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Table of content

Editorial. Ethics And Communication in Pregnancy Among Mentally Disabled Women.....	1
<i>Magdalena Iorga</i>	
The Doctor-Patient Relationship: Providing Care to Muslim Patients in Europe	5
<i>Sana Loue</i>	
Moral Aspects and Ethical Principles of Terminal Patient Care in Palliative Medicine	13
<i>Valenin Petre-Ciudin, Cornel Petre-Ciudin</i>	
The Role of Christian Bioethics in the Public Debate	23
<i>Mircea Gelu Buta</i>	
What is The Relevance of Jewish Tradition and Ethics for Modern Management?.....	37
<i>Liviu Warter, Iulian Warter</i>	
Jewish Business Ethics. Tradition and Modernity	49
<i>Iulian Warter, Liviu Warter</i>	
Organ Transplantation from Artificially Grown Beings	59
<i>Cătălin J. Iov</i>	

The Role of Christian Bioethics in the Public Debate

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Abstract: *Shared values such as truth, good, beauty, which united the European civilization have become relative today and sadly we see that they are no longer accepted by all members of the multicultural society in which we live. It is what we call secularism. The only accepted criterion, that remains and continues to reign, is economic success. This is the model that people, groups and even states take into consideration. On the other hand, the belief that we can not miss a minimum of moral values recognized and established in social interaction is quite widespread. Then, however, when the question of determining them by consensus arises, a consensus reached at a social level, the consistency of such values is reduced even more.*

Christians, sometimes feeling estranged in their own country, ask themselves whether there is a specific Bioethics for Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Lutherans, Calvinists etc. That is why Christian bioethicists want not just laws, for example prohibiting abortions, but rather to create a world where abortion would be unthinkable.

Keywords: *christian bioethics, public forum, spiritualization of the economy.*

1. Introduction

In today's pluralistic societies, where diverse religious cultural and ideological orientations coexist, it

becomes increasingly difficult to guarantee a common basis for ethical values, shared by everyone, that can represent a sufficient basis for democracy itself. On the other hand, the belief that we can not miss a minimum of moral values recognized and established in our social interaction is quite widespread. Then, however, when the question of determining them by consensus arises, a consensus reached at a social level, the consistency of such values is reduced even more.

There certainly is a Christian bioethics. This differs from secular bioethics through a regulatory approach, such as "Is it wrong to kill embryos", which secular bioethicists avoid enunciating. In addition, Christian bioethics relies on divine revelation, a value foreign to secular bioethics. There are also differences between various religions and the bioethics they generate. Thus, Roman Catholic and Protestant bioethicists

try to build a Christian bioethics based on reason, by natural law arguments, without referring to the revelation (Charles Curron, 1979). Confessional bureaucrats, supporters of the ecumenical movement, who believed strongly that sin is simply ignorance, and evil can be defeated through education, have managed to create, over time, doctrines devoid of depth. Hovering at the surface of things, we may think that, in fact, legalizing abortion changed our private life and social issues. In fact, everything seems to continue exactly as before. Each individual can behave according to his consciousness: those who do not want to have an abortion are not compelled to do it, and those who do it have the support of the law and would probably do it anyway. It is all consumed in quiet operating rooms, guaranteeing at least some security conditions of the intervention: the fetus that will not see the light of day, as if it had never existed. Who realizes what is happening? Why do we continue to make this drama public? Wouldn't it be better to leave it buried quietly in the conscience of the protagonists? Many Christians are wondering today if there is a bioethics specific to the Orthodox, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Baptists, the Lutherans, the Calvinists etc. Shouldn't priests and social workers that we train be able to recognise the

insufficiency of philosophies replacing Christ? (Engelhardt, 2000). That is why Christian bioethicists want not just laws, for example prohibiting abortions, but rather to create a world where abortion would be unthinkable.

2. Homo economicus

The importance of economy has never been so felt by man as now, and paradoxically, he is even aware of the dependency that it created. Shared values such as truth, good, beauty, which united the European civilization, have become relative and sadly they are no longer accepted by all members of the multicultural society we live in. It is what we call secularism. The only criterion accepted, that remains and continues to reign, is economic success. This is the model that people, groups and even states take into account. Today, economy has become the center of our entire civilization and everything relates to it.

I think about how, in recent years, hospital services have begun to be appreciated only when they bring more money than they spend. Wards should be renovated and functional, and competent staff should be willing to work there, only to the extent that such measures raise the market share, compared to neighbouring hospitals. If, in general, the era in which we live has gone through two extremes of

economic control, from communism to unrestrained capitalism, behold, we are now witnessing a financial and economical crisis after decades of consumption and environmental disasters caused by both socialist planning and capitalist greed. In this context, the person, the citizen remains a "homo economicus", encouraged to consume, so as not to upset the global economic order. The growth and rebirth of consumption have become leitmotifs of governors, and the petty-bourgeois ideal of consumption is established by governments as a civic ethics (1).

Just as the socialist worker wants, above all, to be a consumer, leading the fight for the interests of consumption at the expense of production, as the "conscience" frees him from any obligation and inspires unsuccessful and immeasurable pretenses, the petty bourgeois can be devoured by consumption interests in a beastly way, and the latter knows much more about this, than a worker. Still for him there is no ideal, as he places himself on a scale without values called competition, represented by conflict, corruption, lies, envy etc (2).

However, Alexander Berdiyaev warns us that economical and material life is not enforceable against the spiritual life, and man can not detach from it, because, ultimately, it

is the spirit that defeats nature and dominates its forces, organizes and transforms them. The material consumption can not be the only goal of the economy. In addition, the human attitude towards the economic production process can take erroneous directions: it either rather denies the business imperative of production, or man serves economy, worshipping it. The spiritual attitude towards economy presupposes an asceticism, which is to curb the passions of life. Unlimited growth of the population and its needs created an industrial, capitalist civilization, a great deal of upheavals and catastrophes, which means a loss of spirit in European humanity. If people want to regenerate themselves spiritually, they must commit themselves by way of ascetic limitation and spiritualize economic life (3).

By expanding and deeply analyzing the economic problem, to which he is trying to give a religious sense, Serge Boulgakov states the Sofiane aspect of economy, in order to merge it with the soul of the world. "It is becoming increasingly clear that the victory over evil and needs is a cosmic problem. It is insoluble within the limits of the earthly civilization... The socialist ideal of consumption and distribution is not spiritual, but on the contrary, anti-religious, it is an ideal of slavery... The perfect food, in religious

terms, is the Eucharistia. The man is united with the cosmos in Christ and through Christ. Then consumption coincides with creation" (4). Ultimately, Berdyaev continues, the evil of capitalist economy is undermining the spiritual life of people in these times, their religious and moral decadence, and not the economic aspect of capitalism itself, because economy is a hierarchical system and not a mechanism composed of atoms, and its base is the human being, with its qualities, capacities and discipline to work. An austere discipline of the person is important for the economy, just as a form of asceticism is necessary for work. When a person is left completely discouraged, the economy collapses (5).

Today we are witnessing a medical and economic dictatorship against the weak and weakened by illness and / or the poor. It's hard to stand up against the democratically voted laws. Who would dare to claim that some of the mandatory vaccines do not protect public health, and the medical corps often ignores this. Accusations made against drugs in general are related to four main factors: one: the medicines are, in their majority, ineffective; two: also in their majority, they are dangerous; three: they are in constant metamorphosis, which generates confusion and mistrust; four: they incite overconsumption;

five: they are expensive, which creates suspicions regarding the commercial interests behind them (6).

Often, the community has no means of protection in the face of pressure from big pharmaceutical companies. It accepts with confidence and enthusiasm medicines offered by the market. It is true that every new drug has undergone a minimum of checks: genetic toxicity, teratogenic. However, it is not known whether, over the years, the drug whose clinical efficacy is certain, has unpredictable effects. Here's an entirely conclusive example. Stilbestrol is a hormone with manifest estrogenic effects. Initially, it was administered impending abortion and prematurity prevention. That was in 1938. Fifteen years later, it was demonstrated that Stilbestrol does not reduce the incidence of spontaneous abortions. Shockingly, girls whose mothers were treated with Stilbestrol in early pregnancy often developed vaginal cancer. In 1971, it was strongly recommended that the hormone not be given to pregnant women, and in 1978, a multicenter study on Stilbestrol showed that the hormone increases the frequency of reproductive failures. Hence, the natural outcome to eliminate the drug from therapy (7).

Regarding the manufacturers of vaccines and medicines, they intervene and assail the faculties of

medicine, the medical staff with workshops, brochures and medical representatives. They have financial reports with governments, world organizations (WHO, European Community etc.), insurance companies, financial groups, media that transmit desired information to the general public. It is obvious that members of pressure groups do not work for free, "Pro Deo" (free of charge, in the name of God) (8). In other words, "dirty hands" may, eventually, stain or infect (9). That is why, metaphorically, Christians should fight to get a place recognized in bioethics. The lack of Christian quorum is detrimental to the wide culture, for contempt is misleading. In addition, the refusal of the legitimate presence of Christians in the public forum debate draws significant damages to the weak and the vulnerable. Yielding to economic pressures, justified or not, means, in fact, to select, and any selection is profoundly anti-human. Not only do we have to have the same chances to defeat disease, but all must be convinced that we will not be abandoned once our social role is over, and sooner or later we will be victims of our present decisions.

3. A critical view on the concept of autonomy

Apparently, the concept of autonomy has become the dominant

principle of contemporary bioethics. Given the institutional context of bioethics, it is primarily our task to define the terms correctly.

The law of the self is a political fiction, but not one that applies to those who choose to identify with a community of faith by baptism, marriage etc. Christians should respect procedural justice, defined by freedom, acknowledging at the same time that a person is not truly isolated in its decision making. Although, theoretically, the autonomy, or its synonym- political freedom ,offered by the state is permissive, it is not absolute and no one can ever be free from all obligations, there is still the belief that we can not do without moral values, which entered, over time, the collective mind. Public opinion, formed in good thinkers, claims the right to abortion as a part of the freedom of women, men and society. If women and men have the right to continue to exercise their profession, to save his reputation and to maintain a certain lifestyle, society has the right to numerically control the population, in order to guarantee its citizens a general welfare through the balanced management of resources and labor. All these rights are real and well-founded, but they are claimed in the detriment of an innocent human beings's right to life. This way, we become blind to the right to life of another, the right of the

weakest, of the voiceless. Asserting one's rights brings prejudice to another's fundamental right, the right to life. Hence the conclusion that legalized abortion implies the idea that force is the one that founds the law (10).

When Christians refer to limiting autonomy, this can be done by using theological terminology and arguments, which differ from the contractual language of bureaucracy. Besides *acrivia*¹ and *iconomia*², the Christian Church made *epikeia* work, meaning the interpretation of human law not *ad literam*, but in the spirit of borderline cases that have not been sufficiently taken into account by positive law.

There are situations in which we find rational justification of *epikeia*, such as: when the legislation cannot think of any situations that arise in society; in particular cases, when consequences of enforcing secular laws are much more serious spiritually than the consequences of breaching such laws; when we assume that, in the drafting and approval of laws, the wisest and most able specialists have not always attended (11).

Both exactness and stewardship mean the entry of the confessor under the burden of the sinner, the taking of the latter in prayer, the gradual rise of exactness to stewardship, because, in

fact, respecting and fulfilling all canons is an ecclesial act. As people who turn to church manage to evolve gradually, the canons of the Church work and retain their value until the end of time, so that stewardship is not a relativisation of rules, but a superior pedagogy (12).

This theological approach presupposes mutual respect of fundamental values such as truth, good, beauty, freedom, justice, etc., but not necessarily the way to reach them. Therefore, it is necessary that state institutions tolerate Christians and facilitate dialogue, because Christianity is nothing but the memory of the Lord's loving gaze on man in his truth, and ultimate guarantor of dignity. Here is the irreplaceable mission of Christians in the world, as described in "Letter to Diognetus": "Christians are not distinguished from other people by the land on which they live, nor by language, nor by the clothes ... They live in Greek or barbarian cities, as fate has placed each, conforming to local customs, clothing, food and way of life, giving at the same time, the example of their wonderful social life forms, recognized by all as unseen before. They live in countries where they were born, but as if they were foreign; all pay their duties and bear all the burdens as citizens and foreigners; any foreign land is their homeland, and any homeland a

foreign land. They marry like all people, bear children, but do not abandon their newborns. They share the table but not the bed. They are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They live their life on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They respect the established laws, but by their way of life they rise above the laws. They love all and are persecuted by all ... In a word, Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body ... the soul loves the flesh that hates it, and loves the limbs, just as Christians love those who hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, but the soul is supporting body. Likewise Christians are in the world as in a prison, but they sustain the world ... God has assigned them a position so high that it is not permitted to abandon it" (13).

4. The anxieties of truth in post-christian medicine

Geneticists teach us that genetic disorders are almost inevitable, being present in 25% of children, with the observation that 50% of them will even develop clinical manifestations. Faced with these realities, doctors wonder how far they can overcome the limits of telling the truth. Do they have the right to describe the consequences of mutations? Who allows for parents' hopes to be destroyed? We can dispel their hope when, after tormenting anxieties, I

saw parents are happy that their little encephalopath child began to speak a few words that only they could understand (14).

Case 1: Girl, aged 19 months, Apgar 9, normal psychomotor development. Diagnosis: fracture of the right collarbone. In family history, glass bone disease in several generations³. Emergency Medical Doctor recommends a consultation in a specialized service. The child's father, who looked forward to meeting with the specialist doctor, recalls: "After I was taken to a medical consultation room, we were greeted by the staff that showed apparent kindness. When I asked the doctor if the girl could receive a specific medication, he appeared less interested in this aspect, and confided to me that the real purpose of the consultation was the collection of DNA samples from extended family members. When I asked, naively, why that was necessary, he dismissively showed to the child, saying: "We want to make sure that you will not make another one!". Following this foolish reply, I left the clinic intrigued, and my wife promptly showed her intention to take care of any of her future children. In the coming years, our daughter suffered four fractures requesting treatment at the same hospital. Although each time we received very good emergency care, we were sent for an assessment for prescribing

medication. I always wonder if families that defy medical authorities, by giving birth to a child with disabilities, are left on their own" (15).

Case 2. Boy, aged 6 months, presumptive diagnosis.: Down syndrome (Trisomy 21)⁴. In family history, Down's Syndrome. The mother is suffering from breast cancer with metastases. Parents come to the pediatrician for advice and diagnosis of the child. The father to the doctor: "Please help us. Our baby is six months old and we do not know if he has a normal development. According to the family doctor, the child would have Down syndrome. We believe it is a normal child, as the characteristics assigned to the syndrome are common in our family. You know, we had a son who died at the age of 22 hit by a truck in front of the city library. Since then, our desire to have another child was fulfilled. We do not know if he is normal. I want him to be normal so much ...".

I discreetly looked at the child. The phenotype was Down syndrome. I wondered whether or not he had a malformation. Probably, if he lived long enough, he would develop dementia. I was trying to stall, indicating various analyzes. We would certainly have the result in a few months, when we would also forecast the child's development. The parents understood that I could not

provide more data. Upon leaving, the father was alone, praying: "I beg you not to leave me alone. I know that my son has Down syndrome, but the mother has last stage breast cancer and soon she will probably not be around any more. Her only desire is to leave behind a normal child. Please tell us, if and when you can, that the doctors were wrong. The thought that she has a normal boy will calm her down ...". Cold shadows of death were floating around me... I remembered the words of Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania, worthy of remembrance: "Truth without love kills". Gene therapy still remains a part of our hopes.

5. Pharmacology in the face of genetic adversity

Medicine has always tried to correct what could be corrected. It started with malformations. It then discovered hormones and assured life of patients with diabetes. It introduced thyroid hormone therapy and turned myxedema into a relatively benign disorder. It continued to dream ... One day, however, it will be able to correct what seemed uncorrectable, the mutation itself. A chimera ... to discover mutation in billions of genes in the 46 chromosomes, to isolate and to regain normal structure.

While no one argues that gene therapy would be useless, many are

wondering if it finds its place in a world plagued by ignorance (one hundred million illiterates in Asia and Africa), famine (the misery is extended). In addition, medicine has solved a lot of acute challenges (16).

Of course, genetics remains a science of the possible, and in terms of medical science, practiced in sympathy with the values of creation; any identification of a mutation associated with a disease is welcome, helping to clarify the pathogenesis of the disease. As a result, researchers can experiment with drugs capable to counteract morphological and functional deficiencies generated by abnormal genes. In other words, in such cases, postnatal suffering could be relieved. Encouraging such a position agreeable to genetic diseases is consistent with Christian values, which encourage sustainable medical research as innovative and beneficial to humanity.

From the secular perspective, although a theoretical commitment to pharmaceutical innovation is officially admitted, in practice, contemporary medicine undermines this position, through the devaluation of a developing "imperfect life" and thus prevents it by abortion. However, after fifteen years of agonizing debates that accompanied the legalization of abortion in many countries, should we resign ourselves

to losing this battle? I think not, because human life remains inviolable.

To exist as a person is not a psychological fact, but an existential one: it does not fundamentally depend on age, or psychological condition, or the functional morphological characters one may or may not be gifted with. Personality may remain below the threshold of consciousness, as it happens when we sleep, but, nevertheless, it is still there and we need to refer to it. Personality may not yet be developed, as in childhood, but it claims moral respect from the beginning. It may even happen that personality should not thrive in acts, because of missing psychophysical presuppositions, as in the case of mental diseases. Finally, a being can remain closed, as in the embryo, but it exists in it from the beginning, having its own rights. This personality is the one that gives people dignity. It distinguishes us from things and makes us people. The prohibition of killing a human being expresses, in its most explicit form, the prohibition of treating it as something that can be destroyed (17).

Recognising the sacredness of human life and its inviolability is not, therefore, a minor issue, one that we can consider relative, given the pluralism of opinions present in postmodern society. In this respect, as

Pope Benedict XVI testified, the Book of Genesis contains a page of an impressive eloquence to our problem. It is the blessing given by the Lord to Noah and his sons after the flood, which restores, once and for all, after sin, the only laws that can guarantee the continuation of life for humanity. This creation, born absolutely perfect in God's hands, was involved in the disorder that followed the fall and degeneration of our ancestors. Violence and killings without limits spread worldwide, making peace and legal order impossible. And behold, after the great cathartic flood, God calms His wrath and sweeps the world again with His mercy, showing it the requirements essential for survival, "As your life - blood - for it will require it from all beast; and brother will surely be man's life. He who shed blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man "(Gn 9: 5-6).

With these words, God claims man's life as His property, remaining under His direct and immediate protection. It is something "sacred". The blood shed by man cries to Him (cf. Gn. 4, 10), because man is created in His image and likeness. The authority of society is established by Him precisely in order to ensure the respect for this fundamental right, which is endangered by the evil heart of man (18).

Researchers justify the extension of prenatal testing in that the identification and study of genetically disadvantaged minority would help the research community to get involved in improving the health problems of the healthy majority. Another line starts from the commercial hypothesis, which envisages that successful drugs target large markets of patients with increased consumption, and not the minority of rare diseases, where the need is low.

In a recent British study, pharmaceutical industry analysts have coined the term "Eroom's Law" (Moore's Law⁵, spelled backwards) to highlight the contrast between declining productivity in the drug sector with technological advances in the electronics industry. Under this analysis, although huge amounts have been allocated for research and development in the pharmaceutical industry, the number of innovative medicines in the last five decades decreased by 50% every nine years. Thus, the malignant influence of medical utilitarianism can be seen even within the "Eroom's Law": years ago, drugs were evaluated according to the number of lives they saved or extended- a criterion more noble than the monetary ones used now.

Achieving success in the search for new drugs has never been easy.

Joking on the subject, the French manager of a pharmaceutical company once said that getting a new drug on the US market is an achievement as big as an astronaut landing on the Moon.

Utilitarian thinking and financial pressures, requiring as few costs for the social security system as possible, push research in genetics to find the easiest and cheapest solution for inherited genetic disorders and diseases, i.e. it prevents the birth of those with diseases. Here's how a Christian concern for body weakness opens various research programs, while a utilitarian concern for economy creates an entirely different research program. From this perspective, knowledge is not neutral.

Bioethicists wonder if young clinicians were well trained in the correct use of medicines, essential priority of any medical education. If in Romanian universities, the pharmacology curriculum in recent years has been improved with the introduction of clinical pharmacology course, in England a change of direction is signaled, by reducing the medical curriculum (19). These changes have particularly affected the teaching of clinical pharmacology, a dense discipline because of the details necessary to correctly understand the effects of drugs on the human body.

Recent studies on presentations in emergency units suggest that there is an increase in cases of drug poisoning, caused by errors in overtaking prescription drugs.

If one of the causes is undoubtedly the easy access to drugs, placing Romania among the top consuming countries in Europe, we may think of the likelihood of a deficit of pharmacological training in young doctors (20).

A topical issue is raised by the relationship between doctors and drug companies. It is an international custom that doctors can be sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry to participate in international scientific congresses, where they can update their training. This motivation must be a real and effective one, however, and the participation in the congress must be in accordance with that motivation, not another. Participation in congress can not exceed the real motivation and hijacking this motivation is prohibited by law.

In other words, the motivation to update one's training does not constitute legal justification for other masked motivations, such as influencing treatment prescriptions by offering holidays camouflaged in scientific conferences where doctors do not participate or do so partially (or participate, in fact, as tourists), or other similar benefits even likely to

influence the therapeutic protocols (vouchers, medicine, cards etc.).

Also, updating one's training cannot constitute legal justification for clinical trials on patients in authorized public hospitals, medical studies with drugs and protocols / procedures regarding unauthorized and unapproved public hospitals. Regarding these studies, their gravity is much higher, as it violates the rights of the patient, possibly his safety, as he cannot sign at the same time consents for two different protocols of treatment (authorized public protocol or unauthorized private protocol). When taking a clinical study (unauthorized) on a patient in a public hospital, the doctor either simulates or violates authorized hospital treatment protocols, and such proceeding have criminal implications (false vitiated consent, etc.). This is wh, in some countries sponsorships are not made directly between physician and the company, but through specialized scientific societies.

Large pharmaceutical companies have already been fined by the US government for corrupt practices in countries in Eastern Europe, and the discloruse of the situation in Eastern Europe is only a matter of time. The problem is that, if the pharmaceutical company is only fined for irregular practices, the other players (doctors,

zonal representatives, officials from the ministry, Insurance Funds) are criminally responsible. Under the law, these activities or simulations are considered acts of corruption. And criminal liability is, by definition, personal liability (21).

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 21. Susan Matthews. Pharma fines increase, but the pain is not felt on Wall Street. *Nature Medicine*, 2013;19(5).
2. Iconomia is a certain laxity towards the weak, so they can find the right path.
 3. It is a genetically transmitted disease known as osteogenesis imperfecta, characterized by spontaneous fractures or minor injury, imperfect dentition (DI) and hearing loss in adulthood.
 4. Down syndrome or Trisomy 21 is a chromosomal disorder caused by the presence of an extra chromosome in the genetic construct (genome) that is present from the moment of conception in the affected embryo. A person born with Down syndrome shows distinct physical traits and a degree of mental retardation.
 5. Moore' s law predicted the excessive growth of computer processing industry.

Notes

1. Acrivia - exactness in keeping church canons.