

The Bioethics and the Indian Philosophies: A Contribution to the History and Philosophy of Science

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ABSTRACT: *The history of bioethics is described in this brief essay. Then I will reflect on how the Indian philosophies might be useful to study the roots for the emergence of bioethics. Finally, I'll talk about my point of view to the higher objective of bioethics.*

KEYWORDS: *A concise history of bioethics; Bioethics and Indian philosophy.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bioethics is a term that comes from the Greek words *bios* (Life) and *ethos* (Ethic). Despite being a recent term, bioethics has had a very wide practical application and nowadays is crucial in contemporary society as an instrument to define the ethical principles of scientific practice (for example, organ donation, euthanasia, cloning, among others). In fact, the goal of Bioethics is to address the various issues that arise in the medical practice, namely to preserve all aspects of human life (from birth to death) [1]. In this regard, the theme of bioethics has given rise to various debates throughout the world, particularly the threshold for the application of principles of bioethics, taking into consideration the cultural and religious roots of each country.

On the other hand, the Indian philosophies [2] are one of the oldest philosophical systems of the world, being made up of six schools (from Sanskrit "darsanas") that address some philosophical concepts (for example, karma, reincarnation, interpretation of reality, among others) with application to specific issues of bioethics (for example, preserving life, among others).

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF BIOETHICS TO THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE: AN OVERVIEW

In 1927, the term "Bioethics" was used for the first time by Fritz Jahr in an article on bioethical entitled "bioethical imperative" [3] and subsequently was deepened due to various historical events that occurred in the 20th century, namely the scientific experiments (without permission) in human beings during the World War II, the challenges of the emergence of new technologies (such as, genetic manipulation), the problem of ecological ethics (for example, the pollution) and the dialogue between science and religion in controversial issues (such, euthanasia) [4].

Regarding the first item, in 1947, "The Nuremberg Code" argued that it is not allowed to perform experiments on human beings without their consent (such as what happened in the Nazi concentration camps). In 1948, this principle was reinforced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and, in 1953, by the National Institutes of Health of the United States that led to the writing of the "Declaration of Helsinki", in 1964. In 1978, the "Belmont Report" proposed the four main principles of bioethics, such as non-maleficence (avoid causing harm to others), justice (all people should be treated in a similar manner), beneficence (take positive steps to help others) and autonomy (respect the freedom of choice of individual life).

In relation to the second item, many scientists, philosophers and health care professionals have defended that the use of new technologies might only be applied for the benefit of mankind, namely the use of genetic engineering to manipulate human cells, as well as the ethical and legal decisions that the physician might have to take in relation to the life of a terminal patient or in brain dead. In this regard, the Hastings Center is referred to as a pioneer institution in the treatment of terminal patients.

The third item deals with the problem of ecological destruction of the ecosystems (mineral, vegetal, animal kingdoms), as well as the problem of finite natural resources of Earth (such as, drinking water, clean energy sources) in order to make this planet sustainable for human life. In this regard, the physician van Rensselaar Potter has written a book entitled "Bioethics, Bridge to the Future" that is a milestone in ecological ethics.

The fourth item aims to encourage the sharing of point of view among the various religious leaders, as well as to promote the dialogue between scientific community and religious leaders in ethical matters related with the human life (such as, abortion, contraception, among others) so that both of them might have a mutual enrichment in their area of study. In this regard, Paul Ramsey wrote a book entitled "The Patient as Person" that is a reference in the field of bioethics and religion.

III. THE BIOETHICS AND THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Bioethics has arisen mainly due to the need to create a "code of ethics" that promotes a right relationship between human beings, namely after the atrocities that were performed by Nazis, during the World War II, and nowadays through the possible abuse of power in the inappropriate use of new technologies applied to mankind, as well as the inappropriate human behavior to the environment (like pollution). Finally the misunderstanding interpretation between science and religion in relation to various aspects of human life, such as birth control [5].

In this regard, some Indian Saints [6] claim about the need of human being become self-aware of his/her own choices, so as to live an harmonious life with others. Thus, the Indian philosophies defend the concept of Reincarnation (as a succession of life cycles) where the human being has the opportunity to improve his/her personal character through right relationships with other human beings. For example, if a human being does not want to change his/her incorrect character (for example, have hatred due to envy), so it is better to detach physically, emotionally and mentally from him/her in order to avoid damage from each other. Furthermore, the Indian philosophies claim of "liberation" from the wheel of karma (from Sanskrit "action") through the correct relationships with others, with whom I live (genetic family, wife/husband, employers), and finally with the Divine (our true essence or "soul"). In this regard, some Avatars defend that the Divine Grace could mitigate the "harmful" effects of a given action, as long the person has the sincere aspiration and desire to correct his/her behavior in the next opportunity of a given situation in life (change his/her behavior).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, bioethics is an academic discipline with a transdisciplinary approach because it requires the knowledge both of science (medicine, biology) and humanities (history, philosophy, law). In fact, bioethics could be applied in various areas of human life, namely clinical (medical), social, cultural in order to preserve human dignity [7]. However, nowadays, there is still the exploration of the most vulnerable of society, such as children, women and elderly and (generally) people of low social and economic resources. Thus, I defend that bioethics cannot be used as a mere instrument for the maximization of pleasure or power over the others, as defended by the utilitarian philosophers. For example, use euthanasia in terminal patients, just because they have no life expectancy. On the contrary, I claim that it should be created the suitable conditions for the terminal patient so that he/she could die with dignity. I defend that this principle is valid for all other aspects of life (birth, etc). My point of view is that the highest goal of bioethics is to promote a "revolution" into the heart of all human beings so that the Divine Light, Love and Grace might be established on our Planet Earth [8].

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