Bioethics and Philosophical Argumentation

Symposium *Science, Ethics and Arts*
University of Freiburg
Dr. Philippe Merz
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Overview

• Three steps:
  • 1) Clarification: „Bioethics“ & „Philosophical Argumentation“ – what is that anyway?
  • 2) Key questions & areas of Bioethics
  • 3) Five major obstacles to Bioethics
1. Clarification

- „Bioethics“ / „Medical Ethics“?
- Bioethics is a somewhat confusing title for...
  - ... problems concerning life phenomena in general
  - ... Ethics of the Life Sciences
  - ... the sum of Medical Ethics, Animal Ethics, Environmental Ethics
  - ... Biomedical Ethics
1. Clarification

- „Philosophical Argumentation“?
  - With regard to methodology: no metaphysical presuppositions, no ideologies or personal beliefs; instead: consistency of argumentation & weightage of arguments, concepts, values, and norms
  - With regard to content: How should we judge and act in the many morally demanding situations of everyday life?
  - What can give us orientation when judging our own and other’s actions: the result of an action? The intention behind the action? Or the trust that we’ll have the practical wisdom to judge every challenge appropriately?
2. Key questions of Bioethics

• Key questions
  • What’s the beginning of human life?
  • When are we dead („brain death“ as ultimate criterion)?
  • Under what circumstances are experiments on living human beings morally acceptable?
  • Under what circumstances are organ transplantations acceptable?
  • What about transplanting animal organs into human beings (Xenotransplantation) – or producing organs with the help of embryonic stem cells?
  • How should we distribute the organs we have („justice“)?
2. Key questions of Bioethics

• Is the assisted suicide for terminally ill patients morally acceptable – and should we legalize it?

• Is the assisted suicide compatible with the professional ethics of physicians – and how far goes our autonomy for a self-determined death?

• To what extent do patients have to be informed about their medical therapy and possible alternatives („informed consent“)?

• What should we do with genetic informations about ourselves and others?

• Do we have a „right“ for healthy kids? Do we have the „duty“ to prevent genetic defects or severe diseases (esp.: pre-implantation diagnostics & CRISPR-Cas)?
2. Key questions of Bioethics

• Until when should women be allowed to perform an abortion – and under what circumstances?

• Should we perform every medical measure on every patient (diagnostic procedure, surgery, medical drugs etc.)? Or should we make this dependend on her age, physical condition, health insurance – or even sex and social position?

• Are different types of health insurances acceptable, especially if they depend on our income?

• How much money are we willing to spend for health – as individuals, but also as society as a whole?
2. Key questions of Bioethics

- **Areas of Bioethics**
  - Code of Ethics for Physicians
  - Physician-Patient Relationship
  - Induced Abortion
  - Assisted Suicide / „Euthanasia“
  - Research on human beings
  - Transplantational Medicine
  - Reproductive Medicine
  - Enhancement techniques (anti aging, doping, cognitive enhancement)
  - Ethics of Psychiatry
  - Health Economics
2. Key questions of Bioethics

- Central (normative) concepts:
  - Human life / human being
  - Dignity
  - Autonomy
  - Justice
2. Key questions of Bioethics

- Characteristics of Bioethics
  - Reflection of our moral standards, norms, and values – and how well that can be justified
  - Normative orientation for our self understanding & institutional designs
  - Possible only with an interdisciplinary approach
  - Bioethical judgements are mixed judgements.
  - Huge importance for the development of medicine, pharmacy, and our society as a whole.
3. Five obstacles to Bioethics

- 1) The increasing specialization of sciences – and correspondingly: the restriction of curricula
- 2) The fear of philosophical complexity & (supposed) relativity
- 3) The moral pluralism of our societies
- 4) The dominant imperative of our technical age: „What can be done, needs to be done!“
- 5) The economization of our health care systems (imperative of cost-effectiveness as ultimate goal)
3. Five obstacles to Bioethics

• Consequence I:
  • We all share the responsibility to engage in these challenges.
3. Five obstacles to Bioethics

- Consequence II:
  - We need the far-sightedness to implement those challenges more into the curricula of universities and into public debate.
3. Five obstacles to Bioethics

• Consequence III:
  • We need the courage for open dispute – and the openness to follow the force of the best argument.
3. Five obstacles to Bioethics

• Consequence IV:
  
  • But the most important challenge of today’s Bioethics is that we (as individuals and societies!) learn to step back from options that we technically have – if we come to the conclusion that they are morally not acceptable.

  But this learning process is just about to begin...