Notes and News

International Conference "Enhancement: Cognitive, Moral and Mood"

Belgrade, May 14–16, 2013

International conference "Enhancement: Cognitive, Moral and Mood" was held in Belgrade, 14–16 May 2013. The conference was organised by The Center for the Study of Bioethics (Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade) and the Oxford Centre for Neuroethics (University of Oxford). Co-organizers of the conference were the Center for the Promotion of Science and the Center for the Development of Liberalism, with the support of the Center for Ethics, Law and Applied Philosophy. The main focus of the conference was human enhancement debate, in particular moral enhancement. In recent times moral enhancement has become a central topic of human enhancement debates, with emphasis on the relation between cognitive and moral enhancement. Therefore, the first day of the conference was dedicated to these issues. At the opening of the conference we had an opportunity to listen to the discussion of the thesis "Moral enhancement should not be pursued because it is a threat to Freedom". Julian Savulescu from the Oxford University defended the negative position. He argued that increased altruism, reduced violence and aggressions, increased willingness to co-operate and impulse control would count as moral enhancement. Enhancing this would not undermine freedom, stated Savulescu, even more; it would increase our capacity to act reasonable and autonomously. Savulescu claimed that freedom is just one value. Accordingly, the loss of freedom to act immorally could be justified. John Harris from the University of Manchester argued for the affirmative position. His thesis was that cognitive enhancement should enhance the morality of humans and moral bio-enhancement could compromise their freedom. Peter Singer from the Princeton University, who was a discussant, also contributed to the debate and expressed some interesting standpoints.

The panel that followed, "Moral Bio-Enhancement: Can It Offer Anything Valuable in Future", has served as a further development of these issues. Ingmar Persson from the Gothenburg University and the Oxford University in his presentation "Autarchy and Enhancement" took an unusual standpoint in human enhancement debate by characterizing two opposing attitudes: autarchy and heterarchy. Autarchy represented the idea of a self-change to conform the external world, while heterarchy stood for the attitude to change the external world to conform to our desires. His thesis was that heterarchic attitude should be restrained with a moderate autarchy so that human would show concern for the planet and other living beings by prevailing destruction. Nicolas Agar from the University of Wellington argued against moral bio-enhancement.

Vojin Rakić from the University of Belgrade claimed that it is morally justified to work on moral bio-enhancement in his presentation "Voluntary Moral Bio-Enhancement and the Creation of Post-Persons".

Another panel was focused on the connection between moral enhancement and virtues. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner from the University of Erfurt expressed severe worries concerning moral enhancement technology, although he promotes enhancement in general. The title of his presentation was "Moral Enhancement as Obstacle for the Good Life". James Huges from the Trinity College (Hartford, Connecticut) argued that enhanced moral character requires multiple virtues. Huges claimed that the moral enhancement project should be developed in a relation with the virtue ethics and contemporary moral psychology.

Panels during the second and the third day were focused on various forms of enhancement and their usefulness and moral justification. At the beginning of the second day Peter Singer from the Princeton University had a presentation "What are Acceptable Ways of Making People Better and Happier". Singer discussed the nature of happiness, how it can be measured and the means by which it can be enhanced. Discussion keynote speech was given by Nicholas Agar from the University of Wellington.

Panel "Towards a New Culture of Enhancing Humans and Human Reproduction" offered some interesting standpoints in human enhancement debate. Thomas Douglas from the Oxford University discussed the controversial usage of medical interventions as criminal remedies. Katrien Devolder from the Ghent University proposed a new kind of principle, procreative altruism, as an alternative to individualistic selection principles. According to procreative altruism parents have significant moral reason to select a child whose existence can be expected to contribute more to the wellbeing of others. Rob Sparrow from the Monash University investigated the relation between moral enhancement and political egalitarianism in his presentation "Egalitarianism and Moral Enhancement". Bennet Foddy from the Oxford University tried to examine the right and wrong of growing old.

Panel "Enhancement: General Concepts" was opened with the presentation of Jovan Babić from the University of Belgrade. Babić stated that if enhancement has an instrumental value it might increase our well being and the chance to be better decision-makers. Ayesha Ahmad from the University College of London presented distinctions of 'artificialness' in moral enhancement and their impact for the future of human culture/s. Sarah Chan from the University of Manchester raised a cross-species problem in cognitive enhancement and creative beneficence. Michael Barilan from the Tel Aviv University explored why it is impossible to enhance human beings and how this impossibility is relevant to the enhancement debate. He concluded that morally enhanced will undermine morality's fundamental characteristics, self transformation and the capacity to rebel against social consensus and to predict emotional, cognitive and social modes of existence. Jonathan Pugh from the Oxford University considered rationalist conception of reflective autonomy and Derek Parfit's work concerning the rationality of desires in his presentation "Enhancing Autonomy". Veselin Mitrović from the University of Belgrade discussed the origin of the idea of moral enhancement, its epistemic and moral foundations.

Panel "(New) Perspectives on Moral Enhancement" offered Maartje Schermer's (Erasmus University) and Farah Foquet's (Ghent University) presentation "Moral Enhancement: Do Means Matter Morally?". They posed a question whether certain means to achieve moral enhancement are better than others

and why. Hannah Maslen from the Oxford University explored philosophical and ethical dimension of the connection between neuro-interventions, altruism and enhancing morality. In the last two panels we have also had an opportunity to listen to several very interesting presentations about the problematic of human enhancement, such as how indirect moral enhancement might look like and why we should expect it to lead to general moral improvement, what is the connection between cognitive diversity and moral enhancement or weather deliberative democracy could be crucially important for the normative justification of such an enterprise etc.

Regional bioethics

Another part of the conference was dedicated to regional bioethics issues. While one panel, "Variae", consisted of presentations about some researches that were conducted in this geographical area, the second panel, "Integrative Bioethics", evidenced as much more controversial and has been followed by intense discussion. The panel started with Tomislav Bracanović's (University of Zagreb) presentation "Integrative Bioethics: Handle with Care". Bracanović expressed scepticism towards integrative bioethics and focused on the thesis that integrative bioethics fails as bioethics and that it is a pseudoscience. In argumentation of this thesis he claimed that integrative bioethics suffers from the lack of principle to guide us in real life problems, it is unoriginal, and that integrative bioethicists usually cite each other. Bracanović concluded that integrative bioethics is a huge project that received significant amount of money from the Croatian government and that this money could have been putted in much better usage. In a discussion that followed afterwards Rob Sparrow warned Bracanović to be more cautious when declaring something pseudoscience because integrative bioethics jargon, which he characterised as pseudoscientific, is quite common among philosophers. Also, whenever a new field is being established, its articulation starts with cross-citation of its creators. Marija Selak raised a question about international authors who were a part of integrative bioethics projects and who published articles about integrative bioethics. Hrvoje Jurić from the University of Zagreb expressed his gratefulness to Bracanović for showing international audience how developed concept of integrative bioethics is so that it has already become a topic of discussions and critics at such an important international conference. He has shared his surprise with the audience that persons who were objects of Bracanović's criticism were not invited at the conference to give speech. Jurić also asked Bracanović what his ethical position is, since from his presentation it was only possible to conclude that he is a disintegrative bioethicist. This question annoyed Tomislav Janović from the University of Zagreb who repeated three times that this is *ad hominem* approach. Jurić also ironically accentuated that money could have been putted in much better usage, indeed, maybe for the criticism of integrative bioethics. Zoran Todorović from the University of Belgrade, one of the co-chairs of this panel, asked Bracanović about the relation between bioethics and integrative bioethics. Bracanović said that for him it is not important how we divide bioethics or how we define it or who invented it. Bioethics should work with real life issues, stated Bracanović, and integrative bioethicists only works on themselves. After once more pointing out his thesis, Bracanović admitted that he can give credit to integrative bioethicists for making bioethics popular in Croatia.

The second presentation "The Strange Fate of Academic Ethics in Croatia: From Marxian Disintegration of Ethics to Integrative Bioethics" was held by

Tomislav Janović from the University of Zagreb. Janović focused on what he believes is the origin of integrative bioethics and that is the Praxis movement. He claimed that connecting Praxis movement and integrative bioethics is the right way to understand integrative bioethics. He referred to the time of the 1990s when Praxis members have tried to adapt to new political circumstances and integrative bioethics was created. This is doctrinal adaptation to retain the position of authority, stated Janović. As a part of his presentation he has described Praxis as a school of creative Marxism and has also mentioned famous international names which were a part of Praxis group, although, by his opinion, Praxis did not have a significant value. Praxis group today is dead as it can be, concluded Janović. Janović's main thesis was that Praxis shares some features with integrative bioethics. To support his thesis Janović mentioned that Praxis group received government founds for the Praxis journal and integrative bioethicists received funds for "their journals". He claimed that persons connect these two movements: Milan Kangrga's successor Ante Čović is a founding father of integrative bioethics. Janović said that he does not know what integrative bioethics is, but he knows that it has these features: no normativity, obsession with foundation: attitude that we have to theoretically and speculatively found the discipline in order to say anything, mostly no empirical data, but big general statements, utopian attitude. Common practical features include: institutional infrastructure, self-publishing, overpublishing, domestic vs. international reception, we know everything about everything attitude, network of loyalty, leadership ambitions (some members of Praxis were leaders of student movement in 1968 and some members of integrative bioethics were leaders of 2009 student protest movement). Integrative bioethics also has some specific features, stated Janović, such as a wide membership basis, from the Catholic Church to higher education unions, which is very interesting, and has no clear political agenda, unlike Praxis group. In the discussion Rob Sparrow noticed that the list of international co-operators of Praxis group is very interesting and relevant for that period, which could serve as a proof of Praxis significance, and that abandoning Marxism after the collapse of communism is not unique for Croatia. Marija Selak pointed out that it was very interesting to listen to the Janović's advertisement of integrative bioethics. She referred to his statement that integrative bioethics has no clear political agenda, which implies that political view is not relevant for philosophical and bioethical discussion in integrative bioethics and that is something we should all welcome. She has also asked a question about Kangrga's philosophical work, his position of ethical criticism and his attitude towards Classical German Idealism. Janović just replied that he could do only Fichte now for two hours. Hrvoje Jurić referred to Janović's statement that integrative bioethics is enhancement of Praxis and asked him which philosophers he used to establish this connection. Janović said that he cited the authors here and that he will not discuss it furthermore. Jonathan Pugh posed a question about the possibility of a relation with Marxism since Marxism was a doctrine and Janović said that in integrative bioethics everybody's right and nobody's right (statement by Luka Tomašević) which is not a doctrinal approach. Zoran Todorović expressed his disappointment with the way this panel was organised and asked how Janović's presentation is related to the topic of this conference. Vojin Rakić, one of the organisers, also got included in the discussion and stated that his position towards integrative bioethics is simple – he does not understand it and therefore he would not allow it in bioethical institutions that he is working in. Zoran Todorović, who obviously

did not like his answer, ironically apologised to the participants of the conference because the organiser does not understand some things in bioethics.

The third presentation in this panel was done by Nenad Cekić from the University of Begrade. In his presentation Cekić declared the concept of integration very problematic. He raised a question is integrative bioethics a new ideology or not. Cekić stated that it is necessary to have very clear normative position. If everything is to be integrated, than we should have invited here members of the Church because they also have some ideas about ethical problems, but we have not done so, concluded Cekić. In the discussion Marija Selak reminded of the appearance of bioethics and the fact that the development of bioethics has led us to the position that today we, as philosophers, are also allowed to say something about medical bioethical issues, although we are not physicians. She has also pointed out that methodological approach of integrative bioethics includes cultural perspectives in decision making process.

The expected result of the conference was a further development and clarification of various perspectives of enhancement, especially moral enhancement. In this part of the conference, works presented by respective scholars unquestionably contributed to the human enhancement debate. But, the "Regional Bioethics" part of the conference has shown severe organisational deficiencies. At the beginning of the conference we had a praiseworthy opportunity to listen to the Savulescu–Harris confrontation about moral enhancement issues, but in the "Integrative Bioethics" panel we have only heard presentations that were focused on the criticism of integrative bioethics. This is even stranger in the light of the fact that Vojin Rakić, one of the conference organisers, has participated in conferences and proceedings which were a part of the integrative bioethics project. Even more, he was very well acquainted with the main researches in this field. It is hard to say what were the reasons for this kind of selection of speakers, but it is necessary to alert that this type of one-sided approach, which does not give the possibility to the international audience to create an independent view, is something that should not be allowed in any community that aims to be scientific.

Marija Selak