori* established what is right/moral, utilitarians advance the idea that there is no right *as such*, it being dependant on each single individual. *Virtue ethics* - Aristotle- proposes a more balanced perspective, considering that individuals have the freedom to judge, in each given situation, those behavioural traits that make it relevant from a moral point of view. However, this judgement is shaped through processes of socialization and through the influence that the main moral agents have over individuals, throughout their lives.

These ethical systems (duty-based ethics - deontology-, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism) define morality and, namely, what is *good, right, proper*. Thus, they propose a set of norms that guide people's behaviour and activity: how they should behave, what to do to do good and not harm, etc. Moreover, these normative grids proposed by the ethical systems represent standards according to which individuals' activities are evaluated. According to these grids

<sup>5</sup> Georgiana Morley et al., *What is 'moral distress'? A narrative synthesis of the literature*, Nursing Ethics, 2019, 26(3), pp. 646-662.

<sup>6</sup> Terrance McConnell, *Moral Dilemmas*, in Edward Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (CA: Stanford University, 2018), available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-dilemmas/>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Philosophers, *Plato: The Republic*, Book I, available at <https://iep.utm.edu/republic/>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel Warburton, *A student's guide to Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism and Humanism*, available at:

[https://philosophynow.org/issues/15/A\\_students\\_guide\\_to\\_Jean-Paul\\_Sartres\\_Existentialism\\_and\\_Humanism](https://philosophynow.org/issues/15/A_students_guide_to_Jean-Paul_Sartres_Existentialism_and_Humanism), accessed April 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Durham, *William Styron's Sophie's Choice: The Structure of Oppression, Twentieth Century Literature*, 1984, 30(4), pp. 448-464.

<sup>10</sup> Cecilia Tohăneanu, *Etică politică ... op. cit.*, Daniel M. Bartels & David A. Pizarro, *The mismeasure of morals: Antisocial personality traits predict utilitarian responses to moral dilemmas*, *Cognition*, 2011, 121(1), pp. 154-161.

proposed by ethical theories, human behaviours are considered *moral* or *immoral*. *Moral dilemmas* are generated as a result of the interactions between the grids for ethical evaluation and individual personality structures.

*Duty-based ethics* (*deont* – duty; *logos* – discourse, science) is an ethics based on “duty” or “obligation”: human beings act in a certain way because they have the duty to act that way. Kant, as a central figure of duty-based ethics, considers that to be normal means to act according to duty (*deont*) or obligations: “act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”<sup>11</sup> Kantian ethics<sup>12</sup> established *a priori* what is right/moral, in other words, the two concepts are *precursor to the experience* of individuals and *independent* proposing a *universal code of norms* for moral behaviour. Human behaviour conforms to a universal standard, to certain rules that need to be followed in any circumstance: “act always so that you respect every human.”<sup>13</sup>

Ross, considered a representative of contemporary duty-based ethics, proposes a more flexible, pluralist perspective, namely, a set of duties considered as fundamental and to which human behaviour conforms. Thus, Ross<sup>14</sup> proposes the following duties: *benevolence* -the duty to help others-, *to do no harm* -the duty to avoid doing harm to others-, *justice* -the duty to guarantee people that they can obtain what they deserve-, *moral self-perfection*, *rewarding* -the duty of rewarding a fellow person if one did them wrong-, *gratitude* -the duty to do good to those who did good by us-, *keeping promises* -the duty to act according to explicit or implicit promises, including the implicit promise of telling the truth-. Unlike the Kantian monist deontology, the pluralist deontology allows a hierarchy of duties, human behaviour being guided by the *duties/obligations* listed by Ross. If the palette of duties is multiple, Ross proposes for individuals to act on the basis of the one considered as more important in the given situation. However, individuals have different system about good and evil, about long-term and short-term consequences of actions on others and themselves. This perspective is

different from what Kant proposes and namely pre-established, exogenous, *a priori* notions about good and evil, beyond the experiences accumulated at the individual level and the personal value filters.

*Virtue ethics* is centred on the agents of the actions and has Aristotel<sup>15</sup> as a main representative, who considers that virtue is a character trait useful for human beings to feel fulfilled. In the Aristotelian conception, the individuals who possess virtues become good people. However, it is important to notice the nuances. Even though individuals are possessors of certain virtues, this does not guarantee as well their moral behaviour. In order to act morally they need judgement and practical wisdom. The latter represents the capacity of acting right in a given *particular situation*. Thus, it can be deduced that, unlike Kantian deontology, the Aristotelian virtue ethics does not offer pre-made moral criteria, but rather favours the freedom space for individuals to *judge*, according to the given situation, those behavioural traits that make it relevant from a moral point of view. It can be noticed that virtue is found on one side, judgement or practical wisdom on the other, while last but not least Aristotle mentions the state of happiness or fulfilment. However, this last one can be reached only if judgement, which works on virtues to produce a moral behaviour, is used.

The virtue ethics proposes a set of moral rules, called *V Rules*.<sup>16</sup> However, *v* is not just the first letter of the word virtue but also the first letter of the word vice. This means that every virtue contains in itself an impulse that indicates to a *virtuous agent* characterized by judgement what they need to do in particular situations: *do what is right*. Furthermore, each vice contains, similar to an annex, also an interdiction that mentions to a virtuous agent who judges what to *not* do, in a particular situation: *do not do what is not right*. These impulses can be articulated even in an indirect manner and could supply a guide for behaviour as well.<sup>17</sup>

*Utilitarians* consider that our actions are guided by pain and pleasure.<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Bentham, as a main representative of utilitarianism, mentions that humanity’s inclination is to maximise pleasure and diminish suffering and pain. As a result, people who conform to this principle are considered to act rational,

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Bazele metafizicii moravurilor*, Antet Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 52, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Johnson & Adam Cureton, *Kant’s Moral Philosophy*, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford: Stanford University, Metaphysics Research Lab, 2021), available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Frankena William, *The Ethics of Respect for Persons*, *Philosophical Topics*, 1986, 14(2), pp. 149-167.

<sup>14</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, A Peer Reviewed Academic Resources, *William David Ross*, available at <https://iep.utm.edu/ross-wd/>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Fisher & Mark Dimmock, *Aristotelian Virtue Ethics, Unit 4: How One Should Live*, available at <https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/chapter/virtue-ethics/>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Cecilia Tohăneanu, *Etică politică ... op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse & Glen Pettigrove, *Virtue Ethics*, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Stanford: Stanford University, Metaphysics Research Lab, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, A Peer Reviewed Academic Resources, *Jeremy Bentham*, available at <https://iep.utm.edu/bentham/>, accessed April 2022.

meaning *moral*. The utilitarian tradition places at its center the notion of *good*, to the detriment of that which is right, thus considering that the notions of just and unjust do not exist *per se*, but are rather dependent on individuals. Through the utilitarian lens, individuals have the freedom to define their own good. Utilitarians rest on the natural sources of actions, on the selfish nature of human interests, which are considered to regulate behaviours in the moral direction.

Rawls<sup>19</sup> sanctions as incorrect the utilitarian reasoning, since the principle of choice, which is valid at the individual level, cannot be applied at the societal level. Moreover, maximising personal pleasure can produce injustice at a systemic level (at the level of communities and/or societies). For instance, the desire to obtain as many material benefits as possible can affect the medium or freedom of choice for other members of society.

#### 4. PhD students meeting with moral dilemmas

As it can be deduced from the theoretical part, what is defining for moral dilemmas is the acting agent's belief of not having successfully accomplished what they thought they *had* to do or the feeling of behaving in disaccord with their own principles. The case of the student presented by Sartre is one of the *obligation dilemmas* while Sophie's case is an *interdiction dilemma*. *The obligation dilemmas* impose the imperative to choose more than one possible action, while interdiction dilemmas are situations in which all the possible actions are forbidden.

In what follows I will present a series of moral dilemmas that can be lived throughout the doctoral programme by PhD students, referring, for a better understanding, to the theoretical framework presented.

##### #a. Will PhD students respect the rigours imposed by the university deontology and ethics codes in regard to copyrights, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, data fabrication or will they voluntarily renounce them?

Bob Ives, researcher at University of Nevada, carried out in 2016 a research entitled *Patterns and predictors of academic dishonesty in Romanian university students* together with a group of Romanian researchers. Of the 1127 Romanian students interviewed, 95% stated that they were involved in one or more acts that implied a lack of academic honesty.<sup>20</sup>

This percentage is higher by comparison to students from other countries in the area.

Plagiarius, in Latin, mean *he who steals*. The reasons why some PhD students resort to acts of plagiarism, self-plagiarism or data fabrication are diverse, so that independent research can be carried out. The present paper does not intend to analyse these reasons. However, some PhD students often find themselves in the situation of rendering entire texts, of paraphrasing ideas or fragments without correctly indicating the source, of presenting data without the author's permission, of appropriating tables, figures, without sending to the original source, etc.

This is an example of an *interdiction dilemma* since all of the possible actions are forbidden. The Deontology and Ethics Code of the Nicolae Titulescu University brings clear specifications regarding the quality indicators of a scientific work, the academic standards, and the originality of scientific works. In what follows I will attempt some reasoning.

A research endeavour imposes a detailed, rigorous, structured process with well-organised and articulated stages. PhD theses do not represent fragments gathered by chance or various bibliographical materials put together without a clear purpose; they do not, under any circumstance, represent a report. PhD theses presuppose an original research endeavour, with working hypotheses and a vast documentation. Moreover, during the past few years, due to some detailed investigations done by independent professionals and to the putting in place of certain anti-plagiarism programmes, it was determined that a high number of PhD theses do not respect the current academic norms, despite the moral standards and the legislation that sanctions these practices.

To this end I will mention some normative and legislative reference points. The *University Ethical and Management Council*<sup>21</sup> is an advisory body, not a legal entity, established on the basis of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, with its subsequent changes and additions, as part of the structure of the Ministry of National Education. It has the role to guide universities in formulating and implementing policies of academic ethics and integrity. On the other hand, on the basis of the *Ministerial Order no. 3.131/2018*,<sup>22</sup> there were compulsory classes in ethics and academic integrity - 14 hours, starting with the 2018-2019 university year-introduced at the level of master's and doctoral programmes. The aim of these normative bases (laws, orders, decrees) is to consolidate the organizational

<sup>19</sup> David Lyons, *Rawls Versus Utilitarianism*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1972, 69 (18), pp. 535-545.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Ives et al., "Patterns and predictors of academic dishonesty in Romanian university students", *Higher Education*, 2017, 74 (5), pp. 815-831.

<sup>21</sup> Obiectiv CEMU, available at <http://www.cemu.ro>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Order no. 3131 from 30 January 2018 regarding the inclusion of ethics and academic integrity courses in all education plans, for all the universitarian study programmes, organised in superior education institutions of the national education system, available at <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/ordin%203131-2018docx.pdf>, accessed April 2022.

culture of universities and to socialise their members (professors, students, researchers) with academic practices. The university institutional culture is based on norms and values that promote intellectual honesty, justice, responsibility, and sanctions obtaining academic advantages through means lacking probity.

The right to intellectual property is a right belonging to the category of property rights and it allows the author to benefit from their work and investment. *Art. 27 para. 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* mentions that “everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.”<sup>23</sup> *Article 7 from Law no. 8/1996*, which protects copyrights and related right in Romanian legislation, mentions that: “it constitutes the object of copyright original works of intellectual creation in the literary, artistic or scientific field, no matter the manner of creation, the manner or form of expression and independent from their value and destination...”.<sup>24</sup> According to *art. 17 para. 1 of the University Deontology and Ethics Code from the Nicolae Titulescu University*:<sup>25</sup> “the manner of expression and the content of the work are protected by copyright. Taking parts from previous works is allowed only with permission from the author or by using the correct use of the right of citation, as it is regulated by the copyright law.” The same Code defines plagiarism in *art. 18 para. 1* as “the action of a person who appropriates, without right, entirely or partially, the work of another author and presents it as a personal intellectual creation”, and self-plagiarism, in *art. 19 para. 1* as: “using in a written work or oral communication, including electronic versions, of texts, expressions, demonstrations, data, hypotheses, theories, results or scientific methods, extracted from written works, including electronic versions, of the same author(s) without mentioning this and without citing the original sources.”

PhD students become members of the academic community the moment they were admitted into the Doctoral School. What does this entail? The members of an academic community recognise and respect their scientific works. As it can be deduced from what was previously mentioned, violations of intellectual property rights, and thus of copyright, can result in legal proceedings. Together with the judicial responsibility there is a moral responsibility as well, deduced from the ethics codes of universities. Thus, each doctoral school has the right to evaluate and

sanction plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and data-falsification in doctoral research, if necessary.

PhD students who voluntarily renounce ethics codes and academic honesty, are found in the middle of a *moral dilemma*: *will they voluntarily and dishonestly appropriate the works of other authors to add content to their own thesis/research or will they violate the principles of the community they are a part of and, also, lose the legal and moral legitimacy of their status as PhD students?* Both possibilities are, at a theoretical level, forbidden, reason for which this type of dilemma is an example of an interdiction dilemma.

**#b. Will PhD students choose to allocate sums of money to acquire scientific materials, to participate in national/international conferences or to buy medication for a very close family member to save their life?**

Access to qualitative scientific articles that can be found in academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Elsevier, DOAJ, Sage, Springer, Jstor, is done through a subscription or via payment per article. Participating in certain conferences is done based on paying certain taxes; various other costs are added in relation to publishing some peer-reviewed articles, for certain specialised translations or corrections in English. PhD students engage in a research endeavour that cannot be accomplished without access to international databases. Furthermore, the papers presented in conferences and scientific publications represent a compulsory obligation for them. Both tasks necessitate access to certain financial resources besides will and determination.

In the case where PhD students are unexpectedly confronted with an unfortunate situation in their own family, when their children, husband, wife, or parents necessitate an expensive treatment, any financial resource becomes very important in saving the life of that family member.

Let us assume that PhD students have a limited amount of money at their disposition.

They are found caught in a *moral dilemma*: *will they invest the money in the resources necessary for their doctoral programme or will they allocate the money to the treatment necessary to save the life of the family member?* Both responsibilities are important but, in this case, the PhD students must choose only one of them. Ross, as a representative of the pluralist deontology, proposes several duties, as it can be observed in the theoretical section of the paper. The first is *benevolence* -the duty to help others-, so that, *keeping promises* -the duty to act according to explicit

<sup>23</sup> *Declarația universală a drepturilor omului*, available at <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/22751> accessed April 2022.

<sup>24</sup> *Legea nr. 8 din 14 martie 1996 (\*republicată\*) privind dreptul de autor și drepturile conexe\**, available at <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/7816>, accessed April 2022.

<sup>25</sup> *Universitatea “Nicolae Titulescu”, București, Codul de Etică și Deontologie Universitară*, available at <https://www.univnt.ro/index.php/comisia-de-etica/>, accessed April 2022.

and implicit promises- is placed a position lower. PhD students could resort to a hierarchisation of duties, according to their importance. According to their judgement, they will become virtuous agents and will transform virtues in moral behaviours.

**#c. Will PhD students choose to invest time to advance in their research endeavour or to exercise their professional and family tasks?**

PhD students can fulfil multiple roles that correspond to the constellation of statuses that they have in their personal and professional life. Thus, they can be parents, husbands, wives, they can have soliciting professional tasks, etc. It is not rare for social and professional roles to enter in conflict. For instance, in certain situations and life periods, professional roles can have a central position obscuring the other roles. The moment PhD students have decided to engage in the elaboration of a PhD thesis and, as a result, in an elaborate research endeavour, they have voluntarily chosen to add to the constellation of personal and professional roles and statuses another role that corresponds to the status of PhD student: to study, to research, to elaborate, to operationalise, to compare, to reflect, to analyse, to participate in various scientific manifestations, to conceive academic studies, etc. Moreover, this new role involves a redistribution of personal resources and of the tasks that PhD students had accomplished until they were admitted to their doctoral programmes, but also an allocation of time for doctoral research, in other words, a reorganization of the time of the former ones.

In one of the meetings I had with a family of professors in Portugal, the man recounted that in their youth, in order to work on her doctoral research, his wife had to stay for nine months in an unsanitary room in Paris, although they had a comfortable apartment in Portugal. Moreover, in the nine months they very rarely saw each other, since the doctoral research was very demanding.

*The dilemma in which the PhD students will find themselves is the following: will they reduce the time spent with their family/at work in order to advance their doctoral research projects or will they not accomplish the research duties, risking expulsion since they did not allocate enough time to them?*

Not fulfilling their doctoral duties involves not respecting the promise towards the advisor, but also towards the entire faculty of the Doctoral School, thus a behaviour lacking deontology. Doctoral Schools are periodically evaluated according to the scientific activity of the PhD students. In the case where one PhD student does not fulfil their obligations, they not only create a certain vulnerability in their own status, but they also affect the prestige of the Doctoral School.

On the other hand, a reduction in the time spent with their family or at the workplace, involves taking

on another way of managing family and professional duties. Since the decision of doing doctoral research was voluntary, it is presumed that PhD students have a strong motivation to invest time in their doctoral research.

In the Aristotelian perspective, in order to act morally, PhD students would need judgement also called *practical wisdom*, meaning the capacity to act right as long as they have assumed the status and role of PhD students. They have the freedom *to judge* according to this new role those behavioural traits that make it relevant from a moral point of view. In other words, it would be moral for them to accomplish their duties. The accomplishment that Aristotle speaks of could be associated with finalizing the doctoral research. However, this can only take place if the virtues of the PhD students are transformed in moral behaviours under their judgement.

**#d. Will PhD students accept duties related to their doctoral programmes (teaching or administrative activities, etc.) or will they prefer to ignore them, thus causing disparities in regards to the distribution of responsibilities among the group of PhD students?**

Let us assume that PhD students are asked to report their scientific activity in view of the evaluation of the Doctoral School or that they are asked to carry out teaching activities, such as seminars or other duties related to their doctoral programme. For instance, their lack of collaboration in reporting the situation regarding their scientific activity will disrupt the evaluation process; as a result, other individuals - colleagues or administrative personnel- will have to accomplish this duty. In case they will ignore the activities that were attributed to, they will not only not accomplish their duties, but they will also disrupt the learning process itself, other colleagues having to get involved in the teaching activity, supplementing their teaching load.

*The dilemma in which they are found is the following: they either ignore their doctoral duties, or they show moral responsibility and, as a result, they do their duty -they fulfil the duties that they were attributed within the doctoral programme-*

I will attempt an explanation from the perspective of deontological ethics (that of duty), of the utilitarian one, and of virtue ethics. I would like to restate that these ethical systems propose behavioural rules according to which individuals' behaviours are considered as moral or immoral.

If we were to relate to the model proposed by the *utilitarian ethics*, the individuals have the freedom to define their own good, meaning to maximise pleasure and diminish suffering and pain. The selfish nature of human interests is considered to be the one that regulates individuals' behaviours. However, when their

personal actions are not completely independent -as it is in many life situations-, the selfish nature of personal actions can affect those around them, whether they are colleagues or partners in various projects. This maximisation of personal pleasure, considered as moral by utilitarians, could have an unfavourable impact over the professional group of which PhD students are a part.

In the pluralist *deontic ethics* perspective promoted by Ross, the duty to help others takes first place. Moreover, Kant's *duty-based ethics* (deontology: *deont* – duty; *logos* – discourse, science) is an ethics based on duty/obligation. PhD students have the duty to respect their tasks, *have the duty* to behave so as to consider humanity both in their person and that of others, *always as an end and never simply as a means*.<sup>26</sup> Kant considers that treating humanity with respect means conforming to universal rule standards.

*Virtue ethics*, as a balanced space between the aforementioned two, focuses on the capacity to act right in a given situation. In other words, PhD students can use their practical wisdom, judgement to be moral. *The moral V rules* proposed by the virtue ethics indicate to PhD students, as virtuous agents, how to act right on the one hand, and what not to do so that their behaviour is not unjust on the other hand.

**#e. Will PhD students constantly manifest their commitment towards their advisor honouring their initial promise towards them or will they abandon this given promise, in order to honour other promises?**

A key element of the doctoral endeavour is the advisors – PhD students relation. This professional relation can fundamentally mark the direction of the research endeavour but also the manner in which PhD students will mature academically and personally. Advisors do not represent only an important resource of information and scientific guiding, but can also build models of academic integrity and honesty. The professional advisors – PhD students relation can be similar to a melting pot where ideas and principles intersect, where new knowledge tracks are outlined, as a result of intellectual emulation, where PhD students are challenged to think, reflect, surpass their intellectual limits by accumulating new knowledge, to create based on the information accumulated.

It is not rare for short-circuits to happen in this relation. If at the beginning stage, PhD students undertake a commitment to respect the duties they have towards their advisors, these promises are sometimes abandoned along the way. When I refer to abandoned promises, I think about a series of indicators, namely: PhD students do not present in time the promised

materials, they do not respect the indications from the advisors, they do not respect the principles that ensure the scientific quality of materials, they interrupt communication with advisors over longer periods of time, etc. When these behaviours are repeated, they become constitutive behavioural norms.

*The moral dilemma* in this case is: *they either behave right/moral meaning they fulfil the promises made towards their advisors, or they choose to fulfil other promises and to get involved in other activities that they consider as more important, thus affecting both their professional relation with their advisor and the scientific quality of their doctoral research.*

PhD students are found before *two contradictory actions*, since they cannot carry out both, although they have moral reasons to accomplish each one of them.

However, the erosion of the relation with the PhD advisor takes place only through a repetitive behaviour. In other words, PhD students abandon the promise made initially in countless situations, choosing to honour other promises (personal, professional, or social). I will refer back to the theoretical framework to give arguments.

Plato considers that acting right/moral entails *telling the truth and fulfilling your duties, keeping promises*. Otherwise, the behaviour is not right.

In the monist Kantian deontology, to be moral means to act according to duty (*deont*) or obligation. In other words, the rules must be followed in all circumstances. In this case, the famous Kant quotation “always treat humanity with respect”<sup>27</sup> could be adapted as follows: *always treat PhD advisors with respect*. Otherwise, immorality results as a lack of fulfilling the duties that PhD students undertook at the beginning of their doctoral programmes.

Assuming that Kant's deontology is too rigorous, I will take as a standard the list of *duties/obligations* proposed by Ross'pluralist deontology, which is considered as having a more flexible approach. However, PhD students do not honour a series of important obligations proposed by the author here either:

- to not do harm -the duty to avoid doing harm onto others -: through their behaviour of not respecting their undertakings, PhD students can do harm onto their advisors by putting them in a delicate situation;
- justice -the duty to guarantee people that they get what they deserve-: advisors deserve respect and seriousness from behalf of the PhD students; in the case where PhD students manifest disengagement and do not fulfil their obligations, the duty to be right/moral is not fulfilled;
- gratitude -the duty to do good onto others who did

<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Bazele metafizicii moravurilor ...op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Frankena, William, *The Ethics of Respect for Persons*, Philosophical Topics, 1986, 14(2), pp. 149-167.

good by us-: advisors who organise work meetings, distribute materials, give comments on texts, etc. offer a real support to PhD students, in other words, they do much good by them; in the case where PhD students do not respond in kind, they do not fulfil their obligation of manifesting gratitude;

- keeping promises -the duty to act according to explicit and implicit promises, including the implicit promise of telling the truth-: in the case where PhD students do not present their materials, do not honour their work meetings, do not create materials that respect scientific criteria, etc. it can be concluded that their obligation of keeping their promises was not respected.

## 5. Conclusions

A series of conclusions can be drawn from the present study.

Ethics, as a normative discipline, prescribes rules, norms, and universals at the general level. The theories of ethics propose rules of behaviour to individuals: how they must act, what is indicated to do, not do, etc. Moral dilemmas appear as a result of the interactions between the codes of conduct proposed by the theoretical models and the value structures of individuals/the manner in which individuals live the codes of norms; moral dilemmas challenge individuals to choose between two or more contradictory moral obligations, without being able to give course to both or all of them.

Despite promoting university ethics and deontology within higher education institutions, unethical behaviours are frequently encountered with students (see the study by Bob Ives, 2016).

The doctoral programme can represent a stage in the personal and professional maturing of PhD students. As mentioned by Rosenau, PhD students have the possibility to acquire goods such as integrity, modesty, or self-discipline. This process of transformation does not however come by itself, but it rather represents a succession of stages, among which the students' confrontation with a series of moral dilemmas: they find themselves in the situation of choosing to either invest time and resources to give course to other personal, social, or professional obligations, or to fulfil their research obligations strictly, taking into consideration the promises made and the responsibilities they have as PhD students.

Finally, I would formulate a hypothesis that was shaped during the present study: between realizing the work related to their research endeavour at scientific standards and ethical principles there is a determinist relation, namely: the more correct, involved and sincere the PhD students are towards the promises made, the higher the chances for the research endeavour to be adjusted and improved. And the vice-versa could be valid as well but, as mentioned, this is just a hypothesis.

This hypothesis could be developed in future research.

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