



Original article

Epistemology of bioethics in the making: from historical context to conceptual plurality and anticipation

*La formación de la epistemología de la bioética:
del contexto histórico al pluralismo
conceptual y la anticipación*

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Abstract

This paper addresses the epistemological reasons for bioethics emerging as a utopian pluralism. I evaluate first the possibility and the conditions of a unifying discourse around a shared epistemology, through several methodological approaches that marked the discipline.

Reviewing the history of bioethics, I observe that the utopia has been reduced to building governance on strategic biopolitical consensus, minimizing conflicting subjective rights. I conclude that bioethics is still in the making and that its new role is to anticipate the consequences of techno-sciences and the anthropological changes they provoke.

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Keywords: Bioethics history; Applied epistemology; Plasticity; Anticipation; Capabilities

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Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre las razones epistemológicas por las que la bioética emerge como un pluralismo utópico. En primer lugar, evalúo la posibilidad y las condiciones de un discurso unificador en torno a una epistemología compartida, a través de diversos enfoques metodológicos que marcaron a esta disciplina.

A raíz de una revisión de la historia de la bioética, observé que la utopía se ha reducido a construir un gobierno del consenso biopolítico estratégico, minimizando los derechos subjetivos que entren en conflicto con él. Concluyo que la bioética es una disciplina aún en desarrollo y que su nueva función es anticiparse a las consecuencias de las tecnociencias y los cambios antropológicos que estas desencadenan.

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Palabras clave: Historia de la bioética; Epistemología aplicada; Plasticidad; Anticipación; Capacidades

Introduction

In order to understand the phenomenon of bioethical epistemology and its globalization, we have to describe the context of its emergence in the sixties as well as the anti-paternalist movement's effect on health care, which contributed to the confusion between bioethics and medical ethics as two forms of applied ethics. Epistemology refers to the philosophy of science since Thomas Kuhn's¹ "structure of scientific revolutions", a revolution itself in regard to the idea of truth. According to Kuhn, epistemology was not the result of logically coordinated observations since there is no pure observation and therefore he advocated the unification of sciences and knowledge, in his 1962 book: a mere illusion. Ian Hacking added "we cannot de-historicise science anymore" so that after the Vienna Circle, we saw in the sixties a revolution in the philosophy of sciences as a result of the evolution of scientific complexities and modelling. The ethical issue and critical discourse at that time consisted of questioning the link between the scientific revolution and its link to "imperialism" which sounded quite paradoxical since in the Rome treaty signed in 1958, scientific research was not yet considered an economic activity but merely an aspect of cultural politics. But the exponential innovation of biotechnologies made it a central question for an emerging bioethics responding to the challenges of the

¹ Kuhn (1962).

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