

# Notes de lecture et parutions



## Notes de lecture

Sandu FRUNZA, *Advertising and administration under the pressure of Ethics*, Les Arcs, Editions de la Suers, 2014, 219 p.

In the context of the decline of founding "great narratives" which provided the necessary tools for establishing firm frameworks capable of depicting the life of the individual and the community, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of the topics whose end has been announced. Thus, the volume entitled *Advertising and Administration under the Pressure of Ethics* signed by Sandu Frunza offers an exciting analysis of the way in which ethics, understood as minimal ethics, represents an essential element in understanding the way in which postmodern society functions. The awareness of the importance of ethics in our present times is crucial if we want to avoid a Manichaeian perspective on consumption society and if we want to understand the complexity of its mechanisms.

The ten chapters which constitute the volume try to reconfigure the sphere of ethics in the context of a communicational society on the one hand, and to analyse the way in which the pressure of ethics shapes important areas of contemporary society on the other hand.

Sandu Frunza considers that the minimal ethics represents the necessary condition to overcome the tension between relativism and moral absolutism. Two major reference points are taken into consideration by the author in the description of the minimal ethics

background in which the approach proposed by him is displayed. On the one hand we have Gilles Lipovetsky's view on post-moralist ethics as minimal ethics, which separates itself from any kind of imperative, be it a religious or moral one, becoming democratic and finding its roots in the individual moral consciousness. The other perspective which offers us an understanding of postmodern minimal ethics belongs to the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas. He rethinks transcendence from a relational perspective describing the ethical significance of the face, thus the accomplishment of sacredness is found in the intersubjective relation. Sandu Frunza highlights the fact that minimal ethics although frees itself from the authority of an absolute transcendence, it succeeds to avoid the trap of value relativization thus generating "the context for their assumption through norms, rules, behavioural practices, and every-day decisions" (Frunza, 2014, p. 23).

With the secularization of ethics and its conversion into a tool available for the individual, another defining phenomenon for minimal ethics emerges. It is a phenomenon discussed by the author throughout his book and it concerns the increasingly influential presence of ethics in professional environments. Sandu Frunza considers the retrieval of ethics in the professional field as the consequence of minimal ethics characteristic for postmodern society, and this retrieval cannot be conceived without the acknowledgment of the fundamental importance of communication. The author points out a trend also analysed by Gilles Lipovetsky, which is the instrumentalisation of ethics as a communication strategy. The transforming power of ethics at an

individual level, as well as at an institutional one, becomes obvious especially in the context of a communicational society.

By analyzing the involvement of ethics in public administration, the author highlights a few perspectives, which generate heated debates. One of these debates takes place between individual ethics and organizational ethics. Sandu Frunza points out that such perspectives as the ethics of neutrality, which confirms the suppression of personal moral judgment or the ethics of structure which ignores individual moral judgment, eliminates one of the fundamental elements which provides the ethical status of an organization – the moral individual. The author underlies that the personal values must be blended in, or subordinated to those of the institution in conflicting circumstances, but what is essentially important is the balance between the intent of the public officer and the collective result of the action.

Another topic discussed in the wider context of ethics in public administration is the special dynamics of the ethical and legal relationship. Sandu Frunza thinks that the distinction between these two becomes functional only after the liberation of moral action from the theological pressure. Thus gaining autonomy, the moral consciousness plays an important part in guiding the activities and preferences of the individual. The author asserts on several occasions the importance of protecting the moral consciousness especially against the danger of legal settlement, in order to preserve the ethical character of the individual actions and choices.

Based on the double distinction, between responsibilities and debts towards the soul and body, which we

have in relation with ourselves, and with others, Sandu Frunza addresses the issue of euthanasia and abortion. These subjects are relevant when discussing the relation between the individual choice and public politics, as well as when discussing the relation between the ethical and legal area. The author approaches the topic from a philosophical point of view, using elements characteristic for applied ethics, and argues that this perspective should not be ignored when establishing public politics and the legal framework, which controls these issues.

The complex philosophical perspective on euthanasia and abortion proposed by the author, as well as the detached view upon these matters represent an appropriate background for the analysis of the way in which an ethical debate on these delicate issues takes place in a postmodern society. More precisely, Sandu Frunza convinces us that despite the fundamental importance of individual's self-preservation in the western mentality, as well as the pressure of the judicial system regarding self-preservation, the minimal ethics, which highly regards the respect for the individual, represents the only possible framework where one can properly discuss matters of euthanasia and abortion.

Referencing Kant's humanity formula of the categorical imperative, Sandu Frunza highlights the importance of respect in interpersonal relations, which take place in the public space. Regardless of the way in which respect is manifested, from its most "superficial" form represented by etiquette, to expertise and professionalism regarded as fundamental ethical values of the public servant, respect represents a fundamental concept around which the

ethical discourse characteristic for the area of public administration builds itself.

Embracing Gilles Lipovetsky's perspective on the operationalization of ethics in the organizational strategy, Sandu Frunza demonstrates the importance of ethical management. If we bear in mind the importance of ethics in the sphere of public administration, all of this becomes even clearer. The author draws attention on the numerous implications of an ethical point of view in public administration, highlighting the fact that the strategic function of ethical management and the connection between ethics and efficiency should be a constant presence in the management of administrative activities in the public sphere.

The reclaim of ethics at a professional level reveals a compulsory instrument for any professional branch, the deontological code. Sandu Frunza highlights the importance of deontological code in the ethical guidance of professional activity, as well as in the construction of the professional image and identity. This is where the author reveals his idea that the proliferation of this type of documents represents a symptom of minimization of maximal ethics in postmodern society, these instruments thus becoming "the real carrier of minimal ethics by filling the space left empty by the absolutism of values and their relativity, by ethical maximalism and the uncertainties of absolute ethical relativism" (Frunza, 2014, p. 14).

Sandu Frunza's point of view shows the difficulty encountered by the deontological codification in the completion of its purpose, which is the settlement of ethical behaviour, which cannot be the result of coercion, but the

result of each individual's personal choice. In doing so, he draws attention to the danger of ignoring the specific nature of these instruments, which are not or should not be legal documents. On the contrary, in the spirit of minimal ethics, these tools must be "weak" in comparison to the rules imposed by law. They should not function as a recipe, but to provide the required space for the manifestation of what Andrei Plesu calls "moral talent" (Plesu, 2013, p. 83), to allow the possibility of personal choice and of attachment to the organizational values. Analyzing the code of conduct for civil servants, which is an authorized code, Sandu Frunza concludes that ethical codes should not become tools of coercion, but should be regarded as "a structure of ethical standards that offer security to those under the power of an ethical code" (Frunza, 2014, p. 104).

If the key role played by ethics is obvious in the field of public administration, things are different when it comes to advertising, where even the compatibility between ethics and advertising is being questioned. But Sandu Frunza offers a different perspective, according to which in order to understand advertising and its place in the consumption society, one must appeal to ethics. Sandu Frunza identifies the source of one of the most common criticisms that targets advertising from an ethical perspective, which is the fact that it functions as an on-going generator of desire. The author offers a very interesting conceptual analysis of desire and seduction conceiving them as symbolic structures. He emphasizes on the fact that seduction represents "a part of a relational universe that delineates human existence in its biological as well as spiritual dimension" (Frunza, 2014, p.

104). Thus, by asserting the symbolic dimension of seduction, the author reveals the positive nature of the term as long as it is under guardianship of trust ethics. In the case of manipulation, as well, the author suggests a renunciation of the concept. In order to avoid the negative connotations of manipulation, due to its connections with politics and economy, Sandu Frunza considers that the term *influence* is much more suited for the field of communication.

Aware of the challenges advertising addresses to ethical thinking, the author discusses issues like addiction, advertising for children or subliminal advertising. But, in the same time, Sandu Frunza's approach allows us to understand the importance of advertising for consumer culture. The author shows that advertising generates new forms of spirituality and underlies a special symbolic relationship between consumer and product, which profoundly influences his world view. The interpretation of advertising's purpose in consumer society from the point of view of minimal ethics, as a space where self confidence, self respect and respect for others are fundamental, highlights the qualities of advertising as "part of an aesthetic of seduction that functions as a cultural parameter for postmodern humanity" (Frunza, 2014, p. 145). The symbolic burden of the advertising spectacle transforms it into "an outburst of sacrality in the daily platitude." Representative is Sandu Frunza's analysis on the social attributes of advertising, as source of a specific type of solidarity, communion and hope in consumerist culture. In this regard, the motif of the gift is relevant, a motif so customary in the advertising spectacle during the holidays. This is where the author determines the

fundamental status of ethics in advertising, the advertising's gift to consumerist society: the ethical responsibility towards individuals and common values.

In the spirit of minimal ethics, Sandu Frunza highlights the fundamental status of the responsibility ethics in consumerist society, which asserts individual choice and enables personal attachment towards ethical values, avoiding the formation of a neutrality space characteristic for the law that lessens personal commitment and the ethical vocation of responsibility.

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### Parutions



Léonard LABORIE, *Comment nous sommes devenus écolos. Communication, environnement et société*, Paris, Ellipses Editions, 2011, 160 p

Léonard Laborie, historien et chargé de recherché au CNRS, s'intéresse dans cet ouvrage à « la conversion » subtile de la

société à l'écologie suite à une sorte de sacralisation des informations, pratiques et discours sur l'environnement. Au delà des âges que l'écologie a traversés (l'enfance, l'adolescence, l'âge adulte), au delà de toute démarche historique de problématisation et d'analyse, la confrontation à cette réalité de la sacralisation de l'écologie amène l'auteur à vouloir personnaliser sa démarche et à exprimer le besoin de voir plus claire dans "le continent des discours, au sens large (écrits, paroles, images, labels, etc.), sur la protections de l'environnement, sur ce que Thierry Libaert appelle « la communication verte » et ses racines (Laborie, 2011, p. 7). Les quatre chapitres de l'ouvrage offrent des réponses intéressantes et des pistes de recherche à développer à cet état de choses : l'écologie politique, la politique écologique menée par les pouvoirs publics, l'actualité environnementale – les informations qui parlent de l'environnement, l'environnement comme produit de consommation de masse.



Eric DACHEUX (dir), *Bande dessinée et lien social*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2014, 226 p.

L'ouvrage réunit les contributions à onze auteurs qui s'interrogent sur les diverses hypostases de la bande dessinée (BD) en convoquant des approches pluridisciplinaires pour des visées théoriques et pratiques à la fois. De la bande dessinée comme représentation ou bien comme lien social jusqu'au questionnement d'ordre épistémologique, les textes permettent des possibilités de lecture plurielles : la BD comme média, la BD comme art, la BD comme dispositif communicationnel... Dans cette optique, l'ouvrage montre « comment la BD rend compte des interactions politiques et économiques quotidiennes et la façon dont elle prend place dans nos imaginaires ».



Pascal DELWIT (ed), *Les partis politiques en France*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2014, 249 p.

Ce livre, édité par Pascal DELWIT, professeur de sciences politiques à l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, soulève des questions de profondeur liées aux transformations connues dernièrement par les partis politiques en France. L'ouvrage s'intéresse à l'analyse des partis actifs en France après les élections présidentielles et législatives de 2012. Les principales questions gravitent autour

des sujets tels que les mutations sur la scène du politique, les évolutions idéologiques et organisationnelles dans le système politique français ou le nouveau visage de la géographie électorale. Une réflexion bien menée sur les défis et les tensions auxquels sont confrontés les partis politiques français.



Olivier COSTA, Nathalie BRACK, *Le fonctionnement de l'Union européenne*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2014, 379 p.

Cet ouvrage a le mérite de se focaliser sur le fonctionnement concret de l'Union Européenne et se donne comme objectif de dépasser les théorisations abstraites des institutions européennes et de ses processus afin de contribuer au désenchantement des différentes perspectives à la mode ou tout simplement privilégiées par les acteurs intéressés. Des concepts-clé sont expliqués de manière pédagogique, mais tout en gardant la complexité des phénomènes liés à la construction européenne : déficit démocratique, crise institutionnelle, européanisation, rôle des Etats membres. Ce livre fournit un travail d'explication qui offre au lecteur la possibilité de donner sens aux indéterminations de l'Union Européenne.