Review of the Volume “Bioethics in Crisis or the Crisis of Bioethics? An Anthropology of the Pandemic in the Medicalized Society”, Author: Antonio Sandu, Lumen Publishing House, 2020

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Abstract: The volume “Bioethics in crisis or a crisis of bioethics? An anthropology of the pandemic in the medicalized society”, authored by Antonio Sandu and published by Lumen Publishing House from Iasi, in 2020, is not at all what bioethicists might expect. It is more than they expected. It is a book that not only deals with traditional topics of bioethics, but also takes on new discussions, newly spawned by the current COVID-19 medical and social crisis. It is not only a book for bioethicists, be they philosophers or specialists in the medical field, but it is also an eye opener for sociologists and law specialists.

Keywords: *Bioethics; COVID-19; anthropology; Antonio Sandu.*

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I will start this book review with the perspective of the law specialist, who about 15 years ago, being a young master's student who had just graduated from law school, began to be concerned with something that at that time was an emerging branch of law, namely biolaw, which in law is the sister branch of what in medicine is bioethics. Later, the field of bioethics claimed my full attention as a sociologist and as a bioethicist alike, and over the years I had numerous discussions with the author of the volume on multiple topics in the field of bioethics, having the opportunity to hear, sometimes among the first, some of the theories presented in the volume "Bioethics in crisis or a crisis of bioethics? An anthropology of the pandemic in the medicalized society" (Sandu, 2020a). Personally, for two years I waited for the book to appear, and what came into print was something different than I expected, because the volume was marked, as the title itself shows, by the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the volume did not lose any of what I know the author intended to accomplish when he proposed his writing, but gained in complexity and depth.

The author is well known as an author in the field of bioethics both in Romania and abroad, being a member of the International Association of Bioethics, teaching the discipline of bioethics (under its specific title in the curriculum) at Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, and in his capacity as a doctoral coordinator of the Doctoral School of Sociology from the University of Oradea, he is recognized as having a predilection in coordinating doctoral theses with transdisciplinary specifics, among the topics chosen to be studied in sociological context being preferred those related to bioethics. Also, being a philosopher, the author brings in his bioethical analysis a plus taken from classical philosophy and contemporary applied philosophy. His secondary training as a law scholar also helps him broaden his perspective, so that the volume, benefiting from all the experience of the author in different fields of social and humanistic sciences, is an analysis that could hardly be undertaken by another author, who would not benefit from such a scientific background.

Such a complex researcher could be said to approach bioethics, if we were to use a standardized expression, from a transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspective. In reality, however, the right expression would be that he does it... magical. And the presentation is also a little different than usual. The volume was published in two languages, once in Romanian, under the title "Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii? O filosofie a pandemiei în societatea medicalizată" (Sandu, 2020b), and the reader of this edition, also published by Lumen Publishing House, benefits, as a bonus, from a video presentation made by the author, through six DVDs that accompany the

volume, and second in English, under the title "Bioethics in crisis or a crisis of bioethics? An anthropology of the pandemic in the medicalized society".

Why a bioethics in crisis? Because bioethics deals with everything that is new, emerging and affects the human, the humane, the biological. Therefore, we are always on the verge of a crisis in bioethics. Then the subtitle tells us that the speech was adapted: "An anthropology of the pandemic in the medicalized society", and in these times, when we say pandemic we automatically think of COVID-19. However, those who would expect to find only discussions about COVID-19 between the pages of the book are wrong. Those who expect to find a bioethics treatise in the pages of the book, containing all the major themes in the field of bioethics, are wrong again. Those who expect, instead, to find a text that will open their minds and open their eyes, will find exactly what is expected.

The volume is part of a line of publications that Lumen Publishing House has been promoting for several years, books aimed at the subject of deconstructing ethical values in the postmodern society (Frunză, 2016), disease as a social phenomenon (Frunză, 2017) or the right to privacy versus the interest of the society to regulate the limits of this right (Simionovici, 2019).

In the case of this book (Sandu, 2020a) we discuss, however, about a complex text, which somehow addresses all these topics interspersed, being like a journey, but not as a regular journey, but mostly like one at the speed of light through so many areas of the social, which are implicitly the same of many fields of bioethics, so that in the same page one passes from one subject to another, with a sometimes almost confusing speed, from a philosophical approach to a strictly bioethical one, then to a sociological one, but in the end all this confusion materializes in a harmony of ideas and... no conclusions. This is because the author does not draw conclusions, but rather lets the reader draw their own conclusions. The text and how it was written were influenced by the contact the author had with the readers during the writing of the volume, when the lectures that are the subject of the six DVDs were held online and attracted the most diverse interactions with the audience.

It is a way of writing bioethics in the purest postmodern sense, departing from the ex cathedra style of classical bioethical texts. In the case of this volume, the ethics specialist does not preach what is good and well from his perspective, does not show what is negative or what are the vulnerable points and, especially, does not teach ethics lessons. Antonio Sandu frees himself from this position and prefers to send the reader on a journey within himself and to approach his bioethics according to each reader's perception

of what is ethical. The reader ends up wondering, in the end, what is his own system of values and what are the criteria according to which he calibrates his system of values. It is an invitation not to find answers, but to dialogue.

The author begins by talking about autonomy in general, then makes the reader wonder how many times he has consented without being informed, then presents the medicalized society, in which people appeal to medicine or what they understand by medicine as a surrogate for happiness, in a society in which the refusal of introspection has become an increasingly common way of life, as this is a frightening approach for a society with a confused value system. Then the author takes us on a philosophical journey, talking about communicative action, about how we influence each other through communication, how we perceive what we hear from social influencers, while addressing the issue of group interests and fake news.

Then the author addresses the aspect of public policies and the danger of public policies that violate sound ethical principles, which should be applied correctly. Subsequently, the author attacks the problem of how a major risk situation, felt by an entire planet, in a society recognized as being a risk society in general, but in which currently there is a situation that makes us all aware of the risks we are exposed to, calls into question public policies, more precisely their manner of adoption, the burning of stages, the fact that public consultation is being skipped and that some things are imposed, from a position of superiority, in the name of phrases such as "public good" and "public health safety" in order to promote a series of policies that at first glance can be considered positive, but that hide behind a discourse that will seduce us until it draws us away from what should be ethical in a society.

The author also addresses the subject of scientific truth, of the way research is done on human subjects in a society under pressure, in which there is a strong demand for medical results. Then, after discussing medical and philosophical aspects, he comes to present us with another image of society. Here appears the sociologist who talks about the virtualization of social space, about moving ourselves from the concrete space of physical interaction between people in a space without borders and limits and, from a certain point of view, still without rules (the internet). Topics such as infodemia, fake news, the addiction to ideas that are not ours are addressed, all under the broader umbrella of bioethical principles. Even these principles are questioned and their actuality is analyzed in their capacity as principles of classical ethics, of a Kantian philosophical nature. The book is a review of what we were as a society before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is an inventory of the aspects we face now and an exercise of imagination.

The text of the book is extremely approachable, therefore slipping into the imagination exercise proposed by the author is not at all difficult, even for the reader who is unfamiliar with bioethical thinking, so anyone reading the book finds that in the end they would ask "what would I do, what would I decide, what would I like the world to be like in the future? ". It is a book about the responsibility of each of us. That is why I invite you to read this book. For all those who until now believed that bioethics is something that is only discussed among specialists, this book comes to prove that, in fact, bioethics is made by each of us.

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