



CCNE FACT SHEET « BIOETHICS: VALUES AND CONDITIONS »

Scientific and technological innovations, which are following one another at an increasing pace, are giving rise to great hopes of postponing, or even overcoming, the most disabling and serious diseases. Some developments, such as new techniques for sequencing and modifying the genome, artificial intelligence and the proliferation of health data, are nevertheless raising new questions. We are entitled to ask whether, because of the possible consequences of these developments on the whole of life, all possible applications of research should necessarily and systematically be authorised.

a) What is bioethics?

Clarifying the meaning of research questions, biomedical innovations and their possible uses and consequences is at the heart of bioethical reflection. According to Didier Sicard, Honorary President of the CCNE, "Bioethics is the shaping, on the basis of multidisciplinary research, of a questioning of the conflicts of value raised by techno-scientific development in the field of life". But not only that! "Consent, support at the end of life, access to care, respect for the most vulnerable, etc. are obviously part of it.

Ethical reflection is based on knowledge, in all its diversity and complexity, and takes into account uncertainties and doubts. Nothing is ever set in stone; ethical reflection can be reexamined on a subject, it is a permanent re-interrogation.

Benchmarks

Ethics questions, raises questions and doubts, based on the values that underpin our societies: the guarantee and protection of human dignity, freedom and autonomy, equality and solidarity, tolerance and fraternity, justice and equity, individual and collective responsibilities. Ethics is a deciphering of tensions: for example, those



between autonomy and solidarity, or freedom and fraternity, justice and benevolence...

Answering an ethical question implies articulating these values in order to find the best point of balance when they are in competition. For example, a therapeutic innovation may appear to doctors as a source of freedom and autonomy. But an innovation must be made available to all: if it is expensive or rare, will the principle of equity and equality be respected?

b) Conditions for ethical reflection

-Taking the right amount of time to address complex issues with depth and respect for others. Nevertheless, emergency situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, require a different approach where reactivity - and therefore urgency - becomes paramount

-Identify and formulate the questions posed by scientific advances or societal developments by circumscribing the scope and implications of these questions.

-Try to make the meaning and complexity of an ethical issue intelligible through dialogue between its members and other stakeholders, including civil society.

-Never lose sight of the human dimension in ethical reflection. The notion of progress cannot be approached solely from a scientific or technical perspective as it primarily concerns human beings.

-Be cautious, recognising the limits of knowledge and accepting the resulting doubt.

For more information:

- "La bioéthique pourquoi faire?", Eds PUF, 2013
- "Methods and benchmarks of the CCNE", CCNE document, July 2020, available on this site
- the CCNE Fact Sheet "Reflections and warning points on ethical issues in acute health crises"