



Bioethics and Philosophical Argumentation

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A K A D E M I E

Bioethics and Philosophical Argumentation

Symposium Science, Ethics and Arts

University of Freiburg

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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 depend 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 Arbotion
 - Assissted Suicide / „Euthanasia“
 - Research on human beings
 - Transplantational Medicine
 - Reproductional 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...