

Bioethics in Crisis or a Crisis of Bioethics? Between the Medicalization of Society and Philosophical Ethics

Review

Antonio SANDU

Bioethics in crisis or a crisis of bioethics? Lumen Publishing House, 2020

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Abstract

The volume “Bioetica în criză sau criza bioeticii? O filosofie a pandemiei în societatea medicalizată” [Bioethics in Crisis or a Crisis of Bioethics? A Philosophy of Pandemics in the Medicalized Society], authored by Antonio Sandu, published by Lumen Publishing House from Iași, Romania, in June 2020, is an ample work dealing extensively with the relevant aspects of the ethical redimensioning of bioethics in the larger context of COVID-19 pandemics. The volume is a complex interdisciplinary achievement, with new, interesting and sometimes surprising approaches of bioethics, with forays into the fields of philosophy and sociology.

Keywords: *Bioethics, pandemics, COVID-19, medicalized society.*

Bioethics is probably one of the most challenging fields of contemporary knowledge, due to rapid changes in technological development that impact daily life and the way people perceive the risks and benefits of these developments when applied to the human condition. The specific articles from various fields of bioethics are achievements we have already been accustomed to by the author of the volume “Bioethics in crisis or crisis of bioethics? A philosophy of the pandemic in the medicalized society”, prof. Univ. Dr. Antonio Sandu (2020), throughout his distinguished career as a researcher in the field. That is why elaborating a volume dedicated to bioethics in the current context, as a single author, appears as a natural continuation of this research. But the author pushed

this “natural” to a level that brings with it new challenges, assumed by the author precisely because of his maturity in research.

The selection of the topics of discussion addressed in the book was a proof of inspiration, given that the field of bioethics, today, is so complex that a proper selection can be a monumental challenge. The organization of the material was made with an almost didactic coherence, as the author became a guide for the readers, both for the knowledgeable readers, who, at the end of the reading realize that they resized their own vision on a field whose secrets they thought they knew, only to rediscover it in a new and fascinating complexity, as well as for the readers less accustomed to the topics in the book, who discover during the reading the beautiful journey of ideas and paradigms that the author unfolds in front of them, encouraging them to develop their own critical assessment.

The didactic touch was intentionally kept by the author, because each chapter of the book was initially presented as an online academic course, during the state of emergency established as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and later the topics were discussed interactively during the meetings of the Circle of Applied Ethics and Practical Philosophy “Ekpyrosis”, organized by the author within the Center of Applied Ethics of the University “Ștefan cel Mare” from Suceava and LUMEN Research Center in Social and Humanistic Sciences, with the support of the Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences of the University “Ștefan cel Mare” from Suceava, within the Project Ethical Competence and Academic Integrity in Scientific Research and Didactic Act (EIAECSAD). The pre-publication interaction with the readers transformed the volume as it was written, so that the end was a text that captivates by the way it addresses the reader. The feeling is that of a continuous dialogue with the author, of a free dialogue, which incites courageous approaches, innovation and testing limits.

For specialists in the field of bioethics, the way in which the paper was conceived and elaborated (Sandu, 2020), described above, brought the definite benefit of a volume that meets the latest challenges in the field, of a book anchored in a reality concomitant with the act of writing, of an analysis of a phenomenon as it unfolds, and not post factum. The reader encounters numerous references to the date to which the author refers when making certain assertions, and then the author frankly and openly presents to the same reader the change in his own perception as the events of the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. This volume is a new approach of writing bioethics, moving away from the quasi-general discursive tendency that positions the author on a position which transcends actual facts and deals mainly with ideas and principles, but somewhat estranges the author from the reader,

while Antonio Sandu calls upon his reader to become a discussions partner, by actively involving him in the debate, by asking him to imagine, by inciting him to revolt, while offering him the ethical conflict and at the same time the ways to solve it, but without giving him the final answers. In fact, the author courageously assumes his own vision, but does not impose it on the reader, but encourages him to meditate.

This is the philosophical side of bioethics that the volume addresses not only through the topics discussed and the bibliographic sources cited, but also through the way in which philosophical ethics is applied in the reader-author relationship and, from there, transposed into the larger field of bioethics. The author approaches the COVID-19 pandemic both as a distinct research topic, but also as an opportunity to turn a negative experience into a source of inspiration for researchers to resize the status of bioethics as a field of study (between philosophy and science), of the principles of bioethics and their actuality (by questioning their absolutism during crisis situations), of the maturity of the society to correctly understand and perceive the bioethical imperatives in crisis situations (by criticizing the almost pathological medicalized society), of social awareness as a condition of functional communication between decision-making bodies and citizens (discussing citizens' interest in the public agenda - or rather the consequences of the lack of such interest - and frankly and bluntly attacking the issue of infodemia, fake news and conspiracy theories), of spirituality (as the author so aptly calls it, "from a Church made of walls to the Church inside the heart"), of the ethical challenges faced by the medical professions and and by researchers in their race against clock to produce tangible results that might save lives, and of the virtualization of the social space (the book is a real guide to the correct choice of information sources, to detecting the interests behind online campaigns, to maturity and responsibility in interacting with non-presence and avatars in the online environment).

The crisis of bioethics is identified by the author as a real crisis of responsibility, in the context of social isolation, of a somewhat mandatory massive virtualization of social life, of the imperative to act promptly to combat an unprecedented medical crisis, but without having the necessary time for a risk-benefits analysis, substantiated by sufficient empirical data. Responsibility is analyzed from the micro, individual level the way in which the perception and activity of each citizen on bioethical imperatives influences the post-pandemic course), up to the macro level (dealing with the problem of adaptability of state bodies to public scrutiny in crisis situations).

If we add to all this that this volume is the first single author volume published in Romania to address the bioethical aspects involved in the COVID-19 pandemic and one of the first such volumes worldwide, we will be able to better understand the level analysis that Antonio Sandu managed to achieve in record time. The volume definitely represents, both in the field of bioethics, but also in the field of social philosophy and medical sociology, an important landmark for future research both on the social impact of the COVID-19 virus and on the post-pandemic future of bioethics as a science. or as a philosophy?

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