

Jos Schaefer-Rolffs

Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Universitätsstraße 150, D-44801 Bochum
jos@schaefer-rolffs.de

Integrative Bioethics as a Chance
An Ideal Example for Ethical Discussions?

Abstract

The concept of Integrative Bioethics is the idea of an equal discussion between different ethical concepts from different backgrounds. This concept is not only suitable for the specific situation in Southeast Europe. It can also be a basis to affect the ethical discourse in other parts of the world, either with a homogeneous historical background or within a very diverse ethical setting.

With this essay I will try to point out the possibilities for the discussion of ethical problems in other parts of the world if the core idea of Integrative Bioethics is added to bioethical discussions. It seems to be a chance to find a way to deal with the differences between traditional and modern concepts of ethics.

Key words

bioethics, integrative bioethics, metaethics, pluriperspectivism, ethics

Introduction

Ethical discussions have always been very tough and have often ended as they begun, without a clear answer what the right behaviour should be. If we take a look back to ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, we will see that they all failed in their attempts to define ethical ideas and to define exactly the concept of virtue. They all ended in an aporia. The ideas, which questions ethics should answer, might have changed in the past 2.500 years since Socrates, but still nobody was able to give a final answer to the question what is morally right or wrong. There are several different positions that claim to have the right answer to this question. However, none of them were able to convince all other participants of the discussion. There is no difference whether the question is a classic ethical question or a more modern bioethical question. All of them are important and should be discussed, but there seems to be no end for them.

This leads to several different questions. The obvious one seems to be to ask if it is possible to answer those questions at all. I would say no, but this is not the topic of this essay. There is a question that is far more important: How is it possible to bring all relevant positions of a certain discussion together in an equal and open situation. I think that this is the only way to guarantee that people in a certain situation of bioethical relevance will receive the help they need – for it is not helpful to offer them a one-size-fits-all solution; it would be better to show them a variation of ways to deal with the situation at hand and thus enable them to decide on their own.

In my opinion the concept of Integrative Bioethics as a developing concept could be an ideal example to make an equal discourse possible because it connects ethical concepts from different cultural and social backgrounds in a discussion of multiple positions without taking sides and privileging certain positions. This is a very important task for today's bioethical circle. In this essay, I will explain why the concept of Integrative Bioethics might be helpful in this regard. I will define my understanding of Integrative Bioethics and show the possibilities and chances it provides us with.

The bioethical challenge

The need to cope with the field that is called Bioethics is only a few decades old. This need came when new problems and questions arose through the fact that our society has gone through some dramatic changes, not only by technological possibilities and scientific innovations, but also within society itself. Modern technology did not only give us new tools to play and work with, but also changed the inner structure of our society due to the new means of communication and the availability of knowledge. The challenge for the field of Bioethics is to react to the fact that not only there are new technologies that change our possibilities to handle the world, but that these new technologies also change the way people try and want to deal with it.

Bioethics can be understood as "ein Kind moderner Wissenschaft und Technik."¹ It developed and established itself as an important part of the discourse on science and medicine due to far-reaching and comprehensive changes of technology in general and medical technology in particular. The borders of life and the possibilities of curing diseases have shifted dramatically. For instance, the possibility to keep the body functions of a brain-dead person working did question the definitions of life and death that were used until then.²

Following those dramatic changes new concrete moral problems of especially medical issues came up and still come up. The development of the so called life science has not ended yet and therefore it is not clear how many new questions and problems will arise that need to be discussed ethically. To find answers and ethical principles to those problems we need to get to the core of the conflict and figure out what the problem really is. Is it possible to isolate a certain question as the centre of the problem? And is it similar to already known problems?³ "The origin of bioethical problems lies in the challenge which new biological, biotechnical and biomedical methods pose to the universal principle which are constitutive for the medicine's responsibility towards *all* human beings".⁴ This is the core of Bioethics,⁵ but does not cover the whole extent of bioethical questions since Bioethics goes beyond medical questions.

A major challenge of Bioethics does not arise from the problem that is talked about, but from the way it is handled in society. Due to the influence the globalised world had on societies and the freedom of movement and speech, it is not possible anymore to declare a single position as right and others as wrong. An important part of our society is the possibility to discuss and oppose opinions. Thus different positions on a certain topic are found not only between different parts of the world, but as well within a certain society. Also it gets harder to separate between different societies in the world at all. Therefore it is not possible anymore to easily declare what is right and as wrong since there is no such thing as bioethical knowledge in a scientific

understanding – bioethical knowledge is generally a different kind of knowledge. If we take the positivistic view on medical cases into consideration, the non-scientific basis of bioethical knowledge leads to the danger of being left out of the discussion. This danger has to be avoided by focusing bioethical discussions on the problem and trying to be able to give answers to their questions.⁶

The development is a great challenge for the traditions of our society and their explanations of the world too, and as well as within the discourses of society. To find explanations for bioethical questions we have to include these traditions into observation because they are still dominant and a lot of people still believe in them. The problem is that these explanations were born out of completely different societies often hundreds of years old that did not have the modern possibilities to influence the life of people, meaning that these explanations have been formed in and by another social background. This ends up in a missing coverage between the world and the ethical concepts used to answer the moral questions of this world. The concepts might not be able to adapt to the new situation and therefore we need to find a way to do so.

Before the discipline we now call Bioethics did develop there was a crisis of normative ethics. It seemed to be obvious that it would not be possible to form general normative ethical rules that are reliable and unquestionable. Therefore the only solution seemed to be to stop thinking about normative rules of ethics from a scientific or philosophical point of view. But when the modern developments grew to such a huge importance there was a need to cope with these specific ethical questions because people asked for normative answers.⁷ In the beginning the dominant form of answer was not philosophical, but religious since the theology of moral was still dealing with normative rules. Therefore the question of how to act if we want to act morally right was not answered with rational and philosophical arguments, but rather with emotional and religious opinions. This was a huge problem for the forming bioethical discussion, but it was also an opportunity for philosophical posi-

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Bernhard Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 2005, p. 10. “Bioethics is a child of modern science and technology.” (Translated by JSR).

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B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, pp. 10–14.

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Walter Schweidler, “Global Bioethics Initiatives – From a European Perspective”, in: Abu Bakar Abdul Majeed (ed.), *Bioethics: Ethics in the Biotechnology Century*, Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 2002, p. 25; Marcus Düwell & Klaus Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, in: Marcus Düwell & Klaus Steigleder, *Bioethik*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2003, pp. 15–16.

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W. Schweidler, “Global Bioethics Initiatives – From a European Perspective”, p. 26.

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M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, p. 18; W. Schweidler, “Global Bioethics Initiatives – From a European Perspective”, p. 26.

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Walter Schweidler, “Der ethische Gesichtspunkt zwischen Norm- und Nutzenkultur”, in: Ante Čović & Thomas Sören Hoffmann (eds.) *Bioethics and Cultural Plurality. The Southeast European Perspective*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2005, pp. 18–26; Edgar Morscher, “Die Ideekulturübergreifender Grundwerte und Menschenrechte: ein Paradoxon?”, in: Ante Čović & Thomas Sören Hoffmann (eds.) *Bioethics and Cultural Plurality. The Southeast European Perspective*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2005, p. 51.

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B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, pp. 10–11; M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, p. 12.

tions to fill this gap. There was a need of a rational answer that had to be fulfilled, not as normative rules, but as guidelines for behaviour in the changing society.⁸

One of the major tasks of Bioethics was to form an alternative to the classical medical ethics since the latter was rather a code of behaviour for the doctors that were not able to adapt to the new questions that arose from the newly developed technologies. And it still needs to adapt because the development has not ended yet and we cannot say how far the development will go and what new possibilities we will have in the future. That is why Bioethics is often seen as a new kind of medical ethics, but I think that the field of Bioethics is not limited to medical questions even though I think it is and it should be a huge part of it. One thing is certain: Bioethics is applied ethics and gives alternative answers to questions that are answered by traditional medical ethics, too. However, Bioethics copes furthermore with questions of for example animal or environmental ethics; bioethics has developed into ethics of life. It is ethics of all that is alive and therefore there are no clear borders for the topic.⁹

In my eyes the main focus of bioethical decisions needs to be on the actual situation and should not be about abstract concepts of anything involved. For example, we do not need to discuss what nature is if we want to talk about cutting down the rain forest. For as far as I am concerned it is not relevant to resolve the definition of nature to decide whether it is right or wrong to destroy the rain forest since there are aspects and outcomes of this act that can be judged without agreeing on nature as a value in itself or not. It is not important if you claim a value in its own or if you argue that you should not cut it due to the impact it will have on the life of us humans.

The importance is that we accept moral decisions as radical individual decisions and we need to keep this in mind if we try to formulate moral guidelines and rules. In reference to the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus I am convinced that we as individuals are on our own when it comes to moral decisions, since the one and only purpose of a human being is itself.¹⁰ But since we live in a society our decisions always have an impact on other people and therefore we need to try to make them understand why we chose certain behaviour. It is our absolute freedom and autonomy to make those decisions, but since our reason is an important aspect of this decision it always has to be possible to universalize them so that other are able to understand our decisions. Others have to understand our decisions because they are affected by them and since they are all individually the only purpose of themselves they need to know why I did what and why so that they can decide whether to accept this decision or act against it.¹¹ Since there is no such thing as a natural human understanding of what is morally right or wrong, we always have to redefine and re-justify it for ourselves. The decisions cannot depend on the traditions of a certain group of people, but rather have to be understandable by everybody. This illustrates that an important ability for bioethical discussion is the ability to make compromises. Thus, bioethical discussions have to talk about a formal method to decide about the basis of the discourse.¹²

The field of Bioethics

The definition of what I understand as Bioethics can be summarised as follows: All ethical questions concerning living beings, especially in connec-

tion with the modern developments of technology, science and medicine. It is obvious that the topics Bioethics is concerned with can be very sensitive and partially reach the core of humanity, which leads to insecurity if people are confronted with such situations. As I pointed out there is the danger that answers are given by the help of ethical concepts which are not appropriate for the new situation or that are not able to adapt to it. In our discussion of Bioethics it is important to keep in mind that the bioethical cannot be seen from only one perspective. If we talk about new medicine for example we also have to think about the treatment of animals. Bioethics has to include multiple perspectives because only on the basis of a discourse with different points of view it is possible to decide what the right way to deal with a certain situation is.

That the main focus of ethics is on what we do and not on how we see the world is something that most representatives of all ethical theories could agree on. We can apply this to the field of Bioethics, too. The ethical decision that we make always have to be justified again since it is our own individual decision how we act in a given situation. We are individually responsible, but still the discussion of bioethical topics is an important part of that decision since it has to give us advice and a guideline for situations that overwhelm us. But if you only discuss certain situations and there is no chance to make an abstraction from them the bioethical discussion would be of no use. Only with the help of rational bioethical explanations and advices we can be certain that our action or position in a specific situation is right and legitimate. Only if we are sure that we made ethically right choices we are able to justify our action for others and for us. In situations that overwhelm us it is not sufficient to just have an open discourse because we have to decide on a short term in which we cannot think about whether the reason for a certain decision is reasonable or not.¹³

To find those guidelines for situations of bioethical relevance we can orientate ourselves on the four clusters of basic principles that Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress developed and that were adopted by many other authors. These principles deal with autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice. They serve as a basis of many different positions of Bioethics and I think that they are very useful for what I intend here because those principles make it possible for us to decide if we can support a certain ethical position or not. If we take a closer look at different positions in the ethical discussion we might be able to evaluate them; we have to question whether the position is based in those principle or in another reason, for example a religion.¹⁴

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B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, pp. 9–14; M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, pp. 13–14.

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B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, p. 12; M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, pp. 21–23.

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Albert Camus, *Der Mythos des Sisyphos*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2000, p. 115.

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E. Morscher, “Die Ideekulturübergreifender Grundwerte und Menschenrechte: ein Para-

doxon?”, pp. 52; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Das Sein und das Nichts*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1993, pp. 163–215; A. Camus, *Der Mythos des Sisyphos*, pp. 111–118.

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E. Morscher, “Die Ideekulturübergreifender Grundwerte und Menschenrechte: ein Paradoxon?”, pp. 52–54.

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W. Schweidler, “Der ethische Gesichtspunkt zwischen Norm- und Nutzenkultur”, pp. 11–13.

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E. Morscher, “Die Ideekulturübergreifender Grundwerte und Menschenrechte: ein Paradoxon?”, pp. 60–61.

Only if Bioethics can bring the different ethical positions of society together it can reach its own goal to be helpful for the modern situation. This is also one of the reasons why we do not have to define Bioethics completely since it is more relevant to find solutions for the problems than to decide whether a certain situation should be considered as a bioethical topic or not. This openness is also a chance to show the relations and connections between different ethical questions. The main expertise we need for bioethical decisions is the ability to reflect on what we are doing and why we take a certain position.¹⁵

The scientific basis of Bioethics can be summarized by what is called biomedical science or life science. The fields that are worked on by these new forms of scientific research can be seen as a basis for the debates of Bioethics – Bioethics is a reaction to those developments in scientific research. The research and results of these sciences have a huge influence on the modern society since they change the sense of the self of people. Therefore Bioethics should be seen as an ethics of the living and not as an ethics of the society like ethics used to be often in the past. People sense themselves differently and a new concept of what is human and a definition of the living is needed. For this reason Bioethics, as it is ethics concerning this topic, has turned to empirical grounds and focus on the actual cases rather than general definitions. The main topics of Bioethics are the edges of life – birth and death.¹⁶

How to fulfil the requirements?

Or: what is Integrative Bioethics?

I have tried to explain what I understand as Bioethics and what the challenges are, that belong to this project. I think that the concept of Integrative Bioethics might be the way to deal with these challenges. Integrative Bioethics is a form of bioethical discourse developed especially in Southeast Europe and influenced by the concrete conditions of the society – or societies – we can find there. Important aspects that underline the reasons why a new form of ethical discourse is needed are found here. Not only the mixture of different religions and beliefs, but also a coexistence of different traditions and ways of life can be found here. This makes it obvious that there cannot be anything such as one generally accepted answer to a bioethical question and that there must be something like an equal discourse between the different positions.

A basis of the concept as far as I understand it are the clusters of principles verbalized by Beauchamp and Childress and the understanding of Bioethics of Van Rensselaer Potter who considers himself being the first person to use the term ‘Bioethics’¹⁷ and who addressed the first bioethical conference in Mali Lošinj directly and encouraged this discourse.¹⁸ His understanding of Bioethics defines it as an ethics of life with a clear view on the future, directed onto the survival of mankind with a serious view on the biological and environmental background. Due to this idea it is obvious that Bioethics needs to be interdisciplinary and open for new fields of discussion. Even though it might be lacking a commonly shared basis, Bioethics is an important discourse and the concept of Integrative Bioethics might help to overcome this lack and help to arrange communication within a society that has multiple forms of values.¹⁹

There are some basic ideas what the goal of Bioethics should be, but the way to reach this goal is discussed controversially. There is probably no discussion that every sane human has the goal to be healthy²⁰ and that this should

be the goal to reach in situations of bioethical relevance. This goes along with the idea that no one wants to suffer and therefore this should be avoided. The discussion therefore cannot be whether a situation is of bioethical relevance, but how to react in this situation. As I pointed out earlier, it is necessary to find solutions based on compromise that are acceptable for everybody, not just for us and the people we share our beliefs and ideals with, since the frontlines of this discourse run through each society and not only between the societies. I believe that the concept of Integrative Bioethics might be the tool to help to find those solutions due to its core ideas of being integrative and pluriperspective.²¹

What does ‘integrative’ mean?

In my opinion Integrative Bioethics fulfils its claim because it is the methodological attempt to clarify how we can talk about bioethical topics. This is the basis of the discourse and before this is not finalized and successful we cannot talk about the topics if we really want to get to results that can be acceptable for more than just a small minority that we individually might belong to. Being integrative is the attempt to establish a discourse of different points of views and perspectives concerning bioethical questions to give an orientation within the discussion. By providing different positions Integrative Bioethics can give an orientation for people who are faced with ethical problems.²² Therefore integrativeness is the idea of accepting the points of views on the bioethical topics as serious without any form of hierarchy, but also without falling into total ethical relativism. Another important aspect of the integrativeness is the basic fact that the discussion of those questions raises that sensibility of the society for those questions, as Ante Čović has pointed out.²³

But how is this guaranteed? How can this be guaranteed at all? And is the concept actually able to fulfil its own idea? The concept of Integrative Bioethics does not only mean that we have to include all relevant positions. It also means that we have to exclude positions that cannot contribute to the ideas of

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M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, pp. 19–35.

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M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, p. 31; B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, pp. 14–21.

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Actually, the term was already used by Fritz Jahr in 1927. But Van Rensselaer Potter used it in a broader meaning coming closer to the modern understanding.

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There have been bioethical conferences in the Balkans since the beginning of the 1990s.

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M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, pp. 21–35; B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, pp. 9–13.

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Even though it is not possible to determine what everyone else defines as healthy you can assume that the goal of being healthy is shared by everyone, but it is a highly subjective goal.

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W. Schweidler, “Global Bioethics Initiatives – From a European Perspective”, pp. 20–33.

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Ante Čović, “Bioethik unter den Bedingungen des Postkommunismus – Fallbeispiel Kroatien”, in: Ante Čović & Thomas Sören Hoffman (eds.), *Bioethik und kulturelle Pluralität. Die südosteuropäische Perspektive*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2005, p. 150–151.

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Ante Čović, “Wissen und Moralität”, *Synthesis philosophica* 26 (2/1998), p. 565.

Integrative Bioethics. Reasons might be that they violate against the elementary principles of Integrative Bioethics, for example if the representatives of these positions do not accept other positions as legitimate. Another problem is if they claim to have the final and terminal explanation for bioethical questions.

I see the concept of Integrative Bioethics as a chance to actually make decisions within a society since it makes a discourse of different positions possible that do not claim to be the ultimate truth, but help to show the diverse aspects of a certain topic even though there are broad differences between the positions that are involved in a certain discussion, no matter whether they have opposing opinions on a certain topic or if they agree in most aspects.²⁴

What does ‘pluriperspectivism’ mean?

A core idea of Integrative Bioethics is pluriperspectivism – the inclusion of all relevant and important points of view that can add a new position to the discourse and broaden the view on the topic that is talked about. Bioethics has to be pluriperspective since there is neither one single point of view that is right nor just a few selected points of view. Also the combination of integrative and pluriperspective does not mean that there is one basic point of view which is right and all other points of view have to be integrated as a part of it – this would change these points of view and would be a violation of the idea of integrative because of hierarchies. It rather means that there has to be an equal discussion between different positions that are not sorted in a hierarchic way, for example divided in scientific and non-scientific approaches.²⁵ To summarize it, pluriperspectivism means for me (a) the non-hierarchic discourse of (b) multiple different points of view on one topic that are (c) rooted in different ideals and worldviews. The discourse has to be (d) intercultural and interreligious, (e) transnational and (f) interdisciplinary.

Integrative Bioethics should be characterized by openness and diversity and only by fulfilling these claims it can be appropriate for the 21st century. The goal is a self-critical and self-reflexive form of the bioethical discourse that is open and acceptable for everybody. In addition to the fact that there is no simple contrast of right and wrong in the concept it is also not possible to sort the positions into a dualistic contrast. Not only does this hold the danger of a hierarchic order, but it also is not possible to consider all forms of diversity that are included into this concept.

But the concept of a pluriperspective Integrative Bioethics holds the danger that this concept is only a pretence to hide the own effort to dominate a discussion. By claiming to be open for other positions we could hide your own idea to have the final answer and the goal of this claim might be the attempt to impose our own position over the whole discourse. Integrative Bioethics should not be a theory of and for a small group of scientists who have found a new so called „rational“ or „modern“ point of view to decide what is morally wrong or right. It should also not be an excuse to separate the own ideas from other positions by degrading these positions.

It is important to show and stand up for the own point of view, but this does not mean that there is no other opinion to listen to and to accept – a pluriperspective Integrative Bioethics needs the development and the discourse about the cases and questions of bioethical relevance. It has to be open into all directions and if we want to take part in the discussion we have to accept that there

is no final answer, but that the discourse is rather comparable to a movement that is open into all directions.

As I tried to point out there cannot be anything like Integrative Bioethics without being pluriperspective as well. The equality of all involved positions has to be guaranteed to find answers to the important questions of our time. If this is done I think that there is a chance to be able to find solutions for bioethical challenges that divide our society.²⁶

Integrative Bioethics – not a self-fulfilling promise

Even though the social situations differ within the world the concept of Integrative Bioethics might be suitable for all parts due to its core idea – it is not important whether the society is based on a rather homogenous tradition challenged by the changes arising from the modern globalised world or whether it has a more diverse basis. However, just because the concept has certain basic ideas that might be helpful and functional for the world does not mean that it does fulfil those ideas automatically. It is clear that Integrative Bioethics might be helpful to solve the major problems of morality of our time; but only if it is possible to guarantee an exchange of different, maybe contrary, positions.

If we are faced with an ethical discussion where only a single or a few positions dominate, other positions are excluded from the beginning. The problem is that there is no possibility for other positions to be heard or even influence the opinion within the society. Therefore ethical discussions are not able to find a common basis to discuss and will never be able to give solutions the bioethical problem. There will be a lot of answers for moral questions, but no possibility to decide which one might be appropriate for a certain situation. As a result people are left alone with the bioethical problems and that is what we try to avoid. The concept of Integrative Bioethics might be the chance for an appropriate positioning. This could help to solve the problems and show the necessity of a solution of these cases. It might open up the discussion for new and different answers that might lead to a combination of points of view and a more general understanding of the problem and the reasons of different approaches to it.

Another problem is a dualistic view on a topic. It limits the idea of pluriperspectivism to a dualism of pro and contra, for and against and most of all to just these two ways of decision. If we are thinking of pluriperspectivism we need to have more than just two possibilities. Putting everything into a dualistic opposition will reduce the complexity of a society, a culture or a subculture to one reason of arguments. There is always a mixture and diversity of points of view even within an apparently homogeneous group of people.

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My concept of integrative is based on the concept of Hrvoje Jurić, c.f. Hrvoje Jurić, “The Footholds of an Integrative Bioethics in the work of Van Rensselaer Potter”, in: Ante Čović & Thomas Sören Hoffman (eds.), *Beiträge des Südosteuropäischen Bioethik-Forums, Mali Lošinj 2005*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2007, pp. 68–92.

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A. Čović, “Bioethik unter den Bedingungen des Postkommunismus – Fallbeispiel Kroatien”, p. 150.

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C.f. H. Jurić, “The Footholds of an Integrative Bioethics in the work of Van Rensselaer Potter”.

It is not possible to reduce the answers and solutions to only a few or even to two positions. This would shorten and simplify the whole discussion.

It would also form a hierarchy of positions, which would exclude positions that are not part of the dominant form of culture. It would lead to the claim of a universal answer to the ethical questions that declares all other positions as wrong. But this would transgress against the idea of Integrative Bioethics. All perspectives have to be taken seriously if they have good arguments. No perspectives can be declared as right or wrong a priori. They have to be on an equal footing and each position has to be integrated into the discussion. An important duty of all positions is the reflection whether the own position fulfils the requirements of the concept. Each representative of a certain ethical position within the discourse of Integrative Bioethics needs to give a detailed explanation of their own position, their reasons and foundation as well as the answers to certain problems. Only if this is done others will really understand the answer given and criticize them or develop them further.

An important consequence of these reflections is that we always have to ask who is speaking for whom from which position and why. That means that we not only have to set our own ideas into the context of other theories and ideas, but we also have to think about the elementary structures that are the ground of our thinking. We have to re-think our ideas and reflect on the influence of structural elements of our culture on our thinking such as gender, race and class. But we need to not stop here – we also have to reflect on the influence of the structural elements of transcultural differences such as tradition or religion. We not only have to ask this question if we think about other theories and try to understand them, but also if we think about our own position. Only by asking these questions we can start to be able to fully understand other opinions and we can be sure that other people who ask the same moral questions in certain situations as we do will also be able to understand our own point of view.

Example: Human Dignity in the (bio-)ethical discussion in Germany

In this excursus I would like to point out the problems of multiple perspectives within an ethical discussion by referring to the role that Human Dignity plays within several ethical discourses in Germany.²⁷

The major problem of the referrals to Human Dignity is that the majority of them do not make it clear what the term should mean at all. In many cases the term is used, but it is empty and meaningless. It seems that it is at the will of the person using it what it does mean in a certain situation and is adapted to those situation and used as a rhetorical stunt to end a discussion. In this case it is often used against another participant of the discussion to make their position intolerable. This very frequent, but unclear, use of this concept seems to be typical for bioethical discussions in Germany. It is often even mixed with a concept of the sacredness of life which boosts the incomprehensibility of the concept even more. A good example for the unclear use of Human Dignity as a rhetorical stunt to end a discussion is the response that Peter Singer got in Germany in the early 1990's.²⁸

There are several concepts of Human Dignity in Germany and very different positioning towards those concepts as well. The major approaches of those concepts are (a) based on a philosophy of reason inspired by Kant, (b) a radi-

cal-secular position and (c) religious understanding based on the Christian tradition.²⁹ Those influences are very different, but they include a common fact: (Human) Dignity marks an unquestionable border that should not be crossed. But within that concept of the term there is a large variety of definitions what Human Dignity means and how strong and far the concept could be used. This means that there is not only a difference between the ethical positions for and against the concept in general, but as well within the people who are in favour of the concept.

This is a good example of how the concept of Integrative Bioethics with its core idea of pluriperspectivism could be the tool to solve this problem. It might be able to bring those different positions together for a discussion. The attempt to find a closer, narrower understanding of Human Dignity – as Birnbacher is trying it in his essay “Mehrdeutigkeiten im Begriff der Menschenwürde”³⁰ – is of course a first step into the right direction. However, it does not solve the problem, but will only raise the number of competing concepts even if it tries change the situation, because it is only the attempt of a single person.

But if a larger part of the people involved in this discussion do this instead of a single person or a small group of persons it might be possible to find a core understanding of the term that a large amount of people can agree on as a basis. But this is only possible with an equal and open discourse where multiple perspectives can join and let their voice be heard. And even if this common basic understanding of the concept will not be found it is an important possibility and effort of Integrative Bioethics to bring those very different positions together and make a fair and open discourse possible that is not based on bias presumptions and hierarchies.

Can it be put into use?

Practicability of Integrative Bioethics³¹

In my opinion Integrative Bioethics might be the tool that helps to point out that our modern globalized society cannot act as if there is only one position or solution to the problems we are facing in the world. Old behaviours and beliefs might no longer be fitting for our modern world and therefore more and more traditions seem to be inappropriate for the present society. New ways to deal with old problems have to be developed since they appear in a new light due to the changes of our world. And new technologies and possibilities arise

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Human Dignity plays such a big role in the bioethical discussion in Germany that it seems to be impossible to introduce into this topic without referring to the concept of Human Dignity. See e.g. M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, *Bioethik*; B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*.

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Dieter Birnbacher, “Mehrdeutigkeit im Begriff der Menschenwürde”, <http://www.gkpn.de/singer2.htm>. Accessed on December 29, 2011.

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Günther Pöltner, “Bioethik unter Metaphysikverdacht”, in: Ante Čović & Thomas Sören

Hoffmann (eds.) *Bioethics and Cultural Plurality. The Southeast European Perspective*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2005, pp. 36–40.

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D. Birnbacher, “Mehrdeutigkeit im Begriff der Menschenwürde”.

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An overview of the practical use of Integrative Bioethics would be very interesting and helpful, but cannot be done in this essay because it would exceed the limits of this article.

through the scientific progress. Since we cannot stop this progress we will have to deal with the consequences of it. It is not possible to simply prohibit those possibilities or ignore the questions that arise through it. These ethical problems do exist no matter whether they are declared illegally or immoral or not. It is not about a strong government, it is about a strong society that is able to deal with these questions. If it is prohibited there is no chance of controlling what is happening. Of course it has to be possible to argue that something is ethical wrong, but it is important that people talk about it and can accept each others point of view.

The advantage of Integrative Bioethics is that it is not bound to the traditional ethical theories, but that it still is able to tie in with those concepts because unlike some other modern ethical theories it does not break completely with the past theories. It takes all ethical positions seriously and tries to let all these positions be heard and due to this idea it can be guaranteed that no part of the society feels ignored and that a search for an answer to moral questions is done in consideration of all possible points of view.

There are some aspects that we have to consider if we think about different ethical points of view and theories. Traditional theories like Christian positions for example have a large support within the society in most parts of Europe since they have been helpful in the past and they can show their achievements and present themselves as a working concept. That is why these theories have to be listened to because they could help to get a view on the wishes of a large part of society. The problem of those theories is that they can only use their own tools to judge ethical problems. Yet a lot of the modern problems were not present when the traditional ethical theories developed since there are often hundreds of years between the development of these ethical theories and the emergence of the modern bioethical problems. These problems were simply not there and therefore could not have been taken into consideration then. Even if those theories can be adapted to modern problems it is a long and time-consuming process. This process has often not started yet or only just begun – if it is possible at all.

But there is also a problem for theories that have just been developed to adapt to those newly arisen problems. If Integrative Bioethics wants to fulfil its own claims the discussion has to be opened up for new ethical and philosophical concepts that are adjusted to the modern world and have an idea to change it in a certain way even though it is not clear yet if the answers given can truly be helpful. These concepts could help to get rid of old ways of handling social problems and controlling the development of the society. The major problem of these concepts is that they were not able yet to earn trust. This is understandable since on the one hand there were not yet any possibilities to earn this trust and on the other hand it is not clear which of the new concepts are actually appropriate and might be helpful for the challenges of our time.

In consequence of this variation of very different points of view that is an elementary part of Integrative Bioethics there will be conflicts between those positions. They arise not only from the fact that they have different answers to the ethical questions of our time, but even more from the fact their basis is completely different and even diametrically opposed to each other. Therefore the goal of the Integrative Bioethics has to be to find a common basis to discuss the topics of our societies – not only within the single societies, but as well between the different societies of our world. The goal always has to be to find actual solutions for the problems. Also there is no possibility to make a strict division between parts of the world. Therefore we need to find com-

mon standards – not directly for bioethical problem in particular, but first for talking about those situations and problems. If we are able to talk about those topics we might be able to understand them and find a solution for them.³²

We also have to overcome the prejudice that bioethics is not a philosophical discipline, but rather an ideology. Especially in Germany this opinion arises often since a lot of the topics are brought into context with the Third Reich. Some people consider Bioethics as a way to weaken the ethical integrity of a society and make it possible to act in a way that could be consider immoral. This is even enforced through the fact that the topic Bioethics is often used with no clear connection to the philosophical concept that should be in the background. Integrative Bioethics also has to take this critical responds serious and has to find a way to convince the critical voices that it is necessary to discuss these topics with an open result.³³

Limits of the concept

But even though the concept of Integrative Bioethics could possibly be very helpful for the discourse on bioethical problem we have to bear in mind some limits. There are some boundaries that cannot be crossed. A first example is that there will never be a final answer to ethical problems. There is always a missing coverage between the world and our ability to understand and analyze it. Even though we might be able to answer today's questions, we will probably not be able to answer the questions of tomorrow or even the day after. Therefore a bioethical theory can only give us the outlines to answer those questions, but will never be able to give accurate answers to all possibilities.

Another problem that will occur is that there are only few ethical problems that will be answered equally by everybody or even just by a large amount of the people. We will always have to find a compromise and give different explanations and criteria to answer moral questions. But if the goal is to enable people who are in situations of bioethical relevance to answer those questions by themselves we will have to present them reasonable answers and accept the fact that there is not just one right answer.

We also have to avoid ethical relativism if we want to be able to get to ethical decisions at all. It is necessary that all points of view that are part of this concept are strong and that they defend their ideas against the others without acting as if all other positions were weak or inferior to the own idea. Strong positions are needed to help persons confronted with bioethical situation to decide on a well-founded basis. But while defending the own position it should always be part in the discourse to point out that there are other points of view that also have their own structure of argumentation.

There is no need and no possibility of “a single truth” – it is contrary even to accept that there is a variety of answers that might be helpful. It is important to include those positions in the discussion, but rather because some of them have a huge influence in society and it might be necessary to show the problems of those positions. You have to take them seriously because people do

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W. Schweidler, “Global Bioethics Initiatives – From a European Perspective”, pp. 37–42.

26–28; B. Irrgang, *Einführung in die Bioethik*, pp. 12–13.

³³

M. Düwell & K. Steigleder, “Bioethik – Zu Geschichte, Bedeutung und Aufgaben”, pp.

include them in their lives as guidelines, but you also need to criticise them. It is not simply about defending the own position, it is an even harder quest to be able to accept other even contrary positions and still be able to defend the own position and explain why the answer is good and right without using other answers as a negative example. Integrative Bioethics has to be the project to bring all positions together and to find a way of dealing with each other. The goal must be to offer strong and helpful solutions for people who need to find an answer. When it comes to a situation where someone has to choose over life and death it is important that this person is not helpless. It is important that the given solutions show a way to deal with the situation and also with the results. The people who have to live with what they have done need to be able to justify their actions as right.

No perspective should be declared wrong without first being discussed and getting the possibility to present its own position. New answers to bioethical problems have to have at least the chance to prove why the representatives think that it might be helpful. If this is not guaranteed it could weaken and even disqualify the concept of Integrative Bioethics and lead to a strong opposition against the concept because it has not managed to be a real integrative concept. Integrative Bioethics can only be successful and helpful if all participants of the discourse try to understand each other – and not only the other position, but also its reasons.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, I think that Integrative Bioethics is a chance for a discourse of bioethical questions that could help to overcome the blocked discussion which ethical theory is the right one and focus on a discussion of the actual questions. It might be happening already, yet I have the impression that some discussions try to look more open than they are. I do hope that the concept of Integrative Bioethics helps to change this.

It is obvious that it is necessary to have a working concept to find answers for bioethical questions since it is a very important topic of our society. If the people that are in those situations are not able to find a solution they can live with they either have to act against their own wishes and follow ethical rules that they do not understand or respect or they have to act against an ethical rule because they wish to act like that, but then they have to face the consequences like being marked immoral. Ethical decisions are always single decision in a certain moment and under certain circumstances. „Das Ethische fordert sich selbst von jedem Menschen, und wenn es urteilt, dann urteilt es wieder über jeden Einzelnen; nur ein Tyrann und ein ohnmächtiger Mensch begnügen sich mit dem Dezimieren.“³⁴ But we need guidelines to help us in those situations and get an idea what could be done and what should be done. It will never be possible to find a general theoretical solution, but the theory has to give hints how to act. If there is only one single perspective people will not be able to decide how they think it is right in that situation, but will have to follow the rule come what may.

Jos Schaefer-Rolffs

Integrativna bioetika kao prilika

Idealni primjer za etičke rasprave?

Sažetak

Koncept integrativne bioetike je ideja ravnopravne rasprave između različitih etičkih koncepata iz različitih sredina. Ovaj koncept nije prikladan samo za posebnu situaciju u jugoistočnoj Europi. On također može biti osnovom za utjecaj na etički diskurs u drugim dijelovima svijeta, kako onih s homogenom povijesnom pozadinom tako i onih s vrlo raznolikim etičkim odrednicama.

U ovom radu ću pokušati ukazati na mogućnosti za raspravu o etičkim problemima u drugim dijelovima svijeta ako bi se temeljna ideja integrativne bioetike uvela u bioetičke rasprave. Ona se pokazuje kao prilika za iznalaženje načina suočavanja s razlikama između tradicionalnih i modernih koncepata etike.

Ključne riječi

bioetika, integrativna bioetika, metaetika, pluriperspektivizam, etika

Jos Schaefer-Rolffs

Integrative Bioethik als Gelegenheit

Idealbeispiel für ethische Diskussionen?

Zusammenfassung

Der Entwurf der integrativen Bioethik steht für die Idee einer gleichgestellten Auseinandersetzung zwischen verschiedenerlei ethischen Konzepten aus differenten Hintergründen. Dieses Schema ist nicht lediglich am außerordentlichen Beispiel des Südosteuropas verwendungsfähig. Es könnte gleichermaßen als Basis zur Einflussnahme auf den ethischen Diskurs in den restlichen Regionen der Welt fungieren, entweder jenen mit einem homogenen historischen Hintergrund oder denjenigen mit einer mannigfaltigen ethischen Färbung.

Innerhalb dieses Essays wage ich den Versuch, auf die Möglichkeiten zur Debatte über ethische Angelegenheiten in anderen Teilen der Welt zu verweisen, sollte die Kernidee der integrativen Bioethik den bioethischen Erörterungen hinzugefügt werden. Sie nimmt sich aus als die Chance, einen Weg ausfindig zu machen, die Differenzen zwischen den traditionellen und zeitgenössischen Konzepten der Bioethik in Angriff zu nehmen.

Schlüsselwörter

Bioethik, integrative Bioethik, Metaethik, Pluriperspektivismus, Ethik

Jos Schaefer-Rolffs

La bioéthique intégrative comme une chance

Un exemple idéal de discussion éthique ?

Résumé

Le concept de bioéthique intégrative est l'idée d'une discussion équitable entre différents concepts éthiques venant des contextes différents. Ce concept n'est pas seulement approprié à la situation spécifique en Europe du Sud-Est. Il peut également constituer une base pour influ-

encer le discours éthique dans d'autres parties du monde, aussi bien celles ayant un contexte historique homogène que celles ayant un cadre éthique très diversifié.

Dans cet essai, je tenterai de souligner les possibilités pour une discussion des problèmes éthiques dans d'autres parties du monde si l'idée fondamentale de la bioéthique intégrative venait s'ajouter aux discussions éthiques. Elle semble être une chance pour trouver un moyen de traiter les différences entre concepts d'éthique traditionnels et modernes.

Mots-clés

bioéthique, bioéthique intégrative, métaéthique, pluriperspectivisme, éthique