

Michele Aramini:

Introduction to Bioethics

Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 2009, 443 pages.

Modern-day science requires modern-day ethics. Scientific and technological advances on the one hand, and limited material resources on the other, simply impose new categories in relation: individual – society – environment. The necessity to re-define those relations and to redistribute responsibility appears.

In that context the system of biomedicine and health becomes more and more complex, burdened. Formerly accepted opinion that having medical knowledge and skills provides adequate guarantee that the final decision on what is considered medically indicated activity in the best interest of the patient today also requires scientific and professional re-examination because every medical assessment includes in itself a collection of value assessments or norms that are outside the frame of medical values. Medical competence is no longer the only competence necessary for making medically correct decisions because every medical decision also contains a medical-technical and moral component. It is bioethics that, as an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, dialogue, multiperspective and integrative science, provides adequate framework for making medically and morally correct decisions, both for health workers and for patients and all other persons involved in decision-making not adequately covered by the traditional Hypocrites' medical ethics.

With this in mind, it is necessary to give a review of the new textbook that appeared in Croatian bioethics academic field. It is a translation of the second edition of the Italian university bioethics textbook »Introduction to Bioethics« by Michele Aramini, a bioethics professor at the Sacro Cuore Catholic University in Milan. As he states in the Foreword of his book: »... publishing of the new introduction to bioethics, intended for physicians, professors and students of various learning institutions, is justified by attempting to offer scientific information as clear and complete as possible... Moreover, taking into consideration different ethical views appearing in bioethics, this book offers for each topic various ethical views and their arguments. Thus, the book wishes to offer its reader the possibility to form his or her own opinion.«

The translation of this, second, edition, represents the collaborative, dialogue bioethics in practice, since the author himself points out that he owes his gratitude to

his students who accepted this book as a work material and enriched it with their suggestions and gave its form a content and structure that we are presenting here.

The book consists of two parts. Part one, entitled »General Bioethics« contains five chapters: Roots of Bioethics and Principles Methods; Development of Bioethics and the Ethics of Virtue; Current Overview (following subchapters should be emphasized: Laicist Bioethics, Catholicism-inspired Bioethics, Issue of Ethics Pluralism, Quality of Life or Sanctity of Life); What is Bioethics?; Dignity of a Human Being. Part two, entitled »Bioethics Issues« discusses following topics in twenty-two chapters: Health and Sickness; Physical Pain and Suffering of a Human Being; Patients' Rights; Clinical and Pharmacological Experiments on Humans; Genetic Engineering; Cloning; Ontological and Moral Status of a Human Embryo; Artificial Insemination; Abortion; Sexuality and Significance of Human Birth; Organ Transplantation; Cerebral Death; Euthanasia, Therapeutic Violence and Dignified Death; Palliative Care and Alternatives to Euthanasia; Drug Addiction; Alcoholism; Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome; Pathology of Sports: Doping; Youth Suicide; Bioethics and Environment; Animal Rights and Scientific Experiments; Economy and Health. The book also contains Appendices: The National Bioethics Committee Opinion, Documents issued by the teachers of Catholic and Evangelical Church and Italian Jewish Community. It ends with rich bibliography.

With its structure, content and approach used to discuss everlasting philosophical and theological examinations and also with »burning«, controversial issues of contemporary science and technology (in medicine and beyond, touching upon ecology, economy and society in general), it takes a reader on a journey towards self-distinctive, based on personal ethics, and clearly scientifically substantiated bioethical examination with didactically and methodologically appropriately placed »signposts«. In relation to this it attempts to provide answers to one of the eternal question: »Is medicine art or science? Is it a humanistic venture with a scientific component or a scientific venture with a humanistic component?«, which nowadays becomes more and more prominent.

In the past 40 or so years bioethics has lived through a very rich and complex history. With time it has undergone a transformation from a set of quite rigid rules for professional activities, made predominantly by medical profession itself, into a broad field of scientific and social interest. In order to additionally emphasize the position and importance of Aramani's book, it is important to point out that theologians were among the first who reacted to »new« issues arising within »new medical ethics«. As far back as in 1950, the Dean of Harvard Divinity School, Williard L. Sperry, published his lectures held in Massachusetts General Hospital, entitled »The Ethical Basis of Medical Practice«. In his book he raises the issues of truth telling, prolonging life and euthanasia in the context of challenges of new medical technology. Four years later (1954)

the book that has left a strong mark in the history of bioethics »Morals and Medicine« is published. Many bioethicists describe this book as the »pioneer work of new medical ethics«. Its author is Joseph Fletcher who steps away from the usual theological discussions, such as euthanasia or abortion, and discusses individual freedoms and patients' rights. Sixteen years later (1970) Paul Ramsey, a religion professor at Princeton University, published a book which is today considered to be the basis of bioethics as a field of science. In his book »The Patient as Person« he describes a patient as an active, free, autonomous subject in the health care system with specific rights and thus he opposed the idea of traditional medical paternalism.

By mentioning only the most important, the question of such strong presence of theologians in discussions on »new« ethical issues in »new« medicine arises. However, seen through the prism of care about life (including two eternal human realities: *ethics* and *life*, i.e. moral reflection on life and all its components), bioethics is not, in its content, very new in Christian moral theology. Professor Michele Aramini continues the line of theologians who made a great contribution in reflections on topics of bioethics and he does it, as can be seen in the book »The Introduction to Bioethics« religiously unburdened and yet religiously founded. Such approach is surely possible, among other, because of his scientific education in the field of bioethics and political sciences. He is the author of numerous publications on bioethics, particularly on topic of euthanasia in which he is one of the leading analysts and critics of the Dutch law on euthanasia. He is also a science director of »Fondazione Mirasole« at the Milan University and the president of the Ethics Committee of »San Pio X« Clinic in Milan (Camilliani).

That is the reason why the translation of the second edition of »Introduction to Bioethics« can be rightly termed – as dr. Mario Palmaro says - »the new textbook on Italian bioethics«. The attempt to bring bioethics closer to the reader through clear and complete scientific information and multiperspective religious views on particular, even controversial, topics makes this book equally interesting to Croatian readers as well. The book was also translated into Spanish, and the author of the Croatian translation is Ana Volarić Mršić, M.A. from the University of Zagreb, Center for Croatian Studies and long-time executive secretary in the Center for Bioethics at the Institute of Philosophy and Theology SJ, Zagreb.

Finally, this book deserves to be recognized as a quality and comprehensive bioethics textbook for students of biomedicine and related studies, but also for all those who encounter bioethics issues in their professional (and also private) life.

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