

Fernando Lolas*

Fritz Jahr's Bioethical Imperative as Hybrid Epistemics

When Fritz Jahr proposes to protect life in all its forms, within the possibilities afforded by knowledge and context, he initiates a whole tradition of humanitarian and humanistic thinking, ultimately associated with the word bioethics and its discourse.

The true meaning of Jahr's statement, examined in the light of current bioethics, anticipates its most relevant feature, namely the dialogical character. The dialogue appears not only between persons and groups, but also between conceptions of nature, disciplines, and ultimately meanings of life.

In broad terms, life can be characterized as the subject matter of a variety of scientific disciplines. It can also be understood as a feature unique to certain classes of beings deserving respect and care. These two streams of meaning, the scientific and the moral, are integrated in the bioethical imperative. As a matter of fact, what differentiates bioethics from traditional ethics is precisely its integration between these two discourses in what we have called "hybrid epistemic culture". That means that bioethics is by definition a form of ethics anchored in and respectful of scientific discourses, and not a pure philosophical speculation as well as not pure data analysis or empirical fact.

When Jahr addresses the task of a future bioethical enterprise, we wish to understand his usage of the word *life* in both its scientific and its moral connotations. Both aspects should be taken into consideration, depending upon context and culture.

* Correspondence address: Fernando Lolas, Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics, University of Chile, Diagonal Paraguay 265, of 806, Santiago, Chile. E-mail: ferlolas@gmail.com.

Pure moralizing and pure scientific thinking are unilateral approaches. Bioethics is integration.

We would like to emphasize this dual aspect of Jahr's conception of life incorporated into its now famous imperative: life as moral category and as scientific object of study. The dialogical integration of knowledge and moral is what makes current bioethics a distinctive practice.¹

¹ See more in: Lolas, F. "Bioethics as hybrid epistemic culture: a comment to Agazzi", *Bioethics Update*, 2016/1, pp. 66-71.