

Original article

For a bioethics of complexity

Por una bioética de la complejidad

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Abstract

The *bioethics of complexity* is aimed at overcoming a simple and rough meaning of bioethics and its regulatory ambitions, which risks to flatten humans' peculiarities at the same level of what is typical of the natural and biological world, and proposes a new *complex thinking*, able to merge what seems separated and to distinguish interdependences and feedbacks between events, recognizing the interrelations between forms and aspects of life, the relations between phenomena and their backgrounds and between backgrounds and Earth and eventually to accept uncertainty, that is composed by some elements like unpredictability, innovation and mutation. Thanks to this new approach it is possible to understand new forms of relationships between patients and physicians and to propose a different vision of disease and therapy (*medicine of complexity*), it is possible to re-think about our relationship with nature, which is impossible to understand in a reducing and separate way (*environmental bioethics* and *ecology*), proposing a new humanism open to the ecological dimension, which has not the limits of the strong anthropocentric approach. Finally, the *bioethics of complexity* could teach us to re-think in a non antagonistic way the couple humanity/animality, leading to a new way of *animal bioethics* and a new way to think about pity, aware of the dangers of the anthropomorphization of our travel companions in the voyage of Life on Earth.

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Keywords: Bioethics; Complexity; Anthropocentrism; Medicine; Ecology

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Resumen

La *bioética de la complejidad* tiene como objetivo superar un significado simple y burdo de la bioética y sus ambiciones regulatorias, que corren el riesgo de uniformar las peculiaridades humanas al mismo nivel de lo típico en el mundo natural y biológico, y propone un nuevo *pensamiento complejo*, capaz de englobar lo que parece separado y de distinguir las interdependencias y retroalimentaciones entre los eventos, reconociendo así las interrelaciones entre distintas formas y aspectos de la vida, las relaciones entre fenómenos y sus contextos, y entre los mismos contextos y la Tierra, para eventualmente aceptar la incertidumbre, que está conformada por algunos elementos como la impredecibilidad, la innovación y la mutación. Gracias a esta nueva óptica, es posible comprender nuevas formas de relaciones entre pacientes y médicos y proponer una visión distinta de la enfermedad y la terapia (la *medicina de la complejidad*); es posible replantear nuestra relación con la naturaleza, que resulta imposible de entender desde una visión reducida y por separado (la *bioética ambiental y ecología*), para finalmente esbozar un nuevo humanismo abierto a la dimensión ecológica, libre de las limitaciones que impone una visión meramente antropocéntrica. Por último, la *bioética de la complejidad* podría enseñarnos a pensar desde una perspectiva no antagonista sobre el par humanidad/animalidad, que conduce a una nueva forma de *bioética animal* y una nueva manera de pensar sobre la compasión, la conciencia de los peligros que surgen con la antropomorfización de nuestros compañeros de vida en nuestra travesía por la Vida en la Tierra.

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Palabras clave: Bioética; Complejidad; Antropocentrismo; Medicina; Ecología

Introduction

“Science of human survival in the ecosystem”: that was the definition used by Potter in his famous 1971 book *Bioethics: bridge to the future* to explain what bioethics was. Bioethics was intended as a new discipline able to borrow concepts and ideas from biology, medicine, ecology, in order to realize and promote life values (Potter, 1971). Philosophically speaking, this meaning of bioethics was indeed simple and rough, due to its evident regulatory ambition – “saying to people what to do in order to have a good health and saying to society what to do in order to preserve people health” – just as if the idea of health were objective and did not change depending on different systems of values and points of view worldwide. However it was a forerunner of the idea of connecting indissolubly human destiny with the destiny of nature.

The serious limit of Potter’s approach – who was prisoner of the holistic vision and influenced by an old-positivistic framework which thought Bioethics as a *scien-*

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