

# BIOETHICS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AS PART OF THE TRAINING OF FUTURE CIVICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES BASICS TEACHERS

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*Petr JEMELKA*

**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on the area of extending the contents and scope of traditional ethics by bioethics and environmental ethics. They undoubtedly reflect very serious issues of the contemporary world (global environmental crisis, the value of health and life etc.). These issues are not a simple fashionable trend, but they significantly touch upon the future prospects of our civilization. Bioethics and environmental topics thus currently become a substantive part of real politics. The issues of health care, population policy or protection of the environment therefore make an important part of campaign platforms of most political entities – from local to national levels.*

*Training of qualified Civics teachers thus cannot leave out this aspect of philosophy and ethics which has such strong ties to practical life issues.*

*Bioethical issues are thus a way to a really creative school education. They are based upon a concrete information basis, which is up-to-date and attractive (e.g. the question of cloning) and yet easily available to get oriented in the subject. They therefore have an important potential for meaningful educational/instructive activities.*

**Keywords:** *bioethics, environmental ethics, environmental crisis, health, protection of the environment, training of teachers, educational programmes*

Josef Šmajš, a philosopher from Brno, says in his *The Lease Contract with the Earth*: “Globalised culture also devaluates the traditional structure and content of school education. Also today, school provides us lots of useful knowledge; however, in the sensitive phase of human ontogenesis in which cognition is relatively easily connected to values, it does not develop thinking respectful of the Nature. School does not teach us what is the Nature and natural evolution...”<sup>1</sup>

It is exactly the consciousness or intuitive perception of such a situation which is

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<sup>1</sup> Šmajš, J.: *The Lease Contract with the Earth*. In: Jemelka, P., Lesňák, S., *Environmentální etika*. Prešov 2008, p. 90.

the challenge and inspiration for all the creative and passionate teachers, methodologists or workers in eco-centres, who strive for overcoming such a cognitive and emotional deficit in the education and instruction.

The development of the natural-science aspect of the educational effort is surely an important and essential part of such a process. Social-sciences potential is also quite large; civics at primary schools and social sciences basics at secondary schools belong also among important fields which provide space for such topics. For such a reason, environmental topics are considered to be important aspects of the training of future teachers of the above-mentioned subjects, as such a scope of topics touches upon almost all the aspects or parts of the subject-matter of such studies (philosophy; ethics; political sciences; aesthetics; culturology; economics; etc.).

In such a context, it is also important to realise that bioethics and environmental topics thus currently become a substantive part of real politics. The issues of health care, population policy or protection of the environment therefore make an important part of campaign platforms of most political entities – from local to national levels (including foreign policy level) – see e.g. concepts of sustainable development as a standard political doctrine of many countries.

The ongoing social debate thus requires culturing of pupils and students in order to make them better informed, and also able to hold dialogues (development of tolerance, art of argumentation, etc.). For such a reason, such topics are closely linked to the culturing of the value and attitude components of personality development.

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This paper focuses on the area of extending the content and scope of traditional ethics – this means, so-called environmental ethics and bioethics. Without any doubt, these reflect quite topical issues of the present times (global environmental crisis, values of health and life, etc.). Such issues are not simple fashionable trends, but they significantly touch upon the future prospects of our civilisation.

Training of qualified teachers thus cannot leave out this aspect of philosophy and ethics with such a strong ties to practical life issues. Teachers of Civics and Social Sciences Basics will surely cover such issues within the framework of their educational – instructive practice. For such a reason, a new course (Bioethics) was created in our Department (within the scope of the above-mentioned development project), which should help in the basic orientation in this internally quite extended and demanding, however without any doubt very attractive scope of topics in this area of special training of future teachers.

The objective of this paper is not to give detailed information on the subject matter of this newly implemented course.<sup>2</sup> We wish to outline a certain conceptual approach towards the above-mentioned field of studies (bioethics and environmental ethics), which has become a concrete methodology basis for its creation.

Let's begin giving a reference to a document of international validity – the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights from 2005.<sup>3</sup> The Declaration is a reaction to the contemporary development of science and technology and it leads to the requirement for the acceptance of global responsibility also for the moral aspect of such a development.

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<sup>2</sup> The syllabus of this new course is attached.

<sup>3</sup> See Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. UNESCO, Paris 2005.

Such a responsibility applies both to the preservation of cultural diversity and interests of future generations, and biodiversity – protection of all forms of life. It starts from the fact that man is an integral part of the biosphere; however, man is the only creature responsible for her/his behaviour and s/he is capable of realising such a responsibility.

Referring to this key document, we would like to argue in favour of the approach we have chosen for the creation of our concept of the bioethics course. The point is that nowadays, we may encounter two approaches to this subject field. The usual (quite narrow from our point of view) understanding of this subject more or less reduces bioethics to a reflection on the issues of medicine and nursing ethics. Generally speaking, such an approach falls into an anthropological reduction of the issue, as it deals mainly with moral aspects of human health and disease, dying and death or human reproduction.

A wider approach, however, understands bioethics as a specific reflection on the phenomenon of life (which means not only human life). Life is looked upon as a universal value – which corresponds to the original definition of bioethics at the time of its creation in the seventies of the last century. For such a reason, environmental ethics may also be included and meaningfully developed within the scope of bioethics approached in such a manner.

Expressed in other words, such a narrow common approach towards bioethics leads to a paradox when life ethics is mostly focused on the death and suffering, reducing thus its focus on the life as a whole just to a human life. Another essential problem is the fact that such a reduced approach means that such an ethics is in fact mostly applied ethics (typically professional ethics of healthcare professionals, etc.).<sup>4</sup>

We prefer to see a wider scope of bioethics as being based upon a core value – life. This is why it includes both the specifically anthropic reflection and the value and moral dimensions of existence of other than human forms of life, including thus also the relatively autonomous area of environmental ethics.

Bioethics is thus developed with a view to the necessity of interconnection of biological (including environmental) and social reflections – anthropologic and cultural. It also interconnects the systematic approach (determination of basic issue areas; defining of key terms) with the historic level, dealing with the development of reflection on this scope of problems as an essential and important part of the ethical theory.

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The enforcement of such an approach towards bioethics and its basic scope of topics may also be perceived as a certain meaningful innovation of the teaching of social sciences. This is a really concrete connection to a scope of topics which are very attractive (also due to mass media influence). Thanks to the instruction of socio-scientific subjects, bioethical issues may embody the way in which pupils and students face hot themes and issues of the contemporary world.

As it has been already said, such a situation will require a further amplification of the specialised instruction of teachers who will need specific information on the situation in the related fields of science, on the implementation of technological possibi-

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<sup>4</sup> Applied ethics does not have its own authentic value basis; it is usually based on quite a general formulation of values with a high level of abstraction, which enables an universalistic applicability of these.

lities and on the status of legislation and basic valid legal standards, applicable to e.g. research, medicine branches, human reproduction, hygiene, but also animal welfare and legal status of the environment protection.

It is also important to interconnect such an “information basis“ with knowledge of the specific political and economic situation – let’s mention, by way of example, different aspects of the healthcare reform, biocombustible-programme subventions, but also some aspects of the problems of minorities (sources of racism and xenophobia), etc.

Bioethics may thus be very likely regarded as a means by which the instructive and educational aspects (not only) of social science may be successfully based upon specific, interesting and important issues, in which the originally not very captivating and general method of instruction may be transformed.

In such a manner, an important connection may be created e.g. to the multicultural-education scope of issues (see e.g. the above-mentioned topics of xenophobia and racism) or global education (environmental topics from the point of view of global environmental crisis; humanitarian aid or medicine-ethics issues in underdeveloped countries, etc.).

Due to the content attractiveness and diversity, it is also possible to point out that such a diversity also provides an important didactic inspiration, which especially means that it offers possibilities for the development of less traditional educational methods – in relation to the ultimately discursive character of bioethics.<sup>5</sup> Suitable methods may considerably improve the level of instruction not only of social science – projects, case studies, simulation games, brainstorming, etc. Such methods represent an important factor for the creation of much desired interdisciplinary relations. Bioethical issues may thus offer an important interconnection to other subjects through cross-sectional topics. The list is far from being complete; we may anticipate e.g. possibilities in the area of the choice of career (science; medicine; cosmetics; agriculture), family education (health; reproduction; care for the handicapped), aesthetic education (non repeatability and beauty of live nature; aesthetically creative aspect of project education), issues of healthy lifestyle (hygiene; nutrition; healthcare, etc.), etc.

Bioethical issues are thus one of the ways to a really creative school education, as such issues are not based upon vague and general motifs or topics, but it is built upon a very strong concrete information basis, which is up-to-date and attractive (e.g. cloning) and yet easily available to get oriented in the subject, offering thus important (and also vital) topic potential for meaningful educational – instructive activities.

## **Attachment:**

### **BIOETHICS**

**(Syllabus of the Department of Civics of the Faculty of Education of the Masaryk University of Brno)**

#### **I. Introduction to Bioethics Studies**

1. Bioethics as a part of the ethical theory; anthropocentric and biocentric scope

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<sup>5</sup> The characteristic feature of this subject matter is the fact that it is not a domain only for experts, but it includes an all-society public discussion on sensitive topics (typically, e.g. abortions, euthanasia, etc.).

of bioethics; application (normative) and descriptive approach to bioethics.

2. Science and technology as direct sources of bioethical topics (research using biological material; possibilities of medicine technologies; anthropogenous changes of biosphere).

## **II. Bioethical Reflection of Live Nature Value**

1. "Life" – the core category of bioethics (from the biological to axiologic definition).
2. Issue of rights of live organism in the contemporary context (cloning and genetic engineering).
3. Environmental ethics (origin and development of ethical reflection on environmental problems).

## **III. Anthropological Issues of Bioethics**

1. Human life as a specific value; pursuit of human nature; issue of justification of the influence upon the human life (interference in human behaviour; research using human beings; ethical aspects of legislation – absolute punishment; eugenics; problem of racism).
2. Beginning of human life (ethical aspects of human reproduction; assisted reproduction; prenatal diagnostics and its moral impacts; abortions).
3. Human life in health and disease; corporal and mental health as a value; length and quality of life; issues of medical and nursing ethics (patients rights; ethical aspects of transplantation).
4. Bioethical reflection on dying and death (death as a part of life; human intervention in the natural end of life - euthanasia, suicide).

## **IV. Bioethics and the Education towards Citizenship**

1. Bioethical issues as an important part of education and instruction (development of knowledge, skills and approaches); citizen and healthcare (importance of voluntary blood and bone marrow donorship; prevention; healthy lifestyle).
2. Demands for teachers.
3. Principal recommended methods.

# **BIOETIKA A ENVIRONMENTÁLNÍ ETIKA V PŘÍPRAVĚ BUDOUCÍCH UČITELŮ OV A ZSV**

**Abstrakt:** Příspěvek ukazuje potřebu rozšířit obsah „tradiční“ etiky o témata bioetická a o etiku environmentální. Obě tyto dílčí disciplíny sledují závažné otázky současného světa související s environmentální krizí, chápáním hodnot zdraví a života. Zdůrazňování významu bioetiky a environmentální etiky není jen „módním trendem“, jejich témata se zabývají závažnými problémy budoucnosti civilizace, stávají se součástí politických dokumentů. Péče o zdraví, populační politika i ochrana životního prostředí hrají důležitou úlohu v programu politických stran a ve volebních kampaních na regionální i celostátní úrovni. Bioetická a environmentální etika má důležité místo

nejen v předmětech přírodovědných, ale také v předmětech společenských, především v občanské výchově na základních školách a v základech společenských věd na školách středních. Ani biotika, ani environmentální etika by tedy neměly chybět ve vzdělávacích programech budoucích učitelů těchto předmětů.

**Klíčová slova:** etika, biotika, environmentální etika, ochrana životního prostředí, zdraví, vzdělávání učitelů, vzdělávací programy