

BIOETHICS EDUCATION: INTEGRATIVE SENSE AND BIOETHICAL SENSIBILITY

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Abstract

When reflected upon, the rapid advancements of bio-medicine, natural sciences and technology are associated with an awareness about the implications of their progress and the possible dangers they carry. A much needed multidisciplinary, pluri-perspective approach of multi-dimensional thinking flourishes in the efforts of integrative bioethics, a self-reflective discipline which serves as an orientation background, offering an integration of perspectives. Bioethical sensibility is a life-long developing ability to be aware of the importance of life, the living (*bios*), and to acknowledge and tackle issues of bioethics. Bioethics education, although it is still in a somewhat confused state, in a stricter sense focuses on providing appropriate profiles and members of bio-medical professions, science, industry and law with key concepts and references, preparing them for the problems they are going to be facing in dealing with matters of life, and in a broader, more metaphysical sense, continuously encourages bioethical sensibility, in order to build morally excellent characters, deeply concerned about the state of forms and problems of life, not just in individual professional settings, but on all levels connected with the living, the care for otherness, and the planning of a safe and prosperous future. The text examines the points of integrative bioethics and the importance of the nurturing of bioethical sensibility through a comprehensive bioethics education; combines Potter's idea of bioethics as a bridge to the future with Vuk-Pavlović's idea of education as actualised (in the) future; shows how character education is fundamental in shaping and developing sensibility for the living; and briefly examines Jahr's bio-centric approach in bioethics education.

Key words: bioethics education, integrative bioethics, bioethical sensibility, bio-medicine, character.

The acknowledgement of the power of science and technology comes with awareness of the potential dangers their use carries, along with a need to anticipate, prevent or facilitate unwanted outcomes. Dedicated care for the environment becomes paramount in an age of human-generated natural disasters; as do attempts at overcoming socio-economic inequalities and discrepancies in respect for human rights, and a rising sense of the need for access to bio-medical knowledge through a fair and controlled process of inclusion and non-exploitation. Bioethics serves as an orientation background for sciences and philosophy, it provides theoretical directions in pondering issues of life (*bios*), in reaching decisions and in policy-making. Integrative bioethics is a self-reflective discipline, or a meta-discipline, which goes beyond ordinary bioethical systems, conceptualises their world-views and offers comparisons and interpretations. Integrative bioethics is not merely an applied discipline, but combines the metaphysical inquiry of meta-ethics with approaches in problem-solving on an applied-ethics level. The role of integrative bioethics is not only to examine worldviews of different theories in bioethics, but also to constantly self-reflect and determine its own perspectives (this is difficult,

seen as much of its purpose is to offer acknowledgement, respect and use of different perspectives in questions about *bios*).¹

The increasingly pressing life-related issues of the present era, seem to be rendering a pluriperspective understanding of *bios* necessary. This can be achieved through bioethics education. The challenges of the new epoch cannot be grasped and overcome without an expanding bioethical sensibility, which needs a strong foundation, nurturing with specialised boosts and cultural expansion. Asking questions about life, and the answers that come up, cause an exteriorisation of a growing sense of their importance, as well as of the implications of the manner they are being dealt with, and this is what bioethical sensibility is about. How soundly this sensibility is recognized, articulated and nurtured determines how well the goals of integrative bioethics are being met, for it is bioethics of pluriperspectivity and multidisciplinary in facing questions about life (Čović, 1998, p. 565). Being rooted in the sense of the subject, the importance of life and otherness, bioethical sensibility can be nurtured by showing how little it changes even in seemingly competing worldviews, and how richly it draws from the paradigms of different cultures. Nurturing such sensibility encompasses a lifetime of respect for the living, which undoubtedly deals with issues directly pertaining to, or indirectly connecting with, the realm of bioethics. This is done by inclusion of a pluriperspective understanding of the care for life (the living), from respect for animals to the state of humanity and of the planet as a whole, which can be regarded as some of the most important endeavors of contemporary education. Separate subjects in schools, isolated disciplines and unconcerned scientists are no longer enough. Primary school biology, postgraduate level neuropsychiatry and the work in one's laboratory have things in common: the core of their teaching, the potentiality of their magnitude, the questions that come from them, when asked in philosophical terms - these all converge in the field of bioethics. How attentively they will be regarded, how significant the questions are, and how useful the answers, may very well determine how humanity's identity will be shaped in the face of its progress. Bioethics education is there to help shape the bioethical sensibility that stems from multiple encounters with aspects and problems of life, the living, and fellow humans, and to help direct and define issues of bioethics, different stances on them, the meaning of multidisciplinary in dealing with them, through a comprehensive confluence of ethics and science and the application of ethics on problems in scientific approaches and outcomes.

Bioethics education pairs the rationality of scientific development with the empathy of being a moral being, the orientation towards the future of technology with concerns for justice, equity and goodness of an integrative bioethical framework, the sustain and anticipation of progress with appreciation of the fellow living and solidarity with its condition. Bioethics education also shows key concepts of the theoretical part of bioethics, and puts them in practical contexts of applied thinking, as they arise both from actual situations of life, and from theorising about possible scenarios humans (will) face. It is not easy to conceptualise bioethics education, and not only because bioethics is a young and budding discipline – institutionalised teaching and learning are still struggling with the openness and fluctuation of the pluriperspectivity of the discipline. Despite it seeming as a hot topic, bioethics education has yet to be established as necessary in fields concerning *bios*, and offered to everyone else. The need for a long-term, or even a life-long nurturing of a bioethical sensibility is ever-growing, but on a smaller scale, there

¹ About this problem of self-determination of perspectives of integrative bioethics, and about the examination of a perspective which is an examination of a perspective (etc), and the danger of a possible regressus ad infinitum or the annihilation of its own self-reflexiveness in Smiljanić, 2011, pp. 250-251, and more on the possible interpretations: whether it is integrity of perspective or integration of perspectives (Smiljanić, 2011, pp. 251-252).

is much confusion in curricula planning, which is to be expected when such an overwhelmingly rich and expanding discipline is to be put into systematised, age-appropriate (depending on levels of study), and profile-appropriate frameworks. While ethics programs, the substrates and structures of which follow the traditions of schools of thought, national policies and cultural paradigms in different settings, and there have been possibilities for comparative analyses and data-sharing, bioethics education is unevenly distributed, not only on different continents and separate educational systems, but also within countries, cultures, even districts. One of the problems is that even bioethics experts themselves do not often have adequate information about what exists and what is lacking in the field of bioethics education (Ten Have & Gordjin, 2012, p. 99). This is further exaggerated by the vulnerability of the programs, lack of strategy for training of future educators and conspicuous lack of communication between bioethics teachers. The teaching programs depend on the enthusiasm of particular teachers, rather than a firm institutional basis. What is obvious after a brief research of the Balkan countries bioethics teaching strategies mirrors what seems to be a world trend²: educators in the field do not know what their colleagues are teaching, they rarely share experiences and access to teaching materials, and learning goals vary significantly from districts, to countries, to regions. Surely, it is a young discipline, and while in the seventies a handful of universities in the United States and in Europe had bioethics in their curricula, bioethics education has come a long way, becoming mandatory for many medical and scientific profiles, and suggested for many more, and starts to pick up importance in secondary and even primary levels of schooling. However, it is in a state of confusion, lingering in a paradoxical state where everybody agrees how important it is, but little seems to be done to systematise and appropriately direct that importance. Despite the praises bioethics education gets (albeit the definition of it still being blurry), “... in most countries there is not an impressive lot of bioethics teaching” (Ten Have & Gordjin, 2012, p. 100). One way to approach bioethics teaching on a university level (including programs in teaching hospitals or courses law programs and in industry) is through a “pragmatic” worldview, following the American standpoint from the seventies onward: medical ethics and medical care professionals learn necessary skills to face ethical dilemmas that appear in day-to-day operations, and this is sometimes expanded to most bio-medical profiles and to scientific research involving live subjects. This is, however, more of a prophylaxis – formally avoiding liabilities in medical and scientific conduct does not mean that medical professionals and scientists acquire in-depth knowledge of bioethics, it means that empirically, professionals will have a point of reference if and when they confront some similar issues in their work. And this, compared to nothing, is a huge improvement: awareness of the Nazi-conducted atrocities, or morally despicable trials (like the Tuskegee case), and a firm basis of key concepts which helps in determining whether a type of conduct is morally acceptable, whether a type of procedure is well measured in terms of risk-benefit ratio, whether a practice’s implications would increase beneficence and decrease suffering etc., is an excellent foundation, as it allows continuous building upon it, depending on contributing factors of the ever-changing world. The problem, however, is that as long ethics applied to science and medicine is considered a mere corrective of failures in professional behaviour, no new horizons open for bioethics education to be appreciated for what it is: a remedy against professional misconducts, but also an integrative framework of broad understanding of life, respect for the fellow living and openness to multiple perspectives in a just and informed problem-solving. The aforementioned long-term nurturing of a proper bioethical

² The Rijeka Guidelines for Bioethics Education from 2011 may be useful for a grasp of the general idea of bioethics education (see *Jahr*, 2012, p. 162).

sensibility, put in an institutionalised educational context means a systemised effort in training in order to create truly morally excellent medical professionals and scientists, who do not act according to ethical rules just because they are rules, but because they would choose to act exactly that way even without the formal need to abide by those rules. This effort in moral education is aimed at shaping up professional virtues, building up personal and professional integrity and overall character formation, and the sooner it starts the better – a medical student already fully aware of oneself as a responsible acting subject and a caring individual is intent upon shaping one's character as well as possible, a teenage science-aficionado is already aware of the implications of science and his/hers role in them, a primary school child is already aware that care for people, for animals and for the environment will be decisive in how he/she sees his/hers future. Some of the goals of bioethics education are the fostering and promoting of moral imagination; learning how to recognise ethical problems; boosting analytical skills; developing sense of moral duty and personal responsibility; encouraging the tolerance of criticism, disagreements and opposed opinions (Gosić, 2005, pp. 31-33). According to the founder of philosophy for children, Matthew Lipman, children are capable of abstract thinking since primary school age, they are able to think creatively and critically, thus essentially employing multi-dimensional approaches. Philosophy for children can, therefore, work excellently with integrative bioethics, which is a discipline with a strong educational role. Such a relationship can bring (philosophy for) children to the formation and development of bioethical sensibility, seen as the epistemological and methodological paradigms of the disciplines are quite compatible.³ Integrative bioethics, which is based on the model of pluriperspectivism, functions as an answer to the dramatic need for orientation knowledge, which would be opposed to epistemological reductionism, especially in issues on life and the conditions for its preservation (Katinić, 2012, p. 588). Bioethical sensibility is possible to develop and stick within the general public, only if educational processes are aware of its importance and intensely include ways to establish and develop it. If philosophy for children is seen as a general philosophical didactics transcending factual knowledge, learning by repetition and the lack of critical thinking (in short – educational reductionism) by employing multidimensional thinking and pluriperspective approaches to gaining knowledge, then, its compatibility with integrative bioethics can yield remarkable results. A new planetary sensibility, or bioethical sensibility, as a goal of integrative bioethics, is possible through multi-layered sensibility for bioethical issues in the general public, which, if comprising of children who have studied philosophy will be in an excellent position. Experiences show (Katinić, 2012, p. 600) that children have capacity and great potential for asking questions of bioethics, so bioethical sensibility must be encouraged in institutionalised learning, despite the difficulties that present themselves in terms of lack of life experience (and scepticism along the lines of “how can there be legitimate emotional stances without previous experience?”) or direct experiences with nature (“what if nature is distant in urbanised settings?”). Schooling cannot do miracles in shaping one's bioethical sensibility, but the synergy of different subjects and courses and individuals paying attention to it, and the multidimensionality and inquisitiveness in philosophy for children are certainly a good starting point.

In the fields of bio-medicine, science and technology, bioethics education as a long-term effort contributes to the care for patients, research-subjects, and other stake-holders for which the professionals in the fields are responsible. So, it is not only about remedying professional slips and misconducts, preventing future dehumanising and objectifying atrocities, it is about

³ An attempt to highlight this relation in Katinić, 2012.

humanising bio-medicine, attenuating technology, taming scientific progress for progress' sake. In this spirit, bioethics education cannot be focused on medical or scientific activities only, as the living transcends such spheres. Therefore, the sensibility for *bios* from the humanities, especially philosophy, and from the social sciences, applied to bio-medicine, science and technology, offers an integrative framework in a broadly-encompassing human context. Encouragingly enough, there being a growing consensus about the ultimate goal of bioethics education – that it is to produce good health professionals and scientists (Goldie, 2000), its importance emerges also in the learning profiles for professionals dealing with health and science from a meta-level. The broader conception that bioethics education is seemingly moving towards goes beyond the early stages of the traditional models of merely identifying and analysing ethical issues, and towards using the emerging alternative models aiming to influence students' attitudes and behaviours (Fox et al., 1995).

Van Rensselaer Potter and the conception of bioethics as a bridge to the future, not as biomedical ethics (although his strain, the American line, is more bio-medically oriented, unlike the European, more “metaphysical” one), or just ecological ethics, but a global ethics of *bios*, opened the path towards understanding the stakes in shaping and conditioning the future by acting in the present. The idea of bridging the past and present to reach a contemplated (if not planned out) future, and the importance of education and character-shaping, converge in the pedagogical concept by the Croatian philosopher Pavao Vuk-Pavlović, a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje for several years. Education and training should not be under ideological normativism, according to him. Education is a process of creation, involving the educator and the student (the pupil, the apprentice), it is a creation of love, of an activity continuously encouraged by this love through which values are being formed, and, thanks to which, the future arrives. The future, regards Vuk-Pavlovic, is not something that is temporally about to happen, something that necessarily comes in a chronological manner, but a time in which through creation certain life values are shaped and come to fruition as a result of the joint dedication of educator and apprentice. The future, therefore, is not to be thought of as a blind, soulless principle of destiny that constantly approaches as time goes by and the natural laws work. The human soul does not passively await the expiration of time – depending on the person as a spiritual creature and the experiences in life, the soul either creates or does not, but in order to create, it needs direction, and synergy, and an awareness for the potentiality in whose actualisation it may participate. The future, according to Vuk-Pavlović, is not external to man, but intrinsic, it is not something we wait for, serenely twiddling our thumbs, nor something we eagerly and hopefully await, but something we create with human longing and zealously. The future is “born” by living life and creating values. Future, in this sense, is more important than the passing of time, and appears wherever one strives towards creating and attributing values, it fills with meaning only in the presence of values (Vuk-Pavlović, 1932, pp. 29-30).⁴

People cannot escape the future (again, not in a temporal, chronological, but value-based manner). The yearning for the future as striving for values is the goal of the cultural society, of the culture it originates from, just as a creature needs to be educated and “cultivated”, in order to historically survive, i.e. persist in his/hers spirituality, meaning and value-continuity. The future depends on context and supplies contexts, which does not mean it can be reached by historical looking into the past and by repeating what has already happened, no matter how significant it has been, for culture, no matter how much it keeps traditional rites, does not develop by merely repeating them. According to Vuk-Pavlović, should education be planned only as based on the

⁴ More detailed in Vuk-Pavlović, 2008, pp. 23-26.

past, however filled with meaning that past is, it will be limited by the past, enclosed and bordered by it, and will become a means for repetition, for an eternal return of sorts. He does not, by purporting this, belittle the value of the past, as the valuable in the world as knowledge with confirmation and repetitiveness enters through the past, but insists that values, by being values, are not facts, and cannot be scientifically confirmed and determined. Axiologically speaking, truth is the main value of theory of knowledge, beauty – of aesthetics, sacredness – of religion, the good – of ethics etc, in this sense the value of pedagogy is the future. Conceiving something as having a future, means that it has a pedagogical, educational value. Educational actions and processes do not serve to some imaginary, illusionary future, but a future which will surely become present, actualised through values. Education can only mark its results in the new (always next) generations, and only in the future can it be determined whether it was appropriate and “good”. Value is confirmed in a future which is to be believed in, but not known of with certainty. Educational acting is not a mere historical fact – pedagogical functions create in a historical way, they influence history (Vuk-Pavlović, 2007, pp. 28-31).

Potter was being dubbed “the father of bioethics” for a few decades, until an earlier, prior father was discovered (thanks primarily to Hans-Martin Sass), the German theologian and pedagogue Fritz Jahr, and a new, European foundation of bioethics was acknowledged.⁵ Jahr expands the sense for the living on all of life, not just humans, but also animals and plants, insisting on a theory with a strong synergetic message, convinced that science and the results of the active and progressive human mind will show that there is not stable basis for adhering to an anthropocentric position. Bioethics lies upon the presupposition of a moral duty not only towards people, but all life-forms, thus, he offers an enlargement of the Kantian categorical imperative: respect every living being in principle as an end in itself, and, when possible, handle it as such! (Jahr, 1926, pp. 604-605; Jahr, 1943, pp. 183-187). Fritz Jahr is relevant on many levels, but in bioethics education his actuality is thanks to his insistence on character education, according to the ten ways he defined to influence moral reasoning in young people (Jahr in Sass, 2010).⁶ Gosić offers a brief resumé of the key points of each principle and then places each in a practical context with a pressing bioethical issue, like the right to abortion, euthanasia, organ transplantation etc.). According to Jahr, it is important to not teach predetermined subjective disposition, to avoid indoctrination within teaching contents, to avoid bias in explaining and teaching about bioethical problems. Along with this, the method of teaching is also to be devoid of indoctrination: cover-ups of predetermined opinion with so-called objectivity through manipulation in interactive teaching are to be avoided. Methodologically unacceptable is to present suitable facts and suppress unsuitable facts, whether by twisting them or denying them altogether. The educator should always consider different character attitudes; difference of opinions is not something to be skated over, but discussed, the benefits and shortcomings of having different opinions and attitudes must be available; if the educator does present a personal opinion, it should be done in an impartial form, and not by skipping unfavourable issues associated with it; biased information should be avoided as often as possible and opportunities to form their own opinions always given to students. Also, in the formation or review of an already existing character, reason and science should never be overlooked. The youth is not ready only for authoritarian methods and it should not be claimed so, nor is it ready only for methods of untamed freedom; when the development of an expected character is not going too easily, it

⁵ About the coining of the term “bioethics” and a chronological bibliography of Jahr’s works in Muzur & Rinčić, 2011, pp. 133-139, a precise list on pp. 136-137.

⁶ About his importance in the present era see Gosić, 2011.

should be remembered how things would have gone with another (a previously employed) method.

Through integration of perspectives, multidimensional thinking, multi-disciplinary approaches, thanks to character-training and encouragement of bioethical sensibility, problems with *bios* will more easily be analysed, understood, put in context and resolved. Integrative bioethics and bioethics education, enhancing a life-oriented sensibility and dedicated care for the living, will be part of the legacy of these stages of human development.

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