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## BIOETHICS IN PANDEMIC TIME

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**Abstract:** Review of Antonio Sandu, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* [Bioethics in crisis or the crisis of bioethics], Iaşi: Editura Lumen, 2020.

**Keywords:** bioethics, COVID-19, contemporary world, ethical challenge, theology, social life.

## BIOETICA ÎN PERIOADA PANDEMIEI

**Rezumat:** Recenzie a volumului lui Antonio Sandu, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii*, Iaşi: Ed. Lumen, 2020.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** bioetică, COVID-19, lume contemporană, provocare etică, teologie, viaţă socială.

Important name both for the philosophical, sociological and bioethical space and author of relevant books, studies and articles that are often refereed<sup>1</sup>, professor Antonio Sandu from „Ștefan cel Mare” University in Suceava, recently offered to his readers an interesting anthology of studies dedicated to the bioethics and the way how they can help in complex times like the ones generated by Covid19th pandemic.

Segmented into 12 chapters, his book speaks about the challenges brought to the bioethical area in times of crisis, focusing not only on the already approached topics like the answer to the question if bioethics must be considered a science or a philosophy<sup>2</sup> or about the bioethics of the public politics<sup>3</sup>, but it also brings into discussion the crisis of bioethics<sup>4</sup> and the way how the events that occurred in the first part of 2020s have changed the world<sup>5</sup>.

Fruit of the lessons previously provided by the author, the studies anthologised in the book are written in a very pleasant style, combining the scientific discourse with the orality of the spoken one and can be in the same time understood both by the scientists and readers who do not have a strong scientific background in this area. Already in the introductory chapter<sup>6</sup>, after speaking about the motivation of the demarche and the methods, Antonio Sandu touches the delicate topic of pandemics, linking the contemporary times with the past, and speaking about the previous pandemics like the Spanish flu. He underlines the fact that: „These pandemics should have generated widespread debate at the level of bioethics and there are already good practice models when various scenarios regarding a possible pandemic could occur, especially since globally there have been various tests on population response and the authorities to such threats to public health”<sup>7</sup>.

The author is totally right and he is emphasizing an important lack in the bioethical discourse when underlines this aspect. Still, it should not be neglected the fact that bioethics is a young science, that appeared in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup> and institutions like

the Christian Churches, that should be its promoters have, in the last years, almost neglected it<sup>9</sup>.

Interesting and for sure useful not only for the research space, but also for the teaching area is the first chapter of the book<sup>10</sup>. Here, after a short definition, the author focuses on the need of studying bioethics and seeing the world through bioethics lengths, but also brings into debate the most relevant topics of this science, like the euthanasia<sup>11</sup>, transplantation<sup>12</sup>, abortion<sup>13</sup>, or the right to the life and its multiple outcomes<sup>14</sup>.

After approaching the aforementioned topic and speaking about keywords in bioethical discourse like the „autonomy and the informed consent”<sup>15</sup> or about the medicalisation of the social life<sup>16</sup> and the social epistemology<sup>17</sup>, the author brings into attention the pandemic from 2020, seen as a catalyser of virtualisation in social space<sup>18</sup>. Here, he underlines the fact that: „Technological globalization can be analysed from the perspective of changes in the interpretation of social space from the traditional one, limited to the geographical coordinates of the interaction, to a delocalizing and universalizing one. The digital revolution produces a phenomenon of virtualization of social space – in the sense of transferring socializing interactions to virtual environments – with special and somewhat unpredictable consequences for the evolution of being and even the human species”<sup>19</sup>.

Interesting is also his definition of the postmodern society, with the accent on the fact that this type of society gives a bigger importance to the pack than to the content<sup>20</sup> and on the way how he relates this aspect with the understanding of the person there. Using the idea of virtualization, Antonio Sandu draws the attention on the fact that the contemporary world started to build „the avatar identity”<sup>21</sup>, a 4<sup>th</sup> dimension of the human extended reality: He says about this aspect the following: „Although we have not yet built an avatar identity, we are beginning to add this fourth virtual dimension to our extended reality, as we have delocalized bodily sensations and as we perceive virtual communication tools - smartphone or laptop - as an extension of our own corporality. These simulations of extended identity will develop in the coming years as the human-machine

interface will be developed in the direction of extended neutral connections. Thus, it will be more and more difficult for us to distinguish the reality from simulation and we will most likely reach a point where we will talk about extended reality - or augmented reality - as the reality in which we live, as, at this moment, our reality is already extended by the inclusion of noetic objects such as reified values, religious beliefs etc.<sup>22</sup>

If the pandemic times brings us to the 4<sup>th</sup> identity or makes the road to it to become faster, it is difficult to say. The author himself seems to avoid this aspect, but he is also conscious of the fact that life will be surely different after this moment. Differences will be also seen in the way how people and state see religion and spirituality. For this reason, the author chose to dedicate the 12<sup>th</sup> section of his investigation to this aspect<sup>23</sup>. The date when he spoke about this topic on the YouTube channel was important for the Orthodox Christians, because it was the Great Thursday. Therefore, he started with an interesting presentation of the presentation of the Last Supper with its inner significance<sup>24</sup>, realizes a comparison with other religions. Then, relating the religious context with the pandemic one, he speaks about the challenges created by it and by the need that the faithful see in a responsible way the situation and listen their leaders in order to avoid a future increase of the number of contaminations. In the same time, it brings in the discussion, as a keyword of approach, the love, seen as a virtue and as a principle, and understood not only in its theological meaning, but also in the social one, as the care for the other and for the entire creation.

Well-written and offering both a synthesis of a rich recent literature dedicated to an actual topic, and an anthology of original reflections related with aspects like the pandemic times, Antonio Sandu's book entitled: *Bioethics in crisis or the crisis of bioethics* is not only an interesting contribution to the understanding of a young branch of the contemporary science, but also a book that makes the reader to address himself questions regarding the life where he lives, its potential future and the way how he or she contribute to the evolution of the world where he or she lives. It draws the attention on potential future dangers, create interdisciplinary bridges and it brings

into attention relevant aspects, previously neglected in the Romanian space. For this reason, the author must surely be congratulated and the readers must wait future research, meant to continue this approach, on the base of the future evolution of the pandemic context.

## Note:

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Antonio Sandu, 2010, *Tehnici de asistență socială* (Iași: Editura Lumen); Antonio Sandu, 2010a *Perspective semiologice asupra transmodernității. Filosofia orientului și fizica modernă. O viziune umanistă a universului* (Iași: Editura Performantica); Antonio Sandu, 2016, *Social Construction of Reality as Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing); Antonio Sandu, 2015, „The anthropology of immorality and the crisis of posthuman conscience”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* Volume 14 (40): 3-26; Antonio Sandu, 2017, *O etică centrată pe valori în sfera publică* (Iași: Editura Lumen); Antonio Sandu, 2019, “Towards a Phenomenology of the Digitalization of Consciousness. The Virtualization of the Social Space”, *Postmodern Openings* Volume 10 (2): 155-161; Antonio Sandu, Alexandra Huidu, Ana Frunză, 2020, „Social perception of ethical values in the Romanian post-secular society” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* Volume 19 (55): 105-120.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 101-132.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 133-186.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 303-371.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 389-412.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 7-17.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 13.

<sup>8</sup> Sandu Frunză, 2013, "Secular Bioethics and Euthanasia in a Democratic Public Space", *European Journal of Science and Theology* Volume 9 (4): 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> Iuliu-Marius Morariu, 2016, „Bioethics in the Discussions of the Pan-Orthodox Synod from Crete", *Astra Salvensis*. Volume 4 (7): 247.

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 19-52.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 2-24.

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 335-339.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 53-86.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 87-100.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 187-228.

<sup>18</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 229-278.

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 231.

<sup>20</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 239.

<sup>21</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 246.

<sup>22</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 247.

<sup>23</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 389-412.

<sup>24</sup> Antonio Sandu, 2020, *Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii* (Iași: Editura Lumen): 389-391.

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