

Iatroethics

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I was very interested in the issue of seeking a scientific and philosophical basis for ethics in general, so I started to work in bioethics, iatroethics. We introduced iatroethics, using a term created by Bunge. We always talk about the rules of bioethics, but I will show you some reasons why this isn't good. Also, my hope is that the bases for science and philosophy be for ethics in general - for journalists, for politicians, and for all living beings, that it expands and therefore must be studied deeply.

DEFINITIONS

When the name 'bioethics'² appeared, I was reminded of these philosophical objections³: Biomedical is used often as a qualifier. For example, there is "biomedical science" and "biomedical research"—this combination is used widely—, but what is the boundary between biology and medicine? Biology can be defined as the science or, better yet, as the joining of disciplines whose object of study is the various aspects of life observed in different ways.

DEFINITION OF MEDICINE

On the other hand, it has always been said (and if you search through dictionaries, you will find this) that medicine is the science and art of preventing or curing disease. But I wondered when making philosophical objections to these overly simple definitions: when medicine was not a science, was medicine only art? Because, in the beginning, it had a magical—religious approach, and also an empirical approach. For example, to heal a fracture or to heal a wound were things that could be done. But at that time when medicine was not science but only an art, this definition was wrong. I had been thinking for a long time and did not know what to call it, but one day, Durand, a postgraduate disciple of Almenara Hospital, said, "If you are searching for a word, why not to use discipline?" I started to research and discipline worked well. So medicine is the "discipline whose aim is the conservation and improvement of health and healing or relief from disease"^{4,5}. This has indeed been present since the beginning of medicine. For instance, Asclepius, the god of Greek medicine, had two daughters—Hygeia, sitting there with his statue—, has to do with hygiene; and Panacea, who is related with the treatment of disease. The word "panacea" has become pejorative today. For example, we say that a medication is good for a number of things, so it is a panacea, taking away its importance. Since that time Asclepius and his two daughters were already concerned with the conservation (Hygeia) of health and the healing or relief (Panacea) of disease.

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BIOLOGY AND MEDICINE

Medicine relies heavily on biology and related sciences, but despite this, is it possible to draw a boundary between biology and medicine? Philosophically, I think so. But because of the close relationship between these two, this boundary is not accurate or well defined, but can be outlined taking into account the two main goals of medicine. Medicine is no longer only biology when it has such important focuses as the prevention of disease and the maintenance of health. This is preventive medicine and curative medicine (i.e., to alleviate or cure diseases). This has a lot to do with ethics. For example, if we are conducting research on a patient because we want to better understand certain aspects of the patient, and I apply biological methods only—to know a little more about the scientific bases of what I see, and I do not worry about maintaining health, preventing disease, or not hurting the patient—then, I am making an ethical mistake. We must always keep in mind the two main goals of medicine.

BIOETHICS

Bioethics emerged, and as we all know, as official; but for some time we have attacked this a bit. The principles of bioethics are: i) Beneficence (do good); ii) Non-maleficence (not to harm, not to do wrong.) But these first two, are they only bioethics, or are they iatroethics? This should be ethics for everyone: for journalists, for politicians, and for human beings in general. We have to do good and not to do wrong; that is clear. iii) Autonomy, that is to say, respect of freewill. But if we talk about freewill, if we talk about biology in general, this is fine for humans and some animals with an evolved enough brain, but for microorganisms... freewill?; iv) Justice, to proceed with justice, amply and without worrying about the ethnic, social, or cultural aspect of the people. In medicine, one must have respect for people in general^{6,7}.

PRINCIPLES OF BIOETHICS AND IATROETHICS

Because of these problems I separated “bioethics” = ethics of life, from “iatroethics” = ethics of medicine. This has been published in various publications^{2,8} in which

I propose as principles of bioethics: i) Conservation of life and improvement of the quality of life, and ii) No harm of life or the quality of life. And for iatroethics, I propose the following principles: i) Conservation and improvement of health, and curing or alleviating disease; ii) Non-maleficence; iii) Autonomy (and here one must respect the freewill of human beings); and, iv) Justice.

ETHICS AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE UNIVERSE

It is very important for the development of ethics in general to keep in mind that the universe moves and evolves continuously. The Big Bang occurred 16 billion years ago, 4,500 million years ago the Earth appeared, and then a little while later life came into existence. But how did life come into existence? In the beginning there were mineral substances, inorganic substances, after bio-monomers appeared—methane, carbon dioxide—, molecules that in time gave rise to life— bio-polymers. And larger molecules began to emerge. Then single celled organisms and their colonies appeared, and then multicellular organisms and their societies, until the human being was formed.

EVOLUTION: LIFE DEFENDS ITSELF AND PROTECTS ITSELF

Parallel to the evolutionary steps cited are the instincts that are recorded in the brains of animals. The animal behaves according to its instincts. To joke about the behavior of people: corruption—all us human beings have our deviations; we have all done bad things in life. When we think carefully about the only way get rid of corruption, it would be to transplant out human brains with dog brains, but we can not do that yet. Of course, there are different degrees of corruption. There are people who are rotten to the core.

Impulses. Impulses leave from the body and go toward the brain. For example, thirst, hunger, sexual desire, among others.

Emotions. One definition that I really like is by Magda Arnold, a famous psychologist who has written very interesting books. She has the following

definition: Emotion is a tendency felt toward an object judged as good, or against an object judged as bad, and that it is accompanied by physiological changes specific to the given emotion. Love has its typical changes—rage, fear... Every emotion has its own specific physiological characteristics. These states seem to create bipolar axes. Incorporating versus expulsion: one incorporates what is judged as good, throws out what is judged as bad, destroying what one perceives as bad and protecting what one perceives as good.

EGOISM AND ALTRUISM

There is a bipolar axis that has emerged during evolution—egoism progressing to altruism, and this is very important. When the cells lived alone (the most primitive ones), they could take anything they wanted from the environment, and there was absolutely no consequence. That is to say, they could be selfish to the extreme. But as they were evolving, the cells united, and there were multicellular groups. In organisms like us, if one cell is so egotistical that it doesn't worry about maintaining a good relationship and order with others, as is the case with cancer cells, which are thought to be the most selfish because they consume all they want, and eventually destroy the organism and kill themselves. The equilibrium between egoism and altruism is very important. In Christian religion and Judaism, it is mentioned that one must love one's neighbor as himself. In fact, one must try to do this, but one cannot. That would be a complete lie, because one must also protect oneself, one's family, spouse, and children. If I, for example, do not worry at all about protecting myself, my family, my spouse, and children, and I only care about society, people are going to say that I am insane. If, on the other hand, I care about myself, my family, and everything else, but I do not care at all about society, I am selfish. That would be the other extreme. Equilibrium is a very important thing. Selye talks about altruism as collective egoism.

EVOLUTION: HIGHER FUNCTIONS EMERGE

Then emerged consciousness and the mind, memory, and the capacity to foresee the future and plan your own actions. A dog, for example, cares

about the sound of the instruments used to prepare its food, and so it is anticipating its meal. But I very much doubt that a dog thinks about that the fact that in 15 years it is going to die as humans do. We have a more complex vision of the future; symbolism which is very important; intelligence, or rather, the capacity to solve problems and, also, to create things that are useful. At first it was thought that intelligence was unique to humankind, but it is not. There are many animals that also have these characteristics. They create methods or systems to make better use of their environment, and transmit them to their peers. Capacity to create a vast culture, a language written and spoken, freedom to make decisions, freewill; self-determination is very important here.

CONCLUSION

I am convinced that ethics should be cultivated, keeping an open mind and perspective toward new and unresolved problems; not to be fundamentalists, who following philosophical ideas or rigid religions, determine what can be done and what cannot. We must look at everything from a bird's eye view, especially new and unresolved problems. I am convinced that the problems of ethics that need to be resolved could be addressed satisfactorily, always keeping in mind inspiration and example, the path followed by life in the process of evolution.

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