I. A PHILOSOPHICAL GLIMPSE OF NON-CONFORMISM

Professionalism is a Humanism

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To borrow Sartre's famous title "existentialism is a humanism", I think that professionalism needs and deserves to be considered primarily as an opportunity and prospect for the promotion and maintenance of humanism in personal and social existence. By "humanism" I do not mean particularly the understanding of Sartre and the existentialists nor abstract philanthropy, kindness, and the uncritical selflessness that are often confused and replaced with gratuitous volunteerism and eccentric charity. I mean humanism according to the etymological sense of the word.

The journey of the word through the ages in theories and interpretations is estranged almost imperceptibly from its linguistic roots. The first is the most ancient sense, the sense of the natural home: *humus*, fertile layer, from which grows all life, also human. From this view, the "humane" is something earthly, ordinary, and trivial. Unlike *divinitas* (sacred, divine things), it refers to practical matters of secular life, but not to knowledge and activities related to Scripture. *Humanitas* was understood in this way by clerics and scholars at the time of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. "Humanitarian" for them was the one discipline that included the study of fine letters and discourse: rhetoric, logic, the works of Greek and Roman authors, and the humanist was "someone who taught those subjects or provided material for others".[1] In this sense *humanitas* is a theory and practice, associated with the most human of all human things – speech, thought, education, and training. But even then, in ancient times, the word was ambiguous depending on who used it – the

[1] T. Davies, *Humanism* (Routledge Press, 2008), 126.

masses or the enlightened man, as Aulus Gellius remarked in *Attic Nights* (*Noctes Atticae)*. In a note about the word *humanitas* he states that it was not always used in the sense of "humanity" and of cooperation, but of favor to all people without distinction.[2] Its older meaning was closer to what the Greeks called education, and what the Romans conceived as teaching and learning in the sciences and arts, because the care for their study and the affinity to them is given to no other living creatures except man. Therefore it is called *humanitas* – humanity. So etymologically, the ancestor of "humanism", appears ambiguous, the winner of two different meanings that exist and are used independently of each other.

The first of these can be defined as "educational" and refers to the concept of elite education, dominant both at the time of Aulus Gellius and long after it, up to the Enlightenment period. According to him, education is appropriate and necessary for the lords' exercise, for those who have power and social status which require learning and training by the cultivation of the ability to think logically and speak convincingly, to exercise successful power. In this context, education is more a function and privilege of power: although it is a universal pursuit, erudition is not attainable by all. So it becomes understandable, as B. Russell insists, that curiosity and the acquisi-

[2] Gellius, Aulus, Noctes Atticae, XIII, 17: "Humanitatem" non significare id, quod volgus putat, sed eo vocabulo, qui sinceriter locuti sunt, magis proprie esse usos.I. Qui verba Latina fecerunt quique his probe usi sunt, "humanitatem" non id esse voluerunt, quod volgus existimat quodque a Graecis philanthropia dicitur et significat dexteritatem quandam benivolentiamque erga omnis homines promiscam, sed "humanitatem" appellaverunt id propemodum, quod Graeci paideian vocant, nos eruditionem institutionemque in bonas artis dicimus. Quas qui sinceriter cupiunt adpetuntque, hi sunt vel maxime humanissimi. Huius enim scientiae cura et disciplina ex universis animantibus uni homini datast idcircoque "humanitas" appellata est.II. Sic igitur eo verbo veteres esse usos et cumprimis M. Varronem Marcumque Tullium omnes ferme libri declarant. Quamobrem satis habui unum interim exemplum promere.III. Itaque verba posui Varronis e libro rerum humanarum primo, cuius principium hoc est: "Praxiteles, qui propter artificium egregium nemini est paulum modo humaniori ignotus". V. "Humaniori" inquit non ita, ut vulgo dicitur, facili et tractabili et benivolo, tametsi rudis litterarum sit – hoc enim cum sententia nequaquam convenit -, sed eruditiori doctiorique, qui Praxitelem, quid fuerit, et ex libris et ex historia cognoverit. (http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/gellius13.html#17)

tion of knowledge are "a kind of love for power".[3]

The second meaning of humanitas reflects the idea of morality as humanity. Underlying this idea is the understanding of love as the ability of humans to care for others and to not be indifferent to the fate and circumstances of those whom we love. The subsequent history of humanistic ideas reveals the basic preponderance and gradual imposition of this second meaning, with which "humanism" is popular today – to emphasize a moral attitude towards others. Our morality is in readiness for humanism – humanity, which is always limited and therefore always insufficient. On the one hand, our finiteness is in seeing "humanity" too broadly, as an abstract category, an empirically untouchable object. On the other hand, as John Durham Peters noticed, quoting Kierkegaard, in Love the individual is placed above the general: the requirement for helping a neighbor in need is a stronger calling than the requirement to help all hungry orphans in the world.[4]

Peters also remarks, that although we insist on love for all people, our physical limitations do not provide us enough time to allow us real intimacy and so we are able to care for only a few. In the course of our lives it can be with relatively few people; we can love only personally. In this sense, love is paradoxical because its requirements are universal, but it is only possible as a concrete engagement since we can share our time and physical proximity with only some but not all people. Overcoming this paradox seems possible when humanism is seen not just as a dimension of love, but as a way of freedom. Its road is in education, in the sense of enlightenment that makes people knowledgeable and humane because it implies self-improvement through teaching and learning. It's not accidentally that humanists such as Montaigne and Rousseau discussed education more than the ideal state.

Today the concept of improvement and self-improvement through cognition and learning is associated mostly with what is called "higher education" because it provides knowledge based on scientific achievements. Often, however, people forget that it is called so, not only because we receive

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[3] B. Russell, *Marriage and Morals* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1929).

[4] John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

it through university, but also because in the university, according to Ortega y Gasset, the average student "will be prepared as a good specialist and a cultural man".[5] In other words, learning skills for this knowledge is interpreted and applied in a spirit of humanism, the readiness of humanity, hand-in-hand with the utilization of the expertise required of every professional specialist.

In this context, the discussion of professionalism requires that it mean an ethical category which is associated with a specific morality, based on certain social paradigms. Therefore the question arises: Is it possible for there to be other discussion of professionalism other than merely as technical skill?

At first glance the question seems rhetorical and superfluous in view of the tautology that it contains, but such an impression is misleading because it leads to a rhetorical answer. As if, for example, professionalism can be spoken of only by professionals. From this view, any professional can talk about professionalism, but not about the professionalism of every profession, only for certain ones – the professionalism of the profession that they practice.

But what implies a discourse of professionalism as human quality, norms, and standards of behavior, choice of action, cooperation, and relationships between people? This question is no longer a matter of professionalism but of ethics. In a sense, ethical discourse can be professional when it is done by people involved professionally with ethics: teachers, scientists, and professors of ethics. Ethics is then exercised and understood as a specialized, theoretical (philosophical) cognitive aspect of morality.

But ethics can also be understood in other, different senses, which was noticed for the first time by Aristotle. This is the meaning of ethics as knowledge about moral experience as daily practice of governing behavioral interactions and relationships between people living together in society but doing (performing) different things. In this case, an ethical discussion of professionalism cannot remain within one's own professional discourse because it relates to human ethos as a civil position and social status. In such a

[5] José Ortega y Gasset, *Misión de la Universidad* [Mission of the university], tr. by Howard Lee Nostrand, 1930.

condition, various professions and their communities are constituted and legitimized, as is evidenced by their histories. This historical frame suggests that the modern professionalization of labor has its own tradition and principle in the face of the modern, urban type of culture and lifestyle, as well as the modern model of citizenship, also known as civil society.

The predecessor of this culture and society is the medieval town from the twelfth century. In this period, cities represented new forces, which, from the late-Middle Ages they turned into the most influential political and economic centers, and formed the core of a new Europe: Europe as the *topos* of civil liberties. Actually, the new is a new principle of European urbanization, thinking about the city as *libertas* and that "urban air makes us free". Besides greater communal autonomy, this freedom gives people the confidence and awareness of belonging to a different social order – the order of "people without a master" as bakers, printers, weavers, traders, masters, etc.

All such citizens lead lifestyles that do not attach them firmly to the vertical chains of themselves and to the hull of a traditional society. The only rules they recognize are the city's laws and general norms. According to their norms, all rivalries and conflicts among residents, who gave an oath of citizenship, are resolved. In addition, citizenship, as noted by Michael Walzer, is "the first position, key social and political [space]... and a prerequisite for all other positions, as far as non-citizens have no right to run for office;"[6] that is, citizenship is any position from which the political community as a whole has an interest, selects who should administer it and regulates the procedures by which people are to be elected.

New forms now distinguish this choice in the modern world. In this world the distribution of positions is not inherited or sold and cannot be appropriated by private individuals. In this world is every job for which a diploma is required for every job so that "all citizens, or at least all citizens with the minimum qualifications or skills, have the right to be taken into account in the appointment of office".[7] This freedom that allows civil equality

[6] M. Walzer, Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

[7] Ibid.

is the source of a new form of competition and rivalry between individuals, and a new kind of power. It is a power that is not typically based on physical force or wealth but on knowledge, skills, and experience, which suggests in each the qualification of professional training.

From this view we can say that the professionalist is primarily a citizen who can occupy a post, because he is "certified" and has a qualification whose legitimacy is based on criteria other than the "market" or at least not only the market because it refers to common values and goals of the society.

In particular, modern society is a community where people come together, guided by the idea of themselves as citizens: as free and equal in dignity and rights, based on reciprocal recognition of everyone as autonomous and responsible individuals. So mutual recognition of rights includes an implicit understanding of human dignity, and the related respect and observance of a person's autonomy and inviolability as a fundamental and inalienable right alongside the rights to life, physical and personal.

Not coincidentally, the same understanding is central to modern professional codes of ethics in various practices. The pursuit of a profession is now more than ever linked to social positions and described by Uolzar as "a place of confidence, legally established power or subordination... position or job".

As a professional place, however, the position is related to specific standards of rationality, fairness, and efficiency that cannot be applied mechanically but require an assessment by the person who depends on their implementation. The assessment itself is not a question of standards – there is no standard that defines how to do an assessment. Therefore, the assessment depends exclusively on the goodwill and the qualities of the assessor, his competence and honesty, ability and preparedness to assess, so that his decision does not conflict with standards and does not replace the objectives in the name of which they are taken.

Thus, professional standards, unlike social ones, are not formal and mandatory but recommendable and guiding because they are designed to delineate the limits of possible decisions, not to command what is to be decided. This means that the professional can be criticized by those whose interests affect his assessment (decision) when the assessment does not satisfy

them or, worse, when it prejudices those interests.

Such a view allows the word "professional" to be understood as "every professional" and not just a certain type – doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, etc. Consequently, if we want to say something that is valid about professionalism, and that can be valid for all professionals and non-professionals alike, it is to insist on professionalism and to have it as an objective, thanks to ethics, which is required in every occupation. This insistence and the desire for it today are facts. There is also the fact that the lives of increasingly more people are dependent on professionaly differentiated and professionaly regulated relations and behavior.

Undoubtedly the first and obvious reason for the increasing professionalisation in the form of new professional fields and new requirements to existing professions is the progress of science and the application of its achievements in the form of various technologies whose use requires knowledge and training. An inevitable result of this process is the intellectualization of labor and people's lives, their communication, cooperation, and coexistence. In short, we live in a culture of professionalism. Of course, the attitude to this varies because some professions are among the contexts in which people can experience first hand the old community sources of moral obligation, whereas others see them as a conspiracy of specialists against non-specialists.

On the other hand, the increasing importance of professionalism on a global scale means that this discussion does not relate only to private, local interests – the interests of individual professionals or their communities – but also to the public interest. Its public character can be seen in the potential for the consolidation of professions, the solidarity which can provoke collegial relationships in professional communities, between those who identify themselves as similar thanks to the intellectual qualities and social significance of their professions.

In the world of globalisation and its information society – in which people communicate mostly in the language of professionals – professional communities emerge as serious competitors to the old, traditional identity-models based on religion, nationality, and race. From this view, the presence or absence of interest in the situation and development of the professions is not only an indication of our attitude towards them, it is a criterion and a basic

condition for their prosperity or decline, development or neglect, in each particular society, and therefore the public status of the very people living in it.

A good professional is usually spoken of as the good man, the moral man, because the words "good" and "moral" are often understood as synonyms connoting valuable, important qualities from the standpoint of morality and free choice. In the same way, when we talk about "professionalism" we usually means what is positive, acceptable, and desirable in the exercise of the professions. In this sense, professionalism is a synonym of good. Otherwise we should talk about "moral" and "immoral" professionalism, which is like talking about "moral honesty", "moral love", or "moral justice".

Of course, moral and good (also professionalism and morality), are not completely identical in content. Their duplication is partly because the good is not limited and is not identified with everything moral, and "professionalism" does not exhaust the entire area of professionalism but describes the ethical paradigm necessary to the practice of any given profession. According to this paradigm, professionalism is the core of professional ethics, valid for people who practice the same profession, as the good is the core of everyday morality, valid for humans as private individuals, as subjects of private life.

Professionalism in this sense is also a reason for morality, the subject of a special professional ethics, including specific responsibilities and moral obligations governing "the ways in which professional activities affect moral rights".[8] The only justification for the specificity of these rights is the social significance of professions: that the professions take care of promoting, maintaining, and guaranteeing one or another social good, such as peace, justice, life, health, knowledge, etc.

Although we have known technological details for a long time, we have to remind ourselves how to apply them in regard to professional behavior. Indeed, the expertise and skills for their application attach a particular status to the profession as a set of skills and a combination of competences that include ethical skills achievable alongside specialized training. This is different from traditional notions of morality, which are not questions of

[8] Benjamin Freedman, "What really makes professional morality different: Response to Martin" in *Ethics*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (July, 1981), 626-630.

competence but of socialization, a personal and shared moral culture.

Professionals in a particular area often appear as a privileged group because of their belonging to a specific community or body of knowledge, around which they form the basis of specialized education and training. Being privileged implies having power. In this line of thinking, it is appropriate to cite what Alvin Toffler noticed in his work *The Third Wave*: that knowledge is the source of power of the highest quality because it allows us to avoid traditional means of pressure, such as violence or wealth, to be persuaded, and to get other people to act in a certain way in anticipation of answers to their personal interests.[9] With particular force, Toffler's words refer to expert (professional) knowledge with regard to the power understood as an opportunity to impact, influence, guide behavior and thinking, our attitudes, our desires, and thus to achieve one or another goal. Like every form of power, the professionals' power is not absolute. It is relative because the nature of expertise today, in the age of information technology and mass-communications, is permanently lost by the charisma of its esotericism.

The loss is that everything done by the doctor, lawyer, administrator, or bank clerk can be put in doubt by their customers, clients, and patients, since if desired every person can in principle learn the rudiments of a profession from access to public discussions, the internet, or reading. While they cannot do this in full, they can get much of what these professionals know. Another reason for the relativity of that power is its "official" limitation with "publicly" imposed and controlled procedures and criteria for the authorization of any professional practice. The main argument of these restrictions is that we are not willing to leave helpless or needy people to be dependent on the self-styled officials who have not undergone the necessary process of training or examinations.[10]

Therefore, if the determination of professionalism relates to use knowledge, the freedom of its use, as well as moral right, then the autonomy of professionals choice about how to use that knowledge must also include responsibility for that choice. In this sense, professionalism is a paradoxical point of overlapping power and freedom and obtains by their balance. The

[9] Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (Bantam Books, 1980).
[10] M. Walzer, op. cit.

equilibrium of power is a privilege that is received by means of the knowledge and freedom to use it.

Of course, knowledge serves the goal of determining the criteria for the balance. When this goal is one or another social good, it is – because it is important for all – fundamental. Whence comes the agenda for the professional use of knowledge. It would seem that the basic sense of professional autonomy is this: the interiorization of responsibility as awareness of the need for the adequate (professional) reaction to certain expectations, fixed in professional (ethical) standards. From this point of view, professionalism can be a kind of self-awareness and an ability to perform reliable self-assessment according to patterns that are established and recognized as professional because the motive for their observance is not only a specific, private interest, a separate single benefit of professionals and non-professionals, but also the social good and the importance of the professions, of their conscientious practice in the name of values and goals that are not only individual but also social goods, e.g., life, health, peace, knowledge, etc.

In the same context, from Walzer's view of professionalism, we may posit: "an ethical code, social connection, model of mutual regulation and self-discipline".[11] The mutuality of this regulation is in the realization of professional "feedback" together with non-professionals. These relationships depend on the distance that professionals actually establish and tend to establish between themselves and others. According to the size of their domain, they can choose to command or to cooperate with others, whether to impose more categorical than hypothetical imperatives, tempted by an intoxicating sense of superiority and contempt towards ignorance. Or they might resist the temptation to impose their wills on others and to prefer authoritarian behavior by reason of the authoritarian recognition of the humanistic paradigm of professionalism.

This is the paradigm of professionalism as a specific attitude towards knowledge and understanding – that we need the professional's power not to enjoy but to pursue and achieve humanistic goals that professional work serves, based and justified on concern for other humans. Therefore, the typi-

[11] Ibid.

cal humaneness of professionalism consists in the recognition that professional care and responsibility for people differs contextually. Not everybody is the same, thus always personalized: the successful treatment of one patient, the excellent results of one student, the satisfaction of one client, and so on, do not indicate any guarantee of successful treatment, training, or service to all.

It's about the complexity of life – businesslike, everyday life – that brings us all those cases, called "specific" because we are not able to foresee them. Namely, we are in need of assessment that is not beyond standardization. Whatever the case, it is impossible to distinguish a case as "private" and to resolve it, if in advance we lack the knowledge, known patterns of typical cases, and the standard methods of any professional practice.

Of course, professional knowledge has its price and its application requires its pay, which depends not only on quantitative parameters but also on the public prestige of social values. Consequently, when we talk about health, justice, knowledge, science, etc. and their social value, we mean not only the people engaged professionally with them and their (personal) responsibilities as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and architects, but also the prestige of the hospital, the court, the school, the university as their professional environments and as the institutions that they represent.

The ability of society to ensure successful functioning of these institutions and the conditions for pursuing and achieving social values such as professional goals are measured by their public willingness for maintenance and development in the long term of institutions that are public. The direction indicator for this willingness is called education.

There is no clearer example of professionalism in education than how education is the only perceived cure for arrogance, trivial thinking, meaningful and ordered categorical knowledge.

In such a situation, residents who, according to Plato's words, are pseudo-wise instead of wise, and whom Jose Ortega y Gasset called "the most common type of human" or "middle man" are prone to mislead and are weak and cowardly because they fail to meet the major requirements that the real, complex, precise and demanding modern world places on them. Instead of answering to its challenges, says Ortega, this "middle man" is subservient to fraud and to false existence because he has invented his own simple

world and prefers "to replace his life with a deceptive and simple existence closed in a cocoon as his caterpillar".[12] Such people are not happy because they are incapable of living a good, happy life – their limitations push them to a minimalism that reduces freedom to asceticism and simple living to survival. Unlike them, the people for whom knowledge is a serious and vital task do not cease to learn, to educate, to exercise, to engage proper cognition in their lives and be useful to both themselves and to others with whom they communicate and live.

For the minimalist, on the contrary, any specialized education and culture is sideline entertainment, hobby, useless ornaments decorating the life of the idler. But his simplistic outlook is dangerous because this dilettantism and primitivism repel and reject every thought, every speech which is different because they don't aim for the truth. This is the terror of the uneducated, under-educated, and self-taught: just as moles dig tunnels in all directions, eat incidently found roots, and might never reach the other end, they cannot taste the fruit of the plant because they neither planted it nor cared for it.

Guided by the desire to avoid mental effort or acquiring serious speech and cognition, these people are ready to condemn it and to think of it as arrogant and unnecessary. They prefer to do so instead of being compared to those who have more knowledge and intelligence and to use them as a measure in the search of comprehension, in the name of sharing the truth, rather than twisting it from incomprehension. This brings us back to the old, well known but still valid maxim, that there is no better way to the best in education because the people without it remain blind and tend to have delusions like the chained captives in Plato's cave.

The problem is, as Walter Lippmann described, that there is some innate difficulty when we use the reasonable method of causality in our activities with the unwise world. Description, which is offered on this occasion by Lippmann, makes it clear that the "unwise world" is something more than inhumane.[13] It is also a metaphor for the world of the uneducated, under-educated, semi-literate people, of dilettantes. Their ignorance and incompe-

[12] Ibid.

[13] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (MacMillan & Co., 1922).

tence is a major source of conflict and rupture within education, inevitable in times of crisis.

By referring to Plato, Lippmann describes this conflict figuratively and artistically in terms of the true pilot who knows what is best for the ship. At the same time he draws attention to the problem that stems from the pilot who knows the crew's difficulty in correctly assesing the pilot's decisions. The crew does not know what the pilot knows and the pilot, awed by stars and winds, does not know how to make his crew recognise the importance of his knowledge. Therefore, according to Lippmann, the true medicine is education. It alone will enable the sailors to evaluate the decisions of their leader as a result of the ability to distinguish false from true crises. In this distinction, according to Lippmann, lies the biggest challenge to human prudence because it requires more than extraordinary effort.

The ship owners on land should know this because only the coastal people can plan many trips. Lippmann's passage affirms clearly and categorically that there is no more serious crisis than the crisis of education. Moreover, every crisis is a crisis of education and nothing more. All other crises are false because the crisis of education generates all other crises: the absence or lack of knowledge about how to behave, how to live in uncertainty. And the longer it lasts, the more false crises there are. It is because of the people who refuse to resist these crises, those who ignore education, that we are doomed to wander forever in the stormy sea, because we cannot distinguish the pilot from the cabin boy.