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ETHICS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY: FROM TEACHING AN ETHICS MODULE TO EDUCATION FOR THE GOOD LIFE

Educación ética en la universidad: de la implementación de un módulo de ética a la educación para la vida buena

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INTRODUCTION. Due to professional crises both within and outside the university, ethics education is receiving increasing attention in both academic literature on higher education as well as in discussions in universities themselves. This article describes and evaluates four ways in which ethics could be part of the university curriculum: 1) teaching an academic ethics module, 2) introducing students into professional ethics; 3) promoting academic citizenship; 4) fostering the ability to live a good life. **METHOD.** The four interpretations of ethics education at the university are subjected to a philosophical analysis. In each case, the intention of the educator is scrutinized by means of a reflection on the interpretation of ‘ethics’ and ‘education’. For this relevant literature is used and philosophical argumentation applied. **RESULTS.** The results of the description and evaluation of each interpretation of ethics education are presented in each section. It is argued that the most minimal interpretation (teaching an ethics module) is less minimal than suggested yet insufficient. Teaching professional ethics is necessary, but will come to full fruition when students leave the university although their work ethics as students will add to their general professional ethical qualities. Dutch law requires universities to promote academic citizenship and personal development. This requires that students have the opportunity to obtain democratic civic dispositions and that universities provide frameworks with which students can form their conception of the good life. **DISCUSSION.** In the final section we supplement our conclusion that universities should promote academic citizenship and aim to foster students’ ability to live a good life with a sobering note and urgent call: successful pursuit of these aims is only possible in an ethical environment and ethos that are currently lacking in universities. Thus, universities also have to work on their own ethical standards.

Keywords: *Ethics education, Professional ethics, Academic citizenship, Living a good life.*

Introduction

Ethics education is receiving increasing attention in both academic literature on higher education as well as in discussions in universities themselves¹. After more than two decades in which the liberal market discourse has had a strong foothold in the university with a focus on competition, production and rankings and in which a business model dominated, university staff and an increasing number of students are calling for a renewed focus on the core purpose of the university and the *Bildung* of students. Moreover, incidents in both the academic institutions themselves, such as fraud in research and questionable diplomas, as well as crises in professions (of which those in the economic sector got most public attention), have added to the call that universities take ethics education seriously. Interestingly, in the Netherlands universities should have felt responsible for providing ethics education all the time and the crises should not have been a reason for renewed attention to the ethical formation of students. For, according to article 1.3.5 of the Dutch law on higher education of 1992, universities do not only have the legal duty to educate academic qualities of their students, but the state also expects them to contribute to the personal development of students as well as the students' sense of responsibility for the well-being of society, what might be called academic citizenship. In other words, we can say that universities in the Netherlands have to provide an academic education with which students are able to live a good life, i.e. a life that is meaningful and worthwhile to them and that contributes to the well-being of society and its citizens. Of course, whether or not students will actually live a good life cannot ultimately be the responsibility of universities as this is what students themselves need to do, but universities are required to contribute to the likelihood that students will do so. This has to influence what they teach and the way in which they teach.

Nevertheless, the two aims have not been high on the universities' agenda and it is not difficult to find colleagues in every department who are sceptical about the need for ethics education and who believe that the main aim of university education is that students become academically knowledgeable and skilled. And while these two aims of university education are mentioned in the mission of all Dutch universities, in actual practice much more attention is paid to the excellent academic results of students and completion rates than to the broader development of students. Several reasons may have contributed to this situation.

Firstly, liberalism in both its philosophical and economic sense has fuelled the idea that ethics education should be kept outside the academic gates. The belief that education, particularly at university level, should aim for personal autonomy instead of induction into a particular conception of the good life has led to misconceived ideas about what can and cannot be taught and to an exaggerated caution about influence. But more importantly, the dominant (neo)liberal market value of success has had two consequences: 1) a focus on successful completion of studies, in light of which ethics could be perceived as an add-on that distracts students from what they really need to know and what they should be able to do (Allen, 2016: 9); 2) personal development and ethics are seen as a personal enterprise for which university teachers do not have responsibility or which they should not aim to influence.

Secondly, the student population has increased extensively over the past decade. In the Netherlands this has not led to a concomitant increase in funding and therefore in many cases lectures are given to large groups of students or are offered as a web lecture which means that there is less opportunity for personal interaction between university teachers and students, and students themselves do not meet frequently in seminars either. We do not want to claim that university teachers are all moral exemplars and that their

personal interaction with students will rub off (the examples of academic fraud are sufficient), but in smaller communities people are more dependent on each other and in seminars students need to cooperate, which also means that their moral qualities are called upon. Moreover, when teachers know their students, it is more feasible for them to assist the personal development of each student. Given the lack of resources, it is not surprising that ethics is no longer a self-evident aspect of university education.

Finally, personal development and societal responsibility are difficult to operationalise in SMART outcomes and it is equally challenging to develop quality standards for education towards these aims. In response to unethical practices at universities and universities of applied sciences in which diplomas were given to students unjustifiably, and to complaints by students about the level of teaching, the state and Inspectorate have responded with an ever growing number of quality standards regarding the number of contact hours, the level of exams and the teaching quality of the lecturers. However, university employees, like other professionals, are increasingly despondent of the lack of trust in their good intentions and are wary about the extraordinary burden of having to write an endless number of reports in which they show that their work meets the quality criteria set by the state and the VSNU (the Association of Universities in the Netherlands). They want to return to their central objectives, i.e. teaching students and doing academic research. In their search for their central purpose they also realise that they should not only teach students academic knowledge and skills, but that they have a wider task to fulfil. And here they thus find the law on their side: universities have to take seriously their role in educating academic professionals, and with that to provide (at least) an ethics education that academics need to be good professionals and citizens.

The text of the law is quite general and open to various interpretations of the aims as well as

the way in which the aims are to be pursued by universities. In this article we will describe and evaluate four ways in which ethics could be part of the university curriculum – by which we also evaluate (interpretations of) the law. There are many ways in which one could distinguish between different types of ethics education, e.g. according to the adopted normative-theoretical perspective (rule-based, virtue-based, behavioural) or their didactics and pedagogical approach (direct instruction, dialogue, modelling). Here we have chosen to distinguish four ways of teaching ethics at the university on the basis of the nature and extent of their *(trans)formative intent*. Ranging from the – from this point of view – most minimal one to the one with the strongest transformative intent, they are: 1) teaching an academic ethics module, 2) introducing students into professional ethics; 3) promoting academic citizenship; 4) fostering the ability to live a good life. These four possibilities differ in the aims pursued, but thereby necessarily *also* in the didactics or pedagogical approach, which helps to distinguish them and is the reason we use four different verbs. It should be noted, though, that the difference between the first type and the three others is more fundamental than that between the three others. The final three types intend to form or educate the students, whereas the teaching of an ethics module only aims to increase students' knowledge (although it may have an unintended formative effect). It is thus also possible to think of a dichotomy in ethics education: those activities that do not or do intend to have a formative impact on the students, where the second type of activity can be more or less encompassing in what it aims to influence (professional role, being a citizen, good life). We end the article with a sobering note about universities' potential to provide ethics education of the formative kind.

Our primary point of reference throughout this article is the Dutch situation, but our analysis should have wider applicability and be of interest to academics at least elsewhere in Europe and

the Western World. We recognize that university life in some countries, such as the United States, differs from that in the Netherlands and many European countries in certain respects that are relevant to the discussion. Where students live on campus, for instance (as is common in the USA, but not the case in the Netherlands and most other countries in Europe), this offers opportunities (but perhaps also challenges) for ethics education that are not available (or do not exist) where students travel between home and university each day. Nevertheless, our evaluation of the four types of ethics education, distinguished by their (trans)formative intent, is not specific to the Dutch situation.

Types of ethics education

This section describes and evaluates four types of ethics education. ‘Ethics’ is used in three different senses here. The three denotations are all used in (applied) philosophy and therefore the defenders of the four positions can all claim that they are teaching ethics, but what they do is fundamentally different. Firstly, in the most minimal version², i.e. teaching a module in ethical theories, ‘ethics’ refers to the study of theories of morality. Secondly, particularly within professional ethics, but also in aiming for academic citizenship, ‘ethics’ refers to the moral quality of professionals and citizens. Thirdly, ethics can refer to living a good life both in the personal sense – that a person lives a worthwhile and fulfilling life – and the moral sense, i.e. that such a life is also good to others (although it could be questioned if these two should be separated if we are talking about the good life). This interpretation is implied in the aim to assist the personal development of students.

Teaching about (meta-)ethics

The most minimal interpretation of stimulating the broader development of students is the

introduction to ethical theories as part of an introduction to (the history) of philosophy. It could be argued that to be an academic implies that one has some knowledge and understanding of the history of thought about the human condition and the good life for human beings.

In this version of ethics education ‘ethics’ is conceived of as an academic subject; students are only expected to learn the views and be able to academically evaluate them. In other words, the intention is that students learn *about* ethical theories, not that they learn *from* them for their personal development or how the theories could be a source for reflection on how to conceive of their professional or civic responsibilities, nor do teachers aim to teach *into* a particular ethical tradition³. The module is primarily offered as part of a smorgasbord of theories, knowledge of which is supposed to contribute to the students’ academic development. The module can be given by a philosopher, whereas other teachers within the respective faculties may be convinced they are not (to be) involved in the ethical development of their students.

This form of ethics education can be regarded as the ‘safest’ way of teaching ethics. Normative ethical theories are discussed, but students nor teachers are expected to reveal their own ethical position. Any accusation of indoctrination can be avoided. Moreover, it could be argued that teaching about ethical theories is the most appropriate, because there is a plurality of such theories. By teaching about ethical theories students are not inducted into the preferred ethical views of the teachers or a particular ethical position that is in principle controversial (see Hand, 2008).

However, this safety is illusory. If, in teaching about ethical theories one carefully avoids showing a preference for any particular one of them, one is more than likely to at least implicitly promote (and be perceived as advocating) a certain meta-ethical view. Firstly,

if one presents these theories as positions that all have their strengths and weaknesses and that none is obviously superior to the others, students' likely inference is that they are all more or less equally valid. One thus promotes the meta-ethical view that there is a plurality of valid ethical views and thereby suggests to students that absolutism, the view that there is a single true ethical theory, is incorrect. Students who enter the university with an absolute conviction of their ethical beliefs (possibly based on religious grounds), will learn that their ethical position is one among others that have equal validity and can lead to different answers to moral questions. Secondly, they learn that the best defensible position is fallibilism with regard to one's own view. While one is convinced that one's ethical position is the right one, one should also be open to possibility that one might be mistaken and that one should therefore be open for a discussion with defenders of other ethical views. This shows that even a rather minimal interpretation of teaching ethics at the university almost inevitably includes fostering a *disposition*.

Moreover, interpreting the university's responsibility to teach ethics in terms of a compulsory academic ethics module does not cover what actually happens in universities. When it is conceptualised in this way, other influences on ethical and moral convictions or dispositions of students — for instance, the didactics and ethos of the university — are shoved under the carpet and are therefore not amenable to scrutiny and improvement. For example, many universities are changing their didactics: they want students to be actively engaged in their studies. Courses are designed to turn students into knowledge producers rather than consumers of knowledge and skills offered by teachers — which, it should be noted, also implies a particular view of what kind of person universities intend their students to be. To accomplish this, lectures are complemented with seminars in which students actively engage with the literature and fellow

students and question their views. And in the case of teaching ethics this would for instance involve stimulating students to reflect on ethical theories by discussing ethical dilemmas. This does not necessarily lead to the situation that students question their own ethical positions, for they could see such a discussion as a purely academic exercise in which they just use the ethical theories they have to study. Students could duck investigating the ethical presuppositions with which they enter the university and emerge after their studies with the same beliefs. Nevertheless, this is not what universities aim for — and rightfully so.

Kyla Ebels-Duggan (2015) therefore argues that an academic ethics module should do more than provide an overview of (meta-)ethical theories. She begins with the observation that most students enter the university with “what we might call an overconfident lack of conviction” (p. 86). Students tend to ‘critically’ question all (ethical or intellectual) statements, are hardly able to develop a positive argument to defend a particular position and tend to have a subjectivistic and relativistic meta-ethical position. So paradoxically, they are too certain that everything is equally uncertain; they are too sure that there is nothing to decide between different normative positions. This was already well-reported by Bloom in his work *The closing of the American Mind* (1987) and is probably recognizable for all university teachers in the Western world (at least it is our experience as well). On the basis of her observation of the above ‘intellectual vices’, Ebels-Duggan suggests that students be taught intellectual charity, humility and tenacity. The first is “approaching new ideas and texts with the presumption that there is something true and worthwhile to be found there” (p. 82) in which is also built an appreciation of positive commitment. The second virtue, intellectual humility, means that people acknowledge that ethical (or all important normative questions) are difficult to answer and are inclined to fallibilism about their own views. When people

have the third virtue, tenacity, “they credit the appearance of truth that their own views have and so do not easily abandon them” (p. 83). However, Ebels-Duggan continues, whether or not tenacity is a virtue depends “at least in significant part, on what your views are, whether they are admirable or pernicious” (p. 84). This substantive criterion does not only apply to tenacity, but also to charity. According to her, the virtuous charitable person is not indiscriminately benevolent towards any view. Thus, she proposes not only a formal criterion (the way in which people are related to their convictions), but also a substantive criterion. And this, certainly, is a challenge for both teachers and students, for there will be students who vehemently defend a position that seems to be in a grey area of what is ethically acceptable and one’s response calls for both charitable and critical thinking. But this is precisely what universities are about.

Thus, we suggest that teaching students about ethical theories and meta-ethical views without inviting students to reflect upon their own ethical principles or teaching any ethical disposition is possible, but if teaching ethics would be confined to treating questions about the good life as an academic exercise, we believe that universities do not fulfil their responsibility to contribute to the personal development of students, nor their development into academics who will most likely have responsible and influential positions in society.

Introducing professional ethics

As mentioned, the crises in various professions in the past decades have shocked not only professionals but also society at large and have spurred academic research and publications about professional ethics. A PhD student of one of us, for instance, found that publications about the teaching of a ‘moral or ethical compass’ skyrocketed after the bank crisis in 2007. Their numbers were tenfold the number of publications about this topic before 2000.

Upon the crises in academia that brought to light cases of fraud and plagiarism, universities in the Netherlands have dusted their codes of ethics and they now ask PhD students at their graduation to pledge that they will keep the code. All PhD students are also expected to undertake a module in research ethics or integrity. The call of society that professionals should act in a moral manner extends beyond the academic professions, however: universities are expected to take responsibility for introducing students into professional ethics, i.e. the normative ethics of their future profession, more precisely the moral codes and aspirations of their respective professional communities.

We deliberately use the phrase introducing students, because it is possible to question whether or not universities are best placed to induct the students into the ethics of the profession they hope to enter into. It could be argued that professional communities are the appropriate locus to teach professional ethics to students, because it is only when they actually start working as a professional that they become aware of the importance of professional moral obligations, begin to think about their professional ideals and are confronted with dilemma’s in which they need to act as virtuous professionals (see also May, 1988). Nevertheless, in the majority of master programmes students are taught to become an academic professional and thus professional development begins at the university.

A sceptical colleague could, however, still claim that the master programmes in his faculty are not profession-specific and that therefore there is no need to teach professional ethics. In response we would say that he might be right about the relatively general character of the programme, but that he is nevertheless introducing professional ethical values and dispositions in his students and thus that he has to reflect upon what and how he wants to do so. For, while there are profession-specific duties and aspirations, there are also general

professional moral obligations and aspirations. And the general ones, such as honesty, fairness, conscientiousness, can be compared to the moral obligations and aspirations that universities tend to expect and foster in their students (at bachelor and master level). Ethical duties and dispositions play a role in all aspects of working as a student: they are expected to read texts carefully, be prepared for meetings, treat fellow students and teachers with respect, be willing to learn and discover the truth, be fair, be precise in writing and verbal communication, etc. By fostering the appropriate work ethic and penalizing students who break the ethical rules by for instance plagiarism, universities are actually contributing to the development of professional ethics.

Finally, the introduction into professional ethics can also be interpreted and defended differently — from what might be called an outsiders' perspective. On the premise that "... all lives and societies will be profoundly shaped by the actions, attitudes, ethos, and ethics of the professions of law, medicine, nursing, business, engineering, and education, as well as the technological and trade disciplines..." (2015: 16) Gutmann argues that "teaching about the ethics, history, politics and sociology of the professions would help prepare students to think creatively about the role of the professions in society and best to hold professionals publically accountable" (2015: 16). We agree that students should come to see it as their moral responsibility to scrutinize practices of their peers (both within and outside their own profession). They are well placed in their future professional position to do so, for they have similar moral rules, principles and aspirations. Moreover, it is not as easy for professionals to dismiss their peers on the basis of lack of insight and/or level of thinking⁴.

Promoting academic citizenship

As we noted, according to Dutch law, universities have a responsibility to educate

students to become academic citizens. Here it is also expected that the moral qualities of students are formed (and thus ethics has the denotation of normative ethics), but with a wider implication than professional ethics. For, the idea that students will become academic citizens seems to be less optional and also to suggest a comprehensive conception of citizenship. The inevitable nature of the aim of academic citizenship can be explained by the fact that whether or not one will pursue an academic professional career depends on the personal decision and circumstances of each student. Not all students will do so or will be able to do so, also because of a lack of available positions. Only professionals, of course, are expected to keep to the moral rules of their profession and to aim to become a good professional. All students, however, will be citizens of a nation. Of course, they may decide to withdraw from society altogether, but that is not what the majority of students will do.

Promoting academic citizenship can take various forms. The expectations with regard to ethics education that should be offered by universities depend on the interpretation of academic citizenship. The more encompassing this conception is, the higher and wider the aims of ethics education at universities should be. Here it is helpful to use McLaughlin's (1992) distinction between thick and thin interpretations of citizenship. He separates these on four features of citizenship, namely identity, the virtues of citizens, their political involvement and the social prerequisites necessary for effective citizenship. For our purposes, the first and second feature are particularly of interest and as we are primarily evaluating practices in Dutch universities we focus on the functioning of academic citizens in liberal democracies; and what we say here can be generalized to other such countries. With regard to the civic identity aimed for, it is quite clear that the Dutch law does not have in mind the minimal view of citizenship, which is "seen merely in formal, legal, juridical

terms” (p. 236). What is aimed for is a citizen who has “a consciousness of him or herself as a member of a living community with a shared democratic culture involving obligations and responsibilities as well as rights, a sense of the common good, fraternity and so on” (p. 236). Also with regard to the virtues expected, the maximalist interpretation seems to prevail, which proposes that citizens have “a responsibility to actively question and extend their local and immediate horizons in the light of more general and universal considerations such as those of justice, and to work for the sort of social conditions that will lead to the empowerment of all citizens” (p. 236).

There might be a good reason for such an expectation. It could be argued that students will probably occupy influential positions in society and that such positions come with responsibilities, extending beyond the professional ones. They may be expected to contribute to the moral quality of society, for instance by being politically active, by contributing to public debates about societal questions, or by being active in civil society as a volunteer. This is a controversial idea, for not only do ideas vary about how much society or the state may expect from academics³, but there are also various ideas about what should be regarded as an ethical contribution to the democratic state. For there are various ways in which students as citizens can contribute and there are various ethical and political views. Nevertheless, it may be expected that academic citizens at least uphold the rule of law, defend the principle of human dignity, and are willing to engage in reasonable discussions about universal human rights and the values of democracy. In a strong version of this argument it could be claimed that they have a duty to do so, given their abilities and level of education. Following a weaker version it could be argued that while they do not have a duty, they should at least have the aspiration to take responsibility for the well-being of society. In any case, it leads to the responsibility of the university to provide

ethics education for academic citizenship to their students.

This argument is, however, paternalistic in two senses. Firstly, students entering the university are already adults and they have sufficient abilities to decide for themselves how they will live their lives; they do not need university teachers to help them. But more importantly, the aim of academic citizenship could easily slide into an undesirable elitist view that academics in influential positions do not only have responsibility to fulfil these in an ethical manner, but also that they are the ethical elite leading *hoi polloi*. Academic citizens may believe that they are best placed to take important decisions regarding society, which might transform a democratic society into a platonic republic or a technocracy. Needless to say, this seems to be precisely what is happening in western European societies and the United States. In these countries the gap between the elite in power and the rest of the population has widened and currently leads to increasing protests of the majority of the citizens that they are not heard or involved in the way in which society is run. And this is exactly the reason why ethics education at universities is important, but also gives a further indication about its aims. Educating students to become academic citizens should not only comprise teaching them academic humility as was mentioned before, but also modesty and inclusiveness.

If universities take their responsibility of teaching ethics in light of the aim of educating students for academic citizenship seriously, what should they present to students? If we adopt a maximalist interpretation of this aim, it is self-evident that universities should also include the education of civic dispositions. What this can entail can be illustrated by our own university.

Recently, the Vrije Universiteit announced its intention to increase the bachelor curriculum of 60 EC per year with 1 EC each year for the

ethical (including the moral) development of students. Although one can critically ask if this does not position ethics at the fringe of academic education whilst it is a legal obligation of the university, and one can seriously question the impact of 3 EC on the ethical development of students, one can also take a more sympathetic position and suggest that by making ethics education compulsory for all students, the university at least begins to fulfil its legal responsibility. On the basis of the core values of the Vrije Universiteit, responsibility, reliability and being an active member of society, the Vrije Universiteit wishes to implement a programme in which students are expected to undertake a module each year in which the cultivation of the seven classical virtues, i.e. courage, temperance, wisdom, justice, faith, hope and love, is encouraged. They are also stimulated to participate in community service activities that are being developed. Needless to say, especially, though not exclusively, the last three virtues give rise to the question if the Vrije Universiteit does not promote a particular worldview that is controversial and therefore not acceptable for a university that wants to be open to all students. This depends, in our view, on what will be promoted. If students are invited to think about the value of these virtues and how, if at all, they could be part of their *civic* identity, the Vrije Universiteit promotes that students learn from in principle valuable virtues, be it in a minimal way. If the university actually expects students to develop these virtues in a particular way it does attempt to induct students into a view on life and thereby it would give an undesirable interpretation to its legal duty to promote academic citizenship.

Fostering the ability to live a good life

All universities are able to claim that they fulfil their legal duty to contribute to the personal development of their students. It could be argued that the academic curricula of all disciplines provide students with ample

opportunity to think about their own views of life, the way in which they would want to live their lives. Another justification for the claim could be that academic development is a form of personal development. One might argue that it is impossible to separate or make a strict distinction between 'academic' and 'personal', because becoming an academic has an influence on one's identity, the kind of person one is. What students actually do with the academic insights and skills or if they indeed come to see themselves as academics is not the responsibility of the universities.

This position might be regarded as quite a minimal interpretation of the contribution to the personal development of students. However, this obviously depends on the content of the academic curriculum presented to the students. If universities introduce students into professional ethics and actively promote the development of academic citizenship, they have an influence on the personal convictions of their students about how they want to live their lives. Even though universities might not have the intention to influence the personal lives of their students, they do so in practice. This argument is known as the *spill-over effect*⁶. Moreover, as we have mentioned before, universities do not only influence students' ideas about what it means to live a good life by their teaching. The way in which university staff interact with the students, the mission, vision and rules of the university, in other words the social context, the ethos, and the whole moral atmosphere of the university also have a formative influence on students. And with this, be it intentionally or not, universities implicitly or explicitly present a framework of ethical values of the good life. We will discuss one example that has not received as much attention as for instance religion has had in discussions between liberals and communitarians in the nineties of the last century.

The Vrije Universiteit, for which it is by no means special, presents itself as a university

in which students can develop their talents to the full. One of the core values of the mission is being a personal university, which is explained as the belief that every member of the university is unique and valuable and will (sic!) fully develop within the university. To be sure, the majority of our current students does not seem to be seriously affected by this value as they are more preoccupied with what they have to learn for their exam and are in many cases satisfied with a pass for courses they are not very interested in (even though it could be of central importance for their future profession). However, our point is that this core value expresses a view on an aspect of the good life, namely that it is good to fully develop one's (academic) talents and thereby that it is good to be what one of us called an optimizer (De Ruyter, 2012).

If one believes, as we do, that flourishing is an aim of education, the Vrije Universiteit can be said to aim to contribute to the possibility that students will lead a flourishing life⁷. Thereby it provides an ethics education in its widest sense. This is certainly to be welcomed, particularly because the Vrije Universiteit also wants to be an inclusive university and has developed many initiatives for first generation students. However, it all depends on what is meant by 'fully develop within the university'. If the focus is on fully developing their academic potential, there is certainly a one-sidedness. Given that the university also aims to promote other potentials of students with a view to their becoming academic citizens, this does not seem to be the case. Yet, it cannot be denied that the attention to academic potential is dominant⁸, which has spurred students to found a Bildung Academy, in which they give themselves the opportunity to develop a wider range of potentials.

In defence of the Vrije Universiteit, or universities in general, it could however be argued that universities cannot take responsibility for everything and that their core business is academic education. In other

words, they contribute to the flourishing of students within their remit. This is a valid defence, but only if the dominance of academic flourishing does not undermine the 'overall' flourishing of students. And here we do believe that universities should reconsider their ethics in order to provide students with an ethics education that fosters their ability to live a good life. It is one thing to enable students to develop their academic potential, to expect all students to excel academically is something else. Given the uniformity of academic curricula, the fixed time frame in which students are expected to successfully complete their studies, not only the responsibility to foster the personal development of each individual student is jeopardised, there is also a danger that many (average) students will not be able to live a good life while they are students. The rise in numbers of depressed students and students with high levels of anxiety and stress might be an indication that universities are taking a wrong path. Moreover, it is conveyed to students that they have to be successful students in order to pursue a successful career and that this is an important part of living a good life. Surely, this is the current climate of western European countries and thereby not specific to universities. Yet, instead of adopting this climate, universities can also aim to influence this climate by changing their own ethics and ethics education. If they do so, we believe that they will be taking their responsibility to contribute to the personal development of students in the wider sense seriously.

In conclusion: a sobering note and an urgent call

If universities take their responsibility to provide ethics education seriously and conceive of this, as we do, as contributing to the wide formation of students, universities also have to be an environment in which students' ethical dispositions can be cultivated. If universities are unethical institutes or if university staff

members do not behave ethically themselves, there is clearly a tension between the educational responsibility of universities and the ethics that are conveyed by the ethos and moral atmosphere of the institute. Here we do not have in mind the scientific scandals, but (as mentioned in the previous section) the way in which members of staff treat students and how they in turn are treated by their institutes.

The way in which universities currently treat their staff, at least in the Netherlands, is hard to qualify as ethical. The expectations are very high, the work load is far beyond normal working hours and competition is a central value. For instance, a university that attempts to get the most research at the least financial cost by attracting as many PhD students as possible, for the majority of whom there is subsequently no position available, sends the message that people and people's needs matter less than research output (figures). Exploitation comes to mind sooner than care in this case. This fits a picture of (the good) life as a competition for personal advantage.

We have no quarrel with the expectation that university staff works hard for their income.

Nor do we want to deny that academics tend to work hard because of their love for their profession. However, rising standards in number of publications and the requirement to earn one's own research time through external subsidies (which is also a criterion for a tenured position) put pressure on the dedication of university staff to their teaching. Furthermore, a substantial amount of the teaching load is given to temporary members of staff, who do not have the prospect of a permanent position unless they excel in bringing in research funds for which they are not given the time by the university. In other words, the climate within the university has hardened to the detriment of academics' possibility of living a good life. And how can students learn to become ethical academics in such an environment?

Thus, if universities really want to take seriously their legal obligation to provide an ethics education to their students, they also have to work on their own ethical standards in the way in which those who are expected to teach ethics and be ethical models to their students are treated. Only in an ethical institution can ethics education truly thrive.

Notes

¹ See, for instance, Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold (2007), Brighouse and McPherson (eds.) (2015) and Allen (2016).

² Again, as noted in the introduction: This type of ethics education is most minimal in its (trans)formative intent, though by no means necessarily negligible in its (trans)formative *effects*.

³ This interpretation of ethics education can be compared to the teaching *about* religions that Grimmit (1987) distinguishes from teaching *into* a particular worldview, where the teacher has the intention that students adopt the particular view on life s/he has, and from teaching religions in such a way that students are stimulated to use their gained insights to reflect on their own view on life and their personal identity.

⁴ This does not mean, of course, that people without an academic qualification should not be taken seriously by professionals.

⁵ The state may for instance expect that its investment in the development of students should be returned by the students' efforts to contribute to the flourishing of society. This is a typical utilitarian economic argument, which arguably does not sit well with the intrinsic motivation to behave ethically as an academic citizen. Students are not expected to be responsible citizens because they have to pay back their investment. Moreover, it could lead to the question when students have done enough to be relieved from their responsibilities or what they should do

to pay of their debts. That could stimulate calculating behaviour, which might actually undermine the intention of the state and universities.

⁶ Amy Gutmann (1995) referred to this argument in her defence of democratic education that includes the aim to influence personal convictions of students. According to her the Rawlsian idea that we can expect of people to think and act in a particular way in public life without affecting their personal conceptions of the good life is (psychologically) untenable. Against political liberals she argues that while they might theoretically be able to make a distinction between being a citizen and being a private person, it is not possible to avoid that the dispositions that students acquire as liberal citizens influence their personal conceptions of the good life.

⁷ We define 'flourishing' as the optimal actualisation of human potential and the expression of this potential in meaningful and worthwhile activities and relationships, which means that a person is living a meaningful and worthwhile life.

⁸ The exception being students who are talented in sports, for whom the Vrije Universiteit has special programmes.

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Resumen

Educación ética en la universidad: de la implementación de un módulo de ética a la educación para la vida buena

INTRODUCCIÓN. Debido a las crisis profesionales dentro y fuera de la universidad, la formación ética está recibiendo una creciente atención tanto en la literatura académica sobre la educación

superior como en las discusiones en las propias universidades. Este artículo describe y evalúa cuatro maneras en que la ética podría formar parte del currículo universitario: 1) enseñar un módulo de ética académica, 2) introducir a los estudiantes en la ética profesional; 3) promover la ciudadanía académica; 4) fomentar la capacidad de vivir una vida buena. **MÉTODO.** Las cuatro interpretaciones de la formación ética en la universidad se someten a un análisis filosófico. En cada caso, la intención del docente es examinada a través de una reflexión sobre la interpretación de la “ética” y la “educación”. Para ello se utiliza la literatura pertinente y se aplica la argumentación filosófica. **RESULTADOS.** Los resultados de la descripción y evaluación de cada interpretación de la formación ética se presentan en cada sección. Se argumenta que la interpretación más mínima (enseñar un módulo de ética) es menos mínima de lo sugerido pero insuficiente. La enseñanza de la ética profesional es necesaria, pero llegará a su plena realización cuando los estudiantes abandonen la universidad, aunque su ética como estudiantes se sumará a sus cualidades éticas profesionales generales. La legislación holandesa exige que las universidades promuevan la ciudadanía y el desarrollo personal. Esto requiere que los estudiantes puedan obtener disposiciones cívicas democráticas y que las universidades proporcionen marcos con los cuales los estudiantes puedan formar su concepción de la vida buena. **DISCUSIÓN.** En la sección final complementamos nuestra conclusión de que las universidades deben promover la ciudadanía y fomentar la capacidad de los estudiantes para vivir una vida buena, con una nota seria y urgente: la búsqueda exitosa de estos objetivos solo es posible en un ambiente ético y en un *ethos* que actualmente se echan a faltar en las universidades. Por lo tanto, las universidades también tienen que trabajar en sus propios estándares éticos.

Palabras clave: *Educación ética, Ética profesional, Ciudadanía académica, Vida buena.*

Résumé

Enseigner l'éthique à l'université: De l'offre d'un module de formation éthique à l'éducation pour une vie bonne

INTRODUCTION. A cause des crises professionnelles, qui affectent à la fois l'université et son environnement, la formation éthique devient un centre d'intérêt croissant, non seulement dans les ouvrages académiques sur l'enseignement supérieur, mais aussi au sein des universités. Cet article a pour but de décrire et évaluer quatre possibilités d'inclure l'éthique dans le curriculum de l'enseignement supérieur: 1) Proposer un module de formation éthique, 2) Faciliter l'introduction des étudiants vers une éthique professionnelle, 3) Promouvoir la citoyenneté académique, 4) Promouvoir les capacités nécessaires pour mener une vie bonne. **MÉTHODE.** Les quatre possibilités de formation à l'éthique à l'université ont fait l'objet d'une analyse philosophique. Dans chaque cas l'intention de l'enseignant est examinée de façon à apporter des réflexions sur les interprétations possibles de “l'éthique” et “l'éducation”. Pour cela, des ouvrages académiques d'argumentation philosophique se voient appliqués. **RÉSULTATS.** Les résultats de la description et l'évaluation de chaque interprétation de l'enseignement de l'éthique sont présentés dans chaque partie. Il est soutenu que même la plus petite des possibilités (c'est à dire, l'offre académique d'un module de formation éthique) est plus significative que cela aurait pu être supposé, mais malgré cela reste insuffisant. Enseigner l'éthique professionnelle est indispensable mais les fruits de cet effort ne se verra que lorsque les étudiants auront fini leur cursus universitaire. Ainsi, leur motivation pour leur travail embellira leurs compétences morales et professionnelles. La loi hollandaise exige que les universités fassent la promotion de la

conscience citoyenne et du développement personnel. Il est ainsi indispensable que les étudiants puissent obtenir des dispositions civiques démocratiques et que les universités mettent à leur disposition des cadres qui leur permettront la construction de leur conception d'une vie bonne. **DISCUSSION.** Dans la dernière partie nous complétons notre conclusion, en avançant que les universités devraient promouvoir la citoyenneté académique et faciliter la possibilité pour les étudiants de mener une bonne vie, cependant il est important de se souvenir qu'il y a deux 'caveats': le succès dans ces objectifs ne sera possible que dans un environnement moral suivant un *éthos*, qui malheureusement ne sont pas actuellement présents dans les universités. Ainsi, les universités doivent aussi travailler sur ses propres valeurs éthiques.

Mots-clés: *Éducation éthique, Éthique professionnelle, Citoyenneté académique, Mener une bonne vie.*

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