

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Nicolae Ecobescu, *Pleading for the world-wide genuine adherence to the basic principles of international law*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun, 2021, 624 p.**

The collection of publications signed by Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu was enriched at the beginning of this year with a new volume, with the title *Pleading for the world-wide genuine adherence to the basic principles of international law*, published at Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, under the auspices of the Titulescu European Foundation. The book has a provocative title, which urges reflection on the purpose and role of the principles of international law in international politics, but also on the broader relationship between political elites and diplomacy. Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu makes a broad and reasoned plea on real adherence to the basic principles of international law which, especially in the current tumultuous period that the international system as a whole is going through, seems to be much more formal than in periods of stability of international politics. Respect for the basic principles of international law, assumed and signed by the 193-Member States of the world, members of the United Nations, would be the guarantee of the maintenance of peace and a sign of the maturity of political leaders around the world.

The volume is a comprehensive one – 624 pages – and it opens with an introduction signed by the author, “Argument”, which emphasizes the perspective from which the texts are written, that of contemporary international law, “with a special emphasis on the need to accept and respect *in fact* and not only declaratively the fundamental principles of this law.” (p. 9) Starting from Romania’s entry into the UN, in December 1955, important moments in the evolution of contemporary international law that culminated in *Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations*, adopted by the General Assembly on October 24, 1970, are mentioned. This document should form the basis of relations between all states of the world, since it is a UN document, negotiated and accepted by all Member States, and its principles should guide the state leaders in conducting the foreign affairs of the states they represent. But, as we can see from the deployments taking place on the current international stage, as in other historical epochs, these principles are often circumvented, hence the plea of Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu for their observance.

The volume also has in its content a foreword signed by the Ambassador and Professor Ioan Voicu, “A Persuasive Invitation”, a plea for multilateral diplomacy and for the present book written in the pure spirit of this diplomacy. Professor Ioan Voicu remarks upon the actuality of topics raised by the author of the book, which makes the work all the more tempting for any reader passionate about diplomacy or international relations: “alliances and fundamental principles of international law; regionalism; national interest; democratic security order; parliamentary diplomacy; the main axis of political transformation in Europe; Black Sea Economic Cooperation; non-proliferation of nuclear weapons; fighting terrorism.” (p. 23) All of them urge – with their eyes on the young generation – to future research so that the voice of “authentic diplomacy for peace” can be heard as widely as possible in the world arena.

The book continues with the 26 studies, articles and conferences held over the years by the distinguished author, from which we render here several titles: “Alliances and International Law”; “Unity and Territorial Integrity as a Fundamental Dimension of National Interest”; “Towards a Common, Democratic and Comprehensive Security Order in Europe”; “New Developments of Regionalism: Appropriateness of Setting-Up of an Institutional Framework for its Study”; “Democratic Security – An Essential Prerequisite in Shaping a New Order of Peace and Stability”; “Consideration Concerning the Imperative Need to Build Democratic Peace and Security Systems”; “Avoiding Marginalization of the Balkans – A Major Challenge for the New European Security Order”; “The Main Axis of Political Transformation in Europe: Consolidation of Democracy and Progress for All Nations”; “Considerations on Economic, Environmental and Legal Dimensions of Security”; “Towards a Global Democratic Security Order”; “Towards a Strategy of Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes and Global Reconciliation”.

One of the studies that has drawn our attention is the discussion about national sovereignty, with the title “Sovereignty as the Foundation and the Basic Principle of International Law”. The concept of sovereignty has a long history, which appeared in antiquity and challenged, not infrequently vehemently, in the era of globalization. Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu, however, comes up with the diplomatic perspective on the concept, so reasoned and enlightening. “It is as if we would refuse to acknowledge the existence of almost 200 sovereign States in the world” (p. 247), says the author as an indisputable argument in favour of the *de facto* existence of sovereign states and the concept of sovereignty in its basic sense. Sovereignty is a “reality” and “the basis of international law” on which the international system of nation states operates. All the forces of globalisation operating today have failed to annihilate the international system of sovereign states, as the very existence of the UN proves. The sovereign state is the subject and actor of international law, whose status cannot be undermined – not even by international organizations, in increasing numbers in the contemporary era. The theory according to which international organizations have the effect of undermining national states cannot be supported in the sense of Ambassador Nicolae Ecobescu. “... the important role held by international institutions (established by the States themselves) would be detrimental for those who created them” (p. 264), argues the author in combating this theory. On the contrary, as international realities have shown, states most often use international organizations to increase their power and influence in the international system.

That is not to say that sovereignty has not changed, including from the perspective of international law. And here Nicolae Ecobescu brings up Michel Virally, who analyses the influences that international law has brought to the concept of sovereignty. He thus notes that some classical attributes of the sovereign state have been restricted, such as, for example, the right to make war and the obligation of states to respect human rights, included in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. However, they do not affect the fundamental attributes of the state, as stated in the Declaration of Principles of International Law.

The same pertinent and convincing analysis can be found in the entire collection of studies and articles that form the basic structure of the book, completed by a series of 4 fundamental documents for international law: “Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations”; “Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States”; “United Nations Millennium Declaration”; “Declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations”.

The volume published in English deserves a wide dissemination, so that the plea in favour of international law reaches as many cultural spaces as possible and as many political leaders as possible. International law is the only one that normalizes the anarchy of the international system, the path that states themselves have invented to regulate their relations with each other. Or, as Mircea Malița wrote, “international law is a science called to systematize the rules of conduct or relations between states” (Mircea Malița, *Diplomacy*, 1975, p. 43). Provided that its basic principles are respected in their spirit and letter and that political leaders honour the international commitments that their states have signed. It’s a way to make the whole world a safer and more peaceful place.

**CRISTINA VOHN**

**Dan Dungaciu, Cristina Ivan, Darie Cristea, Lucian Dumitrescu, *O Enciclopedie a Doctrinelor de Securitate [An Encyclopaedia of Security Doctrines]*, “Ion I. C. Brătianu” Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, 794 p.**

#### CONTINUITY IN THE ANALYSIS OF SECURITY DOCTRINES

We bring to the attention of those interested in the issue of Security Studies a theme understudied in Romanian literature and we consider that the issues discussed in this volume have the potential to be a useful analytical tool, whether we refer to academic debates or those formed around the analysis or even the elaboration of security doctrines and strategies by the specialists from this field. *An encyclopaedia of security doctrines* continues the approach launched in 2012, when students, professors and collaborators from the Master of Security Studies of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Bucharest brought to the attention of those interested a first volume centred around debates and information from the topic of Security Doctrines led by University Professor Dan Dungaciu. This volume can be a reference for any debate focused on a better understanding of political and security developments, or for the possibility of further researching security doctrines and strategies, using the pattern proposed by Professor Dan Dungaciu.

To bring together the diversity of the doctrines analysed by the authors, the volume is split into five sections. Thus, the first part consists of a series of theoretical guidelines, and the second will include a series of already classicized American doctrines that continue to influence the current ones, as well as some recent developments. Thus, one can track their continuity elements, and through the analysis of the current ones, we can identify the influences more or less obvious at a first analysis of their content. The third part brings together European doctrines, and in the fourth part we find some doctrines from Asia, the Middle East and South America. Our encyclopaedia concludes with important doctrinal guidelines for understanding the dynamics and influences of contemporary international relations.

The efficiency of a security doctrine also depends on the relevance that it has in the historical context in which it will be applied, and this was also the goal of those who contributed to the content of the volume, partly by respecting a pattern applied to the security doctrines, presented in the following text by Professor Dan Dungaciu.

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For a better understanding of the structure of this volume, we will briefly present the contributions made. Thus, the articles section is opened by the presentation of Professor Dan Dungaciu, who builds a theoretical framework for a better understanding of security doctrines and proposes a grid for a critical analysis of them. Continuing the encyclopaedia, it provides us with a conceptual framework for security, international relations and security studies in an analysis that summarizes the main developments and theories relevant to our subject. Darie Cristea recommends a multiparadigmatic vision in security studies research. Lucian Dumitrescu brings to our attention a postmodern perspective of the security of the European Union. In this study we have a number of conceptual clarifications useful, for the understanding of the European institutional model.

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As mentioned above, the second part brings together some American doctrines that have caught the interest of our contributors. Andrei Milășan opens the section through a study in which the analysis of the Monroe Doctrine is preceded by a broad contextualization of the elements that contributed to its signing. Further on, in Mirela Zorilă's analysis on the doctrine of containment, we have a parallel between the discourse and the reality of what remained known as the Truman Doctrine. American doctrines presentation is continued with an analysis of the Reagan Doctrine signed by Maria-Alina Vâlcea, which is one of the most popular security strategies during the Cold War, considered a revision of the containment policy, but based on the roll-back strategy, and seen as a counterweight to the Brezhnev Doctrine. Ovidiu Apostoaie's study on Bush Jr. Doctrine, presents a new vision of American foreign policy and it includes the main facets of a project aimed to restore the American power. Analysing the Obama Doctrine, Lavinia-Magdalena Mandache notes that a number of events such as the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the financial crisis of 2007-2008 focused its strategy more on domestic politics, a move seen as a fundamental change in its strategy. Further, the doctrine is described as a mixture of strategic elements such as international cooperation, military restraint, containment, negotiation, rollback strategy, integration through diplomacy, membership in international institutions or non-intervention and provides conclusive examples for each case. A distinct approach on the Obama Doctrine has been written by Cristian Mariș. Drawing a parallel with Truman's (1947) Containment Doctrine applied to the Soviet Union, he describes the elements of the post-2015 Obama Doctrine as the Containment of the Islamic State. The following doctrine is an analysis of the Obama Doctrine, in which Bianca Pulbere addresses the Open Doors Strategy of the United States of America and the policy followed after the Cold War. The author also focused on the role and domination of the United States in shaping the politics of the world's states. Obama's policy interpretations series is completed with a study signed by Lucian Dumitrescu. The lines bring to our attention a review of the Obama Doctrine, by addressing how we should explore a presidential doctrine from an academic perspective. The Trump doctrine is the subject of a thorough analysis of his foreign policy considered as one of isolationism doctrinally propelled by conservative nationalism. Also, Lucian Dumitrescu brings into focus the elements of change and continuity in relation to the Obama Doctrine. Iulia-Petronela Moise concludes the second part with an article focused on America's Grand Strategy from Trump to Biden.

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The third part begins with the Putin Doctrine, an analysis signed by Irina Croitoru. The explanation offered for the solidarity of the Russian population is due to the obedient behaviour of the press and the exploitation of foreign alterities. Following the

study, we find the listing of the relevant initiatives of the doctrine and noting that much of Russia's foreign policy is based on three strategic imperatives, namely the quality of nuclear superpower, the power within international activities, and the hegemon of the region, in terms of political, military and economic. Next, we have the presentation of the Medvedev Doctrine. Vlad Irimie presents a coherent picture of the importance of Medvedev's Doctrine and how its principles still influence the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Cristina Melnic analyses the Doctrine of Ukraine post Euromaidan and points out the consequences of the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea by the Russian Federation, and Mihaela Gabuja presents the main features of the Yanukovych Security Doctrine. Damian Mihai Popescu analyses the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland since 2007. Within this doctrine we have as main promoters President Kaczyński, Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski and Prime Minister Donald Tusk. In the next lines, we find an analysis of this doctrine on several dimensions, specifying the elements on which the Polish strategic vision focuses, and references to a potential role of mediator between East and West given that the energy dependence poses a risk to Poland's security. The Security Doctrines of the Baltic States continue the part dedicated to European doctrines. Adrian Sandu makes an analysis of the three states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) from Northeast Europe, which he believes that should be analysed together, as they try to position themselves as a unitary regional bloc in order to consolidate power in the face of threats. Next, Nicolae Țibrigan offers us a perspective on the military doctrine of Georgia, presenting also the geostrategic context of the South Caucasus and the Black Sea through in the light of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. Florentina Medeleanu presents some characteristics of Nicolae Ceaușescu's Strategy. The author believes that Nicolae Ceaușescu's political ideology was defined by two distinct phases, the first one being characterized by strengthening Ceaușescu's power within the party and continuing the political line of independence from Moscow, while the second phase coincided with the establishment the national-communist dictatorship and the cultural revolution. Matei Blîțnaru makes a comprehensive analysis of the Turkish Doctrine in the modern period. We have a synthesis of the neo-Ottoman current, but also one of the doctrines which preceded it. Ioana-Nelia Bercean presents the characteristics of the Responsibility to Protect Doctrine. We are thus moving to the level of international law and humanitarian interventions with a doctrine that has emerged as a response to the inability to effectively prevent mass crimes and atrocities within the borders of a sovereign state.

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China's security doctrine opens the fourth part. In this study, Ioana Nemeș presents some geopolitical imperatives of China. Elena Ariadna Teodorescu continues to present China's doctrinal visions. The analysis of Asian doctrines continues with the Abe Doctrine, considered rather diffuse and interlaced in the very idea of the evolution of the Japanese state. Mihnea-Alexandru Ciocan introduces us to the radical change in the vision of the means and modes of development of the Japanese state towards a pacifist nation, focused on economic development, the central point of Shinzo Abe's development agenda being to regain the status of Japan as great power. In the analysis of the Yoshida Doctrine, seen as the foundation of the Abe Doctrine, Narcis Olteanu states that we do not have a defined period of development, as it was continued by all the prime ministers who have succeeded him. The author starts from the end of the Second World War and exposes the limits of the reactive vision of the Japanese state during the Cold War. In the analysis of the Sun Yat-sen Doctrine made by Roxana Bratu, arguments are brought to support the

fact that Sun created a system which wanted to modernize China, but understood that its ideals can only be achieved over time. Carrying on the encyclopaedia, we have a study on the evolution of Iran's defence strategy and nuclear doctrine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ioana-Nelia Bercean contributes with an analysis in which she aims to explain the Iranian nuclear decision-making process. We move to Latin America with the principles of the Calvo Doctrine. Amalia Raisa Petro comes with a doctrine that she considers to be a response to the doctrine of President Monroe. Part IV concludes with Raluca Baroian's study that treats the Calderón Doctrine of War on Drugs as a significant change within the Mexican borders by analysing the war that the state (led by Felipe Calderón) is waging against drug traffickers. We thus have a contextualization of the adaptation of the state's frontal war strategy against drug trafficking organizations.

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In the beginning of the last part of this encyclopaedia, we receive some information from George Scarlat on the characteristics of cultural doctrines. Between his ideas, we find a review of some narratives interpreted as parts of an endless cultural war. Diana Hăbuc and Iulian Zaharia conducted an analysis of PR policies in Intelligence and discussed the potential of intelligence agencies for integration into the "modern narrative of cinema". After brief interpretations of some films, the authors conclude that film productions are not only bearing the message, but also become mobile for understanding these organizations. A study of Turkey's role in the European Energy Strategy continues the series. George Mihailov answers some questions about the present and future of Turkey in the European energy security. Ana-Maria Varga brings to the reader's attention the strategy of psychological operations and offers a case study on the role of the US Intelligence in the Iraq War. An analysis of the restructuring of the international security apparatus is brought to our attention by Maria Caimeanu. The transition from War on Terror to COVID-19 is one of the first interpretations in an attempt to outline a scenario for changing the focus of future security strategies in a post-pandemic world. At the end of this volume, Lucian Dumitrescu presents some aspects of the strategic narratives of public health in the pandemic. The article is focused on the strategic public health narrative through which Beijing built China's medical exceptionalism during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author states that the practices used by Beijing to promote a Chinese model are equivalent to the practices by which Washington has tried to delegitimize China's medical exceptionalism, thus becoming a process of mirror propaganda.

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These are just some of the doctrines with an impact on the security environment, which, analysed within the context they belong to, can form an analytical framework useful in understanding the complexity of security issues the states are facing and, why not, by the introduction of some variables, could provide scenarios for solving some of them. And if these things are not achievable, the reader receives at least a starting point in addressing the international security environment and a possible grid of analysis of these documents that might have a major impact on IR dynamics. We thus have some multiparadigmatic academic perspectives in the analysis of security doctrines. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was only tangentially approached by the new analyses of our collaborators and we expect to find some strategic reshaping in the post-pandemic world.

**CRISTINA IVAN**



**Ruxandra Iordache (coord.), *UE și Noua „Furtună perfectă”, cu o Introducere de Dan Dungaciu*, “Ion I. C. Brătianu” Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, 592 p.**

#### THIS EUROPE, (STILL) SEARCHING ITS WAY

In 2016, when Europe was touched by systematic and synchronized crises – economic, political and strategic crisis – the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy provided the first big photography of that moment in the Romanian academic literature. The volume dedicated to these complex crises was published under the title *Perfect Storm in Europe*, and was issued by the Institute’s Publishing House. The authors, researchers of the Institute, made radiographies of the very challenging crisis files, in various items such the financial crash in USA, with its effects invading Europe; Brexit; the migration crisis which made the political European world explode; or the terrorist attacks, irremediably frightening the old continent.

Add to all these acute dynamics the geopolitical incursions of Russia, who was again “going shopping” in the “proximity neighborhood”, and we have the complete picture of the moment.

We made an advertisement at that time in our volume, claiming that it was an unprecedented moment, and we predicted, in a realistic manner, without any excessive and inopportune shame, that the Perfect Storm to which we might assist would not conduce to the continent’s annihilation, but would surely affect the European integration phenomena, both on their horizontal and vertical axes (enlargement and federalization). The reaction to the Paris and in particular to Brussels attacks indicated the fact that a limit point was reached, beyond which there was no supportability for the achievement (*approfondissement*) of the European enlargement. This affirmation is valid for at least a non-determined period of time, necessary to UE and Brussels to convince the European citizens that they still are the legitimate and credible holders of the identities and security concerns of the population.

The editorial success of the book was beyond expectations, and a second edition was rapidly issued. The interest of the public for the book themes encouraged us to make an editorial offer in Great Britain, where the volume was published without any delay, in 2017, by Cambridge Scholars Publishers, under the title *The Perfect Storm of the European Crisis*.

The European crisis/crises were far from being consumed, obviously. The political mainstream fatigue, made clear by the 2019 European parliamentary elections, generated a landscape change across the continent, which maintained, however, its equilibrium, for none of the anti-mainstream trends, from the left or from the right, decisively gained the elections.

Europe was starting to work on its own crisis files, and there were many of them, and very difficult: the trans-Atlantic relationship, the sanctions against Russia and the search of a *modus vivendi* with a neighbour whom Europe would not wish to confront, the West Balkans and the frontier security, and the silent insinuation of the idea of Fortress Europe, the endemic incapacity to choose between federalism and intergovernmentalism, the idea of the strategic autonomy of the continent as a propulsion for a Trump-free Europe in the direction of a new global strategic impulse etc.

This seeming tranquillity was, again, interrupted by storms. The first was the pandemic, deeply disrupting Europe, the second, the Chinese defy. If the pandemic did not generate

the Chinese challenge, in return it revealed it, like a terrible and cruel litmus paper. And Europe was again in trouble. More, after the American elections and the installation of a new Washington administration (“Biden-Harris”) Europe was laughing with an eye, and crying with the other. Europe laughs, for escaping from a “bully” such as Donald Trump, but cries, because the “multilateralist” Biden attaches it to the hegemonic and triumphal chariot of the Americans, cutting off the European pretensions of “strategic autonomy”.

Again, Europe is searching for its strategic identity, but is doing that search in a time when the pandemic is not definitively closed – who could predict how many pandemic waves we would confront to in the future? –, and when the political and economic effects of the medical crisis do not yet expose their full potential. And this reflection was the starting point for the idea of elaborating and publishing the first chronicle on the pandemic in Romania: *Fighting ourselves, the virus and the world crises. Academic Journal of the Pandemic* coordinated by Cristina Vohn and Dan Dungaciu and published by the ISPRI Publishing House in 2020. We repeat, it was the first book dedicated in an exclusive and explicit manner to the pandemic crisis in the Romanian literature.

The 2020 volume may be considered as a step forward to the 2021 one. Because all the facts that happened after 2016, especially the pandemic challenge, justified the idea of continuing the project started five years ago.

In this context, we offer to the Romanian public this second book dedicated to the challenges our continent faces. We try to make an appropriate reading of the crisis files, to understand and evaluate their consequences. Like in 2016, these consequences are numerous, even more numerous if we only consider the bigger size of the 2021 book.

We hope that this book will be received with the same interest and attention as the precedent one, issued five years ago. We also hope, as soon as possible, for a British version of this second volume dedicated to the European crises.

The construction of the book is based on four chapters exploring: the relationship between the EU and USA; the pandemic issue and the relationship of the EU with China; the migration, Brexit and populism; the neighbourhoods of the EU. The domestic and foreign challenges with which the EU is confronted appear in their complexity and convergence, putting a strong pressure on the ambition and necessity for the EU to define itself as an important actor of the new world order under construction.

This volume is a “moving” photography of the European crises that converge and melt forming a new perfect storm over the EU. The image may appear with a movement effect, may be still unclear, but it certainly captures the symptoms of the suffering of the EU. The book offers various angles of analysis and observation resulting in a complex landscape of the EU – but not only of the EU –, facing big challenges and changes.

The documentation and elaboration of the studies are the fruit of an intensive and continuous effort, especially considering that the speed of the events interesting the problematic of the book was and continues to be amazing. For this reason, the adaptation, the upgrading and the consequent completion of the studies were an important challenge for the authors, always in competition with the alert tempo of their individual and social existence.

Perhaps the most illustrative example is the pandemic crisis, which complicated and aggravated each one of the items analysed in this volume, and brought the authors closer to their theme of research. This volume has its own life, for being written from the perspective of the researcher who is participant or witness to the subject he analyses and tries to



understand, with the same concern for placing the research on the necessary and very specific theoretical base.

We thank our colleagues from the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy for their effort and availability to align themselves to the political and strategic challenges of our world and for their capacity to offer to the public, with an incredible and regular rhythm, such interesting books that represent honest and lucid chronicles of our times.

**DAN DUNGACIU**  
**RUXANDRA IORDACHE**

**Cristina Vohn, Dan Dungaciu (Coord.), *In the Fight with Us, with the virus and the crises of the world, Academic Journal in Pandemic***, Publishing House of the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “I. C. Brătianu”, Bucharest, 2020, 648 p.

“You can’t see the elephant with a microscope. Just as you cannot fully understand the springs and reverberations of a global crisis like the one we went through. You are too close to the phenomenon, too involved, too “from there”. With the above lines begins the introduction, signed by Professor Dan Dungaciu, of the Academic Journal in Pandemic called *In the Fight with Us, with the virus and the crises of the world*, volume coordinated by Professor Dan Dungaciu and Cristina Vohn, scientific researcher at the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “I. C. Brătianu”. The volume was released in the spring of 2020 at the Publishing House of the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “I. C. Brătianu” and brought together in its pages academics and lot of researchers.

Through this extensive paper, the first publication dedicated to the COVID19 pandemic, the researchers from the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “I. C. Brătianu”, around some prominent members of the Romanian Academy, undertook the task of revealing, through daily pages of the academic journal, articles and studies, the multiple facets of a phenomenon that astonished the whole world.

The first chapter of the volume, entitled The Voice of the Academicians, presents the studies and articles signed by distinguished members of the Romanian Academy which analyse the multiple perspectives of the pandemic that caused consequences with global impact.

The first editorial with which the Academic Pandemic Journal begins is signed by the President of the Romanian Academy, Ioan Aurel Pop, suggestively entitled *Thoughts in Times of Restriction*, at the end of which the academician concludes with the following thought: “This unexpected crisis has taught us what to value in life, how to separate values from nothing, what great fortune is the wealth of the soul. We run moment after moment for good paid jobs, we seek to live in great material comfort, we often hide our true feelings, and now we realize what wealth we have in ourselves and how we could pour that wealth upon our fellow men. Maybe, after this hard test, we will otherwise arrange our individual and social life, we will wake up to be better and fairer, we will pour our overflowing soul towards the world and the country, that is, towards our corner of the world, which we do not love because is perfect (is not!), but because is (still) ours.”

The large volume continues with the academician Victor Voicu interview taken by Mihaela Helms. Under the title *Romania still has the possibility to control the phenomenon of the spread of the virus – which is... hats off!* the dialogue talks about science and its moral values. The academician's opinion is that it is necessary to "Let's let the scientific world do its job. I trust the honesty of scientists." I am confident that the truth will eventually be known, although there are "realities" – in quotation marks – that mankind has had a hard time identifying as genesis and origin. ". At the same time, in the pages of this academic paper, Victor Voicu explains in an interview for Free Europe why, in crisis situations, states should rely on the military. From his point of view, the magic word is "discipline": "What is important to emphasize is that you are not preparing for a pandemic, for a nuclear accident, for an earthquake when it happens, but before. You anticipate, you know that you need specific material resources for any catastrophic event and human resources. The idea is not to build walls, but to organize and think clearly: you always have to have some solutions, some variants, some backup solutions. That's what the military has always said, that the politicians should prepare themselves in advance."

The pages of the first chapter also present the message of the President of the Romanian Academy on the Romanian Academy Day, celebrated for the first time in history away from the institution with members not being able to meet in the traditional festive General Assembly and without organizing "Open Day" by reason of the serious circumstances that humanity is experiencing. The president's message proposes the celebration of "the Academy, all of us, in our souls, to make them aware again, in the community and in communion, of the role of supreme forum for consecrating the intellectual and research values in our country. Let us think – especially these days – of the work and creation of the great medical scientists of our institution, those who developed the most effective medicines, vaccines, remedies, techniques and who healed, through their dedication and talent, millions of people and saved millions of lives".

Also in the articles written by the president of the Romanian Academy we notice the one entitled *Dangerous Elders*, an article in which the academician reminds us of an important moment in history: "more than two centuries ago, when Napoleon was campaigning in Egypt (at that time he was only General Bonaparte) decided, in front of the Mamluks and a borderline situation, to apply a circular defence tactic, with the values in the middle and with the French soldiers deployed along the circle. It is said that then the future emperor would have given a memorable order, which did not sound good at all: "Donkeys and scholars in the middle!". This meant protecting these two categories of beings (true values) by placing them as far away from danger as possible. It was not bad, but it was good because scientists were not assimilated to donkeys, except in terms of their usefulness. Beyond the joke, donkeys were invaluable because they were the best carriers, and scientists were indispensable for deciphering Egypt's historical treasures, including hieroglyphic writing. Both categories did their duty, for which reason Paris has got in the possession of Egyptian obelisks looted and carried with difficulty, and humanity with clear messages about a world to which we owe, among others, the Greco-Roman civilization, from which our modern and contemporary civilization is derived."

In another flash of thoughts, under the name *Pandemic and again Pandemic*, academician Ioan Aurel Pop mentions that if we talk only about "quarantine", Coronavirus and masks, we will end up not dying of the virus, but of hunger. "The authorities have a duty to take the strictest measures to ensure the health of the population, but they have no duty to demoralize the world. Without the functioning of the economy we are lost,

even if we get rid of the plague. How about gathering our energies like the Swiss and thinking about measures to alleviate this daily pressure? Let's also dream of open parks, green forests, remote reunions and ordinary, everyday work. People are social beings, they live with each other, next to each other, they touch and hug. This is the nature of things. Let's not try to change it, but give people the dram of hope needed to continue life!"

In a wide interview at the end of April 2020, about life during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, published under the headline *Governments should understand, after the plague passes, that we cannot live with 0.17% for research* President of the Academy Romanian, Ioan Aurel Pop, spoke about how he lives during the pandemic, about the lessons that humanity has learned throughout history from other pandemics and about the lessons that we have to learn. In his opinion, "We marginalized top medical research, vitiated cell biology, virology, killed the Cantacuzino Institute, let ignorance, stupidity, astrology and even witchcraft proliferate," says Romanian Academy President Ioan Aurel Pop in an interview for the "Adevărul" newspaper.

Also, in the first chapter of the volume we find the interview called *The role of science in the resettlement and evolution of the world* signed by Acad. Bogdan C. Simionescu, vice president of the Romanian Academy, published in MarketWatch magazine, whose first paragraph is the most eloquent: "Pandemic manifested in the whole world, with maximum virulence in Europe, shows us how unprepared we are for major challenges. The health crisis is being felt in developing countries that are sweeping across the spectrum – from the poorest to those that many see, in good times, as role models. And this is happening at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the conditions in which the discoveries of the last decades of the previous century place medicine on a leading place, on a hypothetical scale of the progress of sciences..."

The second chapter of the Academic Journal in Pandemic presents under the title *Coronavirus Crisis* articles and studies from researchers and experts in international relations. In the first study, under the title *China – "indispensable nation"? The coronavirus and the battle for the future world order*, the coordinator of the volume, the sociologist Dan Dungaciu addresses the layers of the crisis and its apogee and states that the COVID19 pandemic is, "according to sociologists, a" total social phenomenon ". In other words, as in the case of wars, earthquakes or deep demographic crises, there is no level of social life that is not, in one way or another, affected by it. The first is the medical level, the one we are facing now. The second, at the same time, is the psychosocial level (the effects of isolation and quarantine), respectively that of interpersonal and intra-family relations; we are not talking about this at all, but we will see the consequences in less than a year (the increase in the number of divorces, family problems, the way we relate to others, etc.). The third is the economic level, namely the crisis or the coming economic recession. The fourth is the political one, respectively the way in which these crises, especially the medical and the economic one, subsequent, will affect the political profile of our societies, whether we are talking about national states, entities such as the EU or even globally. The last, and most important in the long run, even if harder to see today, is the global level, namely the battle between two systems, represented by China and the West (particularly America), which will develop their virtues and efficiency in the fight against coronavirus. The levels of the crisis are, some, concomitant, others, successive and with mutual influences. However, the final grid will be the configuration of the future world order. This is certainly how China looks at it, and this is how we should look at it with realism. You remember the famous words of Secretary of State Medelin Albright, after which "America is an indispensable nation." Well, forget about them! Today, China is the "indispensable nation." Professor Dan

Dungaciu's conclusion is that "... on its multiple ranges, especially the global/strategic one, today's crisis will remain with us and will continue to influence our lives. Awareness of this reality could be a strategic first step. "

In the same chapter, LARICS expert Cosmin Dugan talks about "The inevitability of crises and the fact that they can affect us all – regardless of social position, professional, wealth, etc., but also that individual safety and survival depend on collective behaviour, should make us more responsible for measures to anticipate, prevent, control and reduce the effects of a crisis. For this reason, in all countries, prevention and protection against pandemics is a key objective of government." Researcher Nicolae Tîbrigan addresses under the title *Pandemic Posts: Putin cries for Romania, and the EU turns the issue of pandemic posts behind Italy* and notices that "Public hysteria caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a real "digital" epidemic fake news, distributed mainly on social networks (Facebook and WhatsApp). Some of the false messages were attributed even to the Romanian authorities. The head of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, called this phenomenon of false news "infodemic" starting from the word epidemic. The WHO has defined infodemic as "an overabundance of information – some correct, some not – that makes it difficult for people to access reliable sources when they need them most," and all these false or partially true narratives are accompanied by a quite strong emotional component. In such crisis situations, the feeling of panic often increases in proportion to the attitude of distrust towards government authorities." Another editorial by the same researcher addresses the specifics of Chinese propaganda in the EU, the researcher believing that the coronavirus pandemic has opened the chapter of a real information war between free democracies and autocratic states, between the solutions offered by liberal technocrats and populist leaders.

In one of the many editorials in the volume, analyst Petrisor Peiu addresses the issue of reaching the limits of globalization, believing that "excessive globalization has brought Europeans a frightening virus from Wuhan, in the middle of China, generating a medical and economic crisis of epic proportions and the Europeans have gifted us with the terrifying virus." Today, the European Union operates according to the principle "every man for himself" and Romania finds itself stunned, in the midst of a pandemic, that it has lost more than a quarter of doctors and nurses in the last years, that it has almost completely lost the pharmaceutical industry, that it has closed the only vaccine manufacturer, that does not produce enough food to feed its population and that the "institutions" with special pensions and even more special salaries do not know how to manage the return home of tens of thousands of Romanians fleeing desperately from the epidemic."

Another perspective of the COVID19 issue signed by Professor Dan Dungaciu entitled *Will Europe be supportive or not at all?* through which the crisis that the EU is going through is approached and how this crisis "acutely reveals the difference between a nation-state and a *sui generis* political entity such as the European Union. In the crisis, Europeans are not looking in the same direction; then truly discovers "theirs" and "others."

Researcher Cristina Vohn, one of the coordinators of the volume, analysed the reactions of world leaders to Dr. Li Wenling's warning but also the reasons why the EU could not intervene in the medical crisis caused by COVID-19.

The third chapter of the paper, entitled *Academic Journal in Pandemic*, contains a long series of journal pages of the researchers from the "I. C. Brătianu", Institute of Political Science and International Relations, an updated narrated diary depending on the daily evolution of the COVID19 pandemic challenge.

The Editorial *Instead of a Foreword* signed by the regretted historian Stelian Neagoe, under the title *Today and Yesterday* offers us a historical insight and presents two examples of dramatic cases experienced by Romanians hit by cholera and typhus in 1913 and 1917 because, as Professor Neagoe says, “Changing the register on given topics, it is found, fatally, that of all the cataclysms that have hit humanity hard, the most dangerous are the epidemics. Plague, cholera, typhus, tuberculosis, malaria, Spanish flu, foot-and-mouth disease, chickenpox, Ebola, swine fever or bird flu, mad cow disease, etc. – they have halved the population for centuries in human existence”. According to the historian, “if this killer virus – which seems to be dedicated especially to the elderly – and its saving antidote will not be discovered, the coronavirus will not become a seasonal viral – a disease – but certainly a way to die. Period!”

As Professor Dan Dungaciu says, this volume “wants to be a small part, a drop, of the living memory of the crisis, which will be accessed by future generations ... it is the story of these challenges, our testimony to the challenge of COVID19 which can make not only people but the world sick.”

**OANA SIMION**

**François Levrau, Noel Clycq (eds.), *Equality. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 2021, 356 p.**

Levräu and Clycq have produced a monumental editorial work, dedicated to the topic of equality in times of great social polarization. Equality understood as a multidimensional concept is fundamental for the vital aspects of society such as human rights, solidarity and even freedom and how these are to be conceived implemented and experienced by subjects; these are accomplishments which do not occur without an overarching idea of equality. This observation sheds some light on the long history of the human attempts to understand the theoretical, social, and practical aspects of equality. The present book explores this idea extensively, investigating the concept of equality from a multidisciplinary perspective, where a diverse range of theories about equality and welfare are combined with concrete data about equality in the real world. To put it more explicitly, the thesis of this up-to-date and knowledgeable research on equality is the following: despite the neoliberal hegemony, whose influence is inescapable, despite the competition promoted by it, despite individualism and hyper-individualism, or the tendency to acknowledge ‘reality’ in a narrow positivist way, or, within the framework of meritocracy, any type of inegalitarian or neoliberal or libertarian ideology eventually proves to be a threat to community, to common projects, to peace and to a sustainable future. We find here the appeal to principles of social equality, the philosophical, moral, and practical discussion of equality, the distinction between equality as a concept and as equalisation, taking place at the more concrete levels, via decisions, policies, institutional mechanisms, media mechanism, and even psychological mechanisms and perceptions. Another valuable distinction is that between equality and the welfare state, especially since, as Robert E. Goodin noticed, although the justification for the welfare state resides for the most part in the principles of social equality, ‘the welfare state is not really very egalitarian’, aiming to redistribute ‘only a certain strictly limited set of social resources; it is concerned with minimum standards, not thoroughgoing equalization; it is concerned to readjust final distributions, not basic holdings of productive assets, and so on’ (Goodin, 1988, p. 51).



The research into equality is structured in three parts. The first part is entitled 'Theories & Histories' and covers the conceptual aspects, with reference to political philosophy, history, and multicultural theory. The debates are arranged around the 'object' of equality. Is it the capabilities, the resources, or the ends of (welfare)? The second part of the book looks at 'Institutions & Policies' and looks at the implementation of equality via institutional mechanisms and concrete policies. The third part of the book, 'Experiences & Impressions', critically examines the insights gained from psychology, sociology, and cultural studies concerning individual experiences and awareness of inequality.

The chapters in this collection represent some of the most relevant and pertinent contributions on the topic and they examine the boundaries of the concept and the way in which the ideal of equality can be experienced in real life. Equality is subject to a theoretical approach, but the confrontation between different theories has a practical purpose, as equality is vital in order to arrive at a more just, stable and desirable society, as well as a life of autonomy, dignity and liberty for all. At this point an important distinction needs to be made. Any discussion about welfare is at its core utilitarian. A discussion about equality, at least potentially, is richer: it may include considerations of welfare and utilitarian aspects, but it will never be representative enough or relevant enough if it remains limited to that. Since *A Theory of Justice* (John Rawls, 1971), the topic of equality has been part of the discussion of justice, provided that society is a system of cooperation among free and autonomous individuals: poverty and lack of opportunity, inequalities of all sorts are the highways for injustice. In this respect, the appeal to Rawls and his theory of justice is excellent. However, the relationship that is sometimes made between justice and redistribution can be too simplistic. This is the case for the present volume: failing to take sufficient account of the fact that welfare and redistribution are, in general, utilitarian, the interpretation and place of Rawls in the debate about equality is rather unnuanced and misplaced. Rawls talks about fair institutional and citizen arrangements and agreements which are principled and designed not only to legitimate the form of justice appropriate for society, but which are also trustworthy to ensure at the ontological and social level an appropriate conception of justice. It is necessary to understand that from the Rawlsian perspective a just society grants priority to basic freedoms over other social objectives, such as economic growth or prosperity, an aspect which is dealt with very well in the papers in this volume, associated with the presentation of the maximal principle (the maximisation of the situation of the most disfavoured ones, but in the context of maximising the most favoured level) in contrast with the *leximin* principle (the level of the worst off should be corrected first), but which is not followed with consistency in the interpretations of Rawls throughout the volume. *The theory of justice designed by Rawls has a pragmatist, not a utilitarian dimension.* The theoretical construction follows the concepts of justice and distributive justice and not redistribution, in general. Besides justice, the key concept in *A Theory of Justice* is fairness, associated with the important discussion around the concepts of reasonable citizenship and goodness (Rawls, 1999, pp. 55, 70, 86-105, 228-259). Therefore, the Rawlsian theoretical construction is not based first and foremost on a discussion about redistribution or "simple" equality. It is rather about reasonable and fair access to everything, not only resources, and to the exercise of freedoms and rights for the enjoyment of the good life.

The studies in the volume approach welfare as a major concept in political science in different sections, incorporating both the work of Fr. Levrau, on the one hand, and Wim Van Lancker and Aaron Van den Heede on the other. It is defined as a form of governance



which plays a key role in ensuring a good or decent level of life for its citizens, via specific set of wealth distributive and redistributive policies and through a specific network of social institutions. The concept of welfare is based on principles such as equality of opportunity, the equitable distribution of wealth and the public responsibility for those citizens who cannot provide for themselves. However, a decent life is something very subjective, a fluid notion that cannot be captured precisely and described via a fixed and final set of characteristics. Even the welfare state does not take a single determinate form in reality and it undergoes a number of forms and shapes that change throughout time and from country to country. After the era of *laissez-faire*, both old and new social risks came to the attention of the welfare state, within a complex and mutable “welfare deal”. To complete a “big picture” the investigation shows the difficulties associated with the processes of government and management of the welfare state: assessing the desirable level for the services provided by the state; ensuring a correct, equitable and sustainable level of benefits provided and of the compulsory contributions required in order to sustain productive work and efficiency, without overburdening society with bureaucracy and diminishing its overall functionality. Also, surprising or not, contemporary views on welfare support the allocation of an equitable and well-considered portion of resources from the national budget, at a level of the social services above that funded by contributions from the citizens. In our view, the most interesting is the theory of access to advantage. Thus, in the section dedicated to welfare and equality the investigations show that following the works of Richard Arneson, and especially Gerald A. Cohen, the main question is not to “equalize” a specific type of “equality of chances”, nor to distinguish the level (depth) of equality targeted. The first one is “bourgeois equality”, which involves the elimination of the formal and informal restrictions applied to the equal chances in life. A formal restriction is slavery and racial prejudices constitute “informal restrictions”. The second level is “liberal left-wing equality of chances”, which involves compensating for the circumstances of birth, upbringing and socialisation. This represents a “socialist equality of chances”, pushing the idea of equality further on the basis of the idea that native abilities are as “unselected” as the differences in social environment and therefore going closer in its arguments to the Dworkian, “luck” approach to equality.

Indeed, inequality is contrary to justice and dignity and a source of domination, which is morally wrong. François Levräu adopts a broader political and philosophical view regarding equality as a moral ideal. The egalitarian debates indicate the centrality of the topic of distributive justice. But what should be distributed equally and to what purpose is one of the major issues in these debates. Equal conditions versus equal resulting situations is a key issue in these debates. Other difficulties concern the intricate nature of the financial, institutional and bureaucratic changes which would be required in the political and social institutions in order to accomplish equality. The debate around equality is also an investigation into the just society, but it involves discussing important outcomes of the dynamic equality-inequality, in terms of health, dignity, respect and self-respect in democracy, as well as in terms of solidarity and societal trust.

The theoreticians who agree upon the necessity of distributive equality disagree on the topic of the “equality of *what*”: those who concentrate on resources argue for the institution and guarantee of an “equal package of goods”, the welfarists concentrate on the equal enjoyment of goods, services, opportunities etc. and “capabilists” are preoccupied with equality of real freedoms. The accepted patterns of distribution may vary, too. *Right-wing libertarians* focus on the free market and the individuals’ inalienable right to property and the accumulation of possessions. *Left-wing libertarians* support respect for liberty, but advocate an egalitarian approach to natural resources. *Telic egalitarians* are

for *strict equality* and the eradication of all forms of inequality. *Luck egalitarians* sustain a distributive principle combining respect for equality the individual's responsibility for their choices. *Prioritarians* call attention on the dire situation of the poor that is always noticeably worse than a decent standard of life requires, the level required by basic human dignity in our century, considering the scientific developments of humanity etc. (and, in our view, the most interesting aspects are raised by Parfit, 1997 and Rawls 1971). *Sufficientarism* makes the case that poor do not have enough, which is morally problematic and undermines their human dignity. *Limitarians* look at the upper tail of distribution and consider that the conspicuous extravagant luxury of the rich makes the fact that other people starve to death all the more blame worthy. *Social egalitarians* are interested in finding the appropriate distribution principle mainly because the enduring stability of society is threatened if people cannot meet each other as equals. Egalitarianism faces also global worries (scarcity of global resources, overpopulation, climate change, refugee streams, and religious terrorism and, more recently, pandemics) and the preoccupation with global justice and justice for future generations.

The historical view with regard to the vindication for economic and political autonomy explores situations where communal resources were not privatized and inspires the analysis of the connection between the contribution of people to their community and their entitlement to a share of resources and benefits, which relates to the discussion supporting the implementation of a universal basic income. This might be linked to the multidisciplinary meaning of the concept of *Nahrung*, arguing in favour of the right to a decent form of life for every community member and in favour of correcting the manner in which the invisible hand and bureaucracies allocate resources. However, nostalgic views of the past may be misleading and tend to mask the inequalities of former times, often regarded as "natural" (unquestionable) occurrences. Meanwhile, in certain contexts (in guilds, for instance) the historical view might emphasize certain practices of solidarity, membership and redistribution worth noticing and adapting to present day advances in reducing inequality. Attention to democracy, the rule of law and human rights do not by themselves bring about more equality. Historically, movements for civil rights have prevailed over welfare issues. At the same time, welfare themes such as "inequality of outcomes" and "equality of opportunity" got more attention, although analysts remark that in practice the latter has served to legitimize the status quo by shifting responsibility from the collective to the individual. At stake is the difficult connection between "equality of opportunity" and "merit". But should these two be disconnected? Thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen redefined welfare in terms of the resulting well-being being what people consider important and in terms of people's capabilities (their liberty and capacity to live the life they want). Is this a compromise between equality and rights or is it *a reconnection of equality and rights*? And, again, the reference to John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* is misguided, since the implicit moral conception is not a welfare utilitarian conception, something which Rawls states this explicitly. Rawlsian theory intends to establish a "certain conception of equality" (but not a substantive equality) different from practical and moral utilitarianism and different both from meritocracy and from a mere correction of luck. The criticism that the work does not give a substantial account of the concept of equality (R. Dworkin, 2000) is misplaced since the topic of the Rawlsian theoretical construction is not equality per se, but justice, in his Kantian interpretation, theoretical but not disconnected from practical application. As Rawls shows: "I begin by noting that the principles of justice may serve as part of a doctrine of political economy. (...) A doctrine of political economy must include an interpretation of the public good which is based on a conception of

justice. *It is to guide the reflections of the citizen when he considers questions of economic and social policy* [our emphasis].” (Rawls, 1999, pp. 228, 229) To guide is not to determine, neither to recommend nor to impose.

The inequalities of “difference” irradiate inequality. Socioeconomic disadvantage triggers negative and stereotypical representation of people as backward, strange and unintelligent, assigning and confining people to their more homogeneous, but impoverished and uneducated (and often non-white) groups. However, capitalizing on Platt (2005), the authors in this volume, and especially Ruby Gropas, conclude that “ethnicity can sometimes be a resource as well as a liability, and while the disadvantages of class and ethnicity can sometimes reinforce each other, ethnicity can sometimes mitigate aspects of class disadvantage”. (p. 158) Socioeconomic generalisations are tempting and often wrong, while more complex views in sociology of ethnicity and in the politics of multiculturalism are necessary.

Related to ethnicity, class and cultural norms, gender can be a source of inequality. Women and ethnic women might be more greatly affected by inequalities and discrimination in contracting marriage, married life and in their public activities. However, black men seem to be more badly perceived than black women in society, by peers, by different people and especially by various authorities and state representatives. In the chapter considering the EU framework for the promotion of equality, mitigation of discrimination and respect for diversity Ruby Gropas emphasizes several crucial pillars: law, positive action programmes, social cohesion policy instruments, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities measures, support for civic mobilisation good practices, and learning and cooperation programmes. After which Gropas looks at the triggers of EU equality framework and its limitations. The main concepts distinguished determined the measures taken and the framework of fair treatment and equality.

The difficult correlation between religion, ethnicity and inequality is discussed, although from these discussions of discrimination and inequality the factors of age and sickness (however relevant) are missing. Emphasizing different meanings of the notion of “equality”, the authors Fr. Levrau and L. Franken examine a multitude of aspects, including those pertaining to “difference-blind” and “difference-sensitive” approaches. Especially when a situation calls for the intervention of a (state) decision maker, what is the way to go? The authors argue (correctly, in our view) for a context-specific judgement and against the reduction of these cases to legal formulas. The approach should always be reasonable, that is contextual and oriented to an extensive consideration of the various factors at play in a situation (employment details and opportunities, functionally determined or not, the “nature” of the “offensive” act, the consequences and impact for others, the local and national context etc.

Tim Reeskens and Wim van Oorschot investigate the model of redistribution preferred by Europeans using an empirical methodology. The data from the European Social Survey (2008), measuring the way people relate to the principles of equity and equality and to the realities of need, prompts the authors to discern main redistributive justice tendencies, especially, those pertaining to welfare provision, in terms of difficult situations such as unemployment and (old age) pension plans. The authors argue that individual beliefs reflect national opinions and not just individual standpoints.

The relation between equality and justice leads onto the relation between inequality and injustice and is dealt with in a psychological way by Johanna Pretsch. What makes things both interesting and difficult in this respect is that from a psychological perspective it is not so easy to state that inequality is always unjust or that equality is guaranteed to be a fundamentally just thing. Subjective and individual criteria are as important as the

principles of justice in such evaluations. The reactions of people to injustice are subjective, too. Describing various reactions to distributions of resources considered unfair, the author takes into consideration three distinct contextual spheres, such as the educational sphere, where injustice may be perceived in relation to the distribution of promotion, degrees, attention, praise, prizes or learning conditions etc.; the workplace context, where injustice might be induced by the distribution of pay, promotion, performance evaluation, perks, benefits of all sorts etc.; and family context, where fairness is affected usually by effects of attention, recognition, affection, control etc. But similar psychological aspects should be relevant in other contexts such as differential treatment by authorities and treatment in the public sphere, mediatic treatment, and medical care treatment, which the author does not take into consideration. An important conclusion made by Pretsch indicates that similar reactions to unfair distribution instances may transcend the limits of the contextual spheres described above. Also, in our view, similar factors may function as indicators which reveal justice/injustice in various spheres – recognition, for example, may trigger evaluations of unfairness, inequality etc., in the contexts of education, in those created in the workplace or in those encountered in family environments.

Opinions and beliefs concerning equality and inequality in society are shaped by media. Sieglinde Lemke captures the idea that media representations of “economic suffering” are at least as important as artistic ones in cultivating the right sensitivity to the matter throughout society. Conducting the kind of analysis characteristic of cultural studies type, the author assesses this observation and goes further, establishing that popular trends in sensitivity toward the issues of inequality play a role in stimulating more transdisciplinary research dedicated to the topic of inequality. Confluence forms of discrimination are present in social life and they should be investigated in all their complexity and, ideally, within a new transdisciplinary critical paradigm. Even more interesting is the fact that the authors realize the connection with a relevant new area of studies, entitled “precarity studies”. Investigating the conditions and the outcomes of precarity is paramount to providing a more accurate image of inequality, including aspects concerning class and social hierarchy, in general, but not limited to such aspects.

The volume is comprehensive and complex. However, among the missing distinctions we can identify the concept of equity which is important to the discussion, but not well differentiated from the concept of equality. Also, while it is clear that we cannot dissociate the discussion about equality from a discussion of the chance of realising liberal justice (alleviating suffering, rejection of domination, stigmatisation and cruelty, universal freedom, personal development) without which is difficult to even conceive of “the free society” (Scanlon, 2018), it is difficult to avoid and make nuanced distinctions from the blunt, instrumental and “downgrading” type of egalitarianism (Nozick, 1974, p. 229). Equality has considerable value, derived directly from the enlightened human principles of respect and dignity, closer to Rawlsian principled foundations. It needs to be remarked that an “imperative” of *priority*, distinct from the egalitarian orientation, serves as a commendable call to better the situation of the poorer, as a call to priority and urgency, which is the more acute the darker the situation of the worse off is (Parfit, 1997). The book is not only an introductory book on the topic of equality, but also a comprehensive and inspiring collection of topical studies capturing the present and future stakes of this difficult, crucial and historical concept.

**HENRIETA ȘERBAN**