

Bioethics: Conceptual foundations, principles, methods, problems

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Content and Objectives

Bioethics, as a distinct field of study, has emerged from pressing concerns for a critical normative analysis and assessment of moral challenges resulting from developments in the life sciences and biotechnology. From an epistemological point of view, it forms the ground for the rapprochement of the two scientific “cultures”: that of the natural and medical sciences, on the one hand, and the humanities and social sciences, on the other. Particularly, it emerged around mid 1970s, aiming at a critical investigation of the implications of the rapid advances in the biomedical sciences and biotechnologies for human life and the natural environment. Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation (1975)*, on the moral status and proper treatment of nonhuman animals, and Jonathan Glover’s, *What Sort of People Should There Be?*, on the ethics of reproductive technologies, are reference points. Both opened the door to serious public discussion, too. Since 1970s, debates have developed extensively so as to include studies in Bioethics core concepts and methods, the social context and structures, its legal and institutional implications, as well as specific topics in reproductive medicine, genetics, organ transplantation and donation, public and global health, justice and policy, and critical studies regarding biotechnological interventions in the natural world.

The main objective of the lecture is to introduce participants into its conceptual foundations in philosophical ethics, its basic normative principles and the methodologies associated with them. An integrated framework will be explored, within which current pressing bioethical challenges can be adequately framed and addressed. The role of fundamental principles in bioethical reasoning will be examined, particularly those of respect for personal autonomy, justice, beneficence and non-maleficence. Their modal structure will be analyzed, on the basis of which an order of priority can be defended in cases of conflict between them in actual cases.

The overall aim is to enable students to develop core skills for the conduct of normative analysis and reasoning in bioethics. Specific cases will be examined with special emphasis on genetic testing, the use of genetic data, and biobanks.

After attending this activity, participants will demonstrate the ability to:

- understand, analyse and assess normative issues in Bioethics

master and apply a coherent, integrated ethical framework for addressing such issues, regarding the growth of the new biomedical knowledge, its social integration and impact on agents’ personal and collective life.