

# Public bioethics: a proposal

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## Abstract

### Public bioethics: a proposal

Bioethics is at risk to become an academic discipline unconnected to years of citizenship, which is of particular concern in less developed regions lagging behind due to the impact of globalization, social and economic inequities, scarcity of resources, and lack of public policies to protect suitably people. This article proposes a public bioethics approach to public health problems, medical care, biomedical research, and environmental issues, and safekeeping private sphere by biopolitics colonization. This paper suggests the development of a public bioethics based on four pillars: comprehensive social participation, democratic deliberation, development of protective ethics aimed at empowering citizenship, and structured pragmatism proposal yielding structures and programs targeted to meet community's needs, as well as the empowerment of excluded, channeling these actions through the establishment of strong national bioethics commissions.

**Key words:** Bioethics. Public participation. Social inequity



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Critics of bioethics realized conceptual rigidity, thematic insufficiencies, and perspective narrowness <sup>1</sup>, claiming for the need to revise its fundamentals and to change its perspectives under penalty of seeing it turning into applied ethics lacking social meaning <sup>2,3</sup>. *Los(Bio)ethics principles necessarily fail in providing solution to practical dilemmas, while it is not anymore possible to achieve fictitious consensus...silencing the reasonably moral and debate*<sup>4</sup>. Voices like those of Castoriadis, Maldonado, and others consider that bioethics has diverted in punctual problems intricacies at cost of not attending major conflicts of a humanity submersed in iniquities, marginalization, social and ecological non-adaption <sup>5,6</sup>. These critics suggest that biopolitics provides a more suitable view for the social dimension of bioethical issues, but they do not consider the inherent risks of colonization of private space from a biopolitics that historically has been more destructive than affirmative <sup>7</sup>.

Biopolitics reflections shown in English language-speaking publications that go to the extreme of tolerating and even justifying holy wars and acts of

torture<sup>8</sup>, as well as to celebrate the achievements and social applications of genetics, of the neuroscience, and of nanotechnology<sup>9</sup> despite its inequity potential and depriving neglected diseases<sup>10</sup> of required resources. Ethical surveillance instruments of research with humans like Helsinki Declaration are stripped of normative strength and discredited as irrelevant<sup>11</sup>. The bioethical discipline requires reinforcement and strengthened against these attempts of diverting ethical language, and seeing it replaced by a biopolitical utilitarianism that threatens above all precarious developing countries.

If bioethics understood as reflections on human acts, carried out in freedom and responsibility, in *function of its contribution to harmonic adaptation of human being to its social and natural environment*, the need of a greater compliance of the discipline remains in need, bringing it closer to problems of social relevance and focusing its attention toward less developed world<sup>12,13</sup>.

### **On Latin American bioethics**

From a Latin American perspective, the uncritical evolution of bioethics generates special concern because it hides and justifies damages and ill-practices that marginalized and powerless populations are submitted, on the grounds of a debate monopolized by Developed World academics, which grants scarce space for dissenting voices who try to expose and deliberate on problems and yearns of poorer nations.

There is, certainly, wealthy history of social and political movements that stimulated academic thought of the region, but whose presentation exceeds the limits of current work. Bioethical proposals own to our region, such as the ethics of liberation, the bioethics of protection or bioethics interwoven in human rights, all presented to some extent in the '*Diccionario Latinoamericano de Bioética*' (*Latin American Dictionary of Bioethics*)<sup>14</sup>, did not achieve to enter the international debate.

It is urgent to fulfill the regional task guiding bioethical deliberation in accordance with the autochthonous culture, and pertaining to issues that concern our societies. It is a priority to develop own stance in face of the social evils that afflict our citizenship and cause deep sanitary inequities, which are the cause and consequences of weakness and disempowerment. It is equally unpostponable to reinforce own language in face of our ecological reality, harmed by several factors with historical prevalence – economic dependence, social segmentation in classes, cultural colonization, conservative morality, considering that *interpretation of certain values and norms depend on cultural beliefs, and modifying the level of changes in social circumstances, political and economic, including the availability of resources*<sup>15</sup>.

Immersed in historical vicissitudes, social turmoil, ethnical tensions, as well as economic dependence and bankruptcy, the *region is in permanent seek of a significant ethics to respond promptly to moral*

*conflicts of people and life communities in Latin America* <sup>16</sup>. Biomedical research, technological transfer, knowledge management and mercantilization, professional formation and brain losses, are just few issues that require agreements more than sterile polemics. Latin American bioethics has as task to defend the autochthonous and prepare a armor against every colonizing attempt, including the academic, for which new perspectives must be developed.

To bioethics will not be granted, certainly, an hegemonic role in this social project of existence, nevertheless, it must fulfill its builder's task that contributes to the soundness of the building, in consonance with some attempts to develop a regional ethical discourse. The danger for an applied ethics is to fall into the instrumentalism that characterizes pragmatic bioethics, which provides prima facie principles aiming at creating decisional trees with algorithm features, which arises special interest to approach techno-scientific issues, but attending to socially more relevant issues only marginally, such as sanitary rights, the role of the State in **providing social services, particularly in health sector, the** search for therapeutical agents for endemic diseases, and accessibility to medicines <sup>17,18</sup>.

Socioeconomic inequity characterizes Latin America as shown by its deplorable Gini index, understanding that bioethics gets closer to sociology to recover

relevance in its concern with the reality of our population. Immersion in the social reality is precisely what academic bioethics has not served, having limited itself in the empirical to lighten the origin and validity of ethical yearns and uncertainties of the social practice within biomedical scope <sup>19,20</sup>.

This text intends to introduce in the debate the notion of public bioethics, based in a perspective similar to that developed in the social sciences under the title of *public sociology*. There are few initiatives to develop an applied closer to citizenship as are the community bioethics and that based in common morality, which received attention only marginally. A summary of these initiatives shows how a gap persists to be filled between bioethics as discipline and the fulfillment of its social relevance.

### **Community bioethics and common morality**

Community ethics developed itself in the 20th Century as a response to large migratory currents that, by inserting themselves in societies that shelter them, attempt to assimilate without losing their cultural fitness, avoiding dissolutive assimilation, as well as marginalizing discrimination. Given its focal and local feature, it may not represent the entire civil society as it has a guiding north to safeguard its own idiosyncrasy without harming the governing culture, values and moral <sup>21</sup>.

In its turn, to highlight the relevance of common moral is an ethical proposal that has been understood very diversely. Every human being shares, from its socialization and based in moral disposition<sup>22</sup>, a transcendental ethics understood as necessary condition to begin communication and action<sup>23</sup>. People have some fundamental perspectives, which Ch. Taylor designates as the horizons of meaning, which provide meaning and coherence to its ethical stances<sup>24</sup>. Of ethics, one speaks from a stance, not from a void, and this stance is given through which, from history, tradition, and the circumstances of a society, structures the companionship, the meaning of pertaining and the will of cohesion or change<sup>25</sup>.

This common moral, according some philosophers, is inherent to every human in as much a gregarian, is invariable, and has as basis to maintain the moral principle of not harming<sup>26</sup>. The common moral, for others, is an initial proposal susceptible to be changed because every ethical proposal, as fundamental as it may be, has to undergo justification and compatibilization with other equally valid perspectives<sup>27</sup>. The relationship of common moral, *expressed in specific moral convictions* or intuitions, with ethical theories is analyzed through the *philosophical ethics and, perhaps, particularly by bioethics*<sup>28</sup>. In this sense, principlism changed its approach, adopting the language of the *prima facie* postulate – that may be validly questioned by other postulate – and presented with *pro tanto* feature, that is valid within a given scope and circumstances.

These digressions, as polemic theoretical subjects of the academia, make common moral a *corpus* of precepts invariable for some, contextual and socially constructed for others, opening the door for doubts on what is identified as common really is attaining to yearning of citizenship.

### Public Sociology

M. Burawoy's proposes, in his Presidential Message read before the American Association of Sociology, in 2004, the return toward a public sociology engaged *in turning public issues of our private tribulations*, to be understood as decolonization of the private space and the recovery of its limits in face of the public space<sup>29</sup>. Private concerns transcend social area by seeking recognition and support, yielding public groups around a common interest, as movements like *pro choice and pro life* in relation to abortion, the Alcoholic Anonymous, the association that defend minorities. These groupings lead to a fragile existence, *threatened to be destroyed by the market, colonized by the means, hindrance d by bureaucracy*<sup>30</sup>.

Public sociology presents itself as a complementary way to develop discipline, along with other three more traditional variants: professional sociology, policy sociology, and critical sociology. One tends to differentiate descriptive sociology from the prescriptive, this later distinguished by the philosophical speech for proposing its *normative idealism... within specific contexts*, which avoids

updating a decontextualized and universal descriptive speech<sup>31</sup>. The distinction between sociology for sociologists and public sociology for non-sociologists, although not exempt of criticism<sup>32</sup>, is also comfortably extrapolated to bioethics, in search of a contribution to renews and correct some deficiencies in current bioethical speech, providing a questioning proposed synthetically by the question: to whom does bioethics speak?

### **Sociology and bioethics**

Current literature spreads many bridges between sociology and [bio]ethics. Dew proposes an observation of Durkheim's thought that saw biology as *having as goal its practical effect on medicine and therapeutics...sociology having similar goal in its practical effects on society*<sup>33</sup>. From this, the author sees contemporary public health as replacing religion in the role of organic social solidarity through its concern with social inequities, sanitary behaviors, and populational health perspective that shall influence over social health and disease determinants, inclusively on clinical practice in terms of justice and equity. The evaluation of sanitary impacts presents one of public sociology applications, producing texts where closeness with bioethics is undeniable<sup>34</sup>.

Sociologists interested in the interaction of their discipline with bioethics have stressed the difference between *sociology in bioethics*, which

utilizes the social science to answer bioethical questioning, and *sociology of bioethics* that relies in ethics to *unravel* sociological issues<sup>35</sup>. Sociology collects empirical data on beliefs and values given in society, providing evidences that become part in formation of moral opinions<sup>36</sup>. To make reflections on bioethical issues from a macro-sociological and sociopolitical standpoint has been undertaken by global bioethics, with a speech that remained just as mere proclamation, recognizing itself as impotent to face holistically the circumstances of disadvantaged nations and their many social conflicts<sup>37</sup>. In its turn, nations requesting external aid are concerned in how these programs threaten their autonomy and autochthonous<sup>38,39</sup>.

### **Toward a public bioethics**

Similarly to sociology, it is possible to detect four ways to develop the bioethics discipline: a) The *academic turn around* of bioethics, which yielded criticism both by the recurrent sterility of its speech and by its excessive dedication to issues of scarce social relevance, provoking the suggestion of replacing bioethics by biopolitical perspective; b) The professional bioethics, which adopts an epistemological instrumental stance, including to so-called experts in bioethics requested in advisory to the legislative power, testimonies given in legal suits, participation in committees, and evaluation of programs, documents, or teaching plans; c) Critical bioethics also exercised in academic grounds, where nourishes discussions, for

example, on the validity of several principles in face of neo-fortuitism, or ethical normative that should govern bioethics in research with humans; and d) As an applied ethics, bioethics cannot stop keeping a close contact with real biomedical situations required to be deliberated, and with the necessities and interests of agents and affected when involved research procedures, clinical practices and education in health professions.

These tasks cannot be dealt with in the deductive mode – from above – applying norms elaborated by the theory nor have had general acceptance in using the inductive method of empirical bioethics, which has the risk of falling into the naturalist fallacy by deriving a normative speech from the description of governing moral stances in society. There has been much discussion if bioethics should develop the deductive mode from theory– *top down* – or in inductive way, from the empirical experience and socially governing moral convictions– *bottom up* – <sup>40</sup>. Beauchamp’s proposal is that an applied ethics inevitably will make eclectic use of both paths, exerting what he designates *coherentism*, and which is the most appropriated for a bioethics built from the conjunction of social reality and a moral deliberation.

The task of linking an ethical deliberation the bioethical reflection with a social reality that requires guidance and advisory in decision-making would correspond to the exercise

of what could be designated as *public bioethics*, whose development must be synergetic with the academic, professional, and critical ways mentioned above. In a public ethics, it will be necessary to consider social reality, the values, and institutions of citizenship as empirical data that nourish deliberation, to develop coherent arguments and opinions with relevance and quality about the collected empirical evidence <sup>41</sup>.

#### **Four components for a public bioethics**

A. Sen states, in his writings, that a part that only there can be empowerment of people in the conditions of effective democracy, when the public hand took needed measures to ensure primary goods for all. In his more recent work, where Sen clearly recognizes that presented concept of democracy comes from John Rawls, emphasizes that representative democracy, is defined by the voting and election acts, is *the exercise of the public reason* by free and equal people <sup>42</sup>. Going beyond and recognizing that democracy has diverted into a elites democracy as announced by Schumpeter, one should struggle for participative and deliberative democratic forms.

The proposal to develop a public bioethics relies in four pillars that ensure its conceptual solvency and at the same time point to a strategy for its effective insertion amidst civil society: participation, deliberation, protection, and pragmatism.



## Participation

By rectifying that citizen participation is the kernel of deliberative democracy, it is not possible to forget how the attempts to convene civil society have been difficult, frustrating, and not fruitful. It has been confirmed from several perspectives that, by *having scarce saying in the course of the public affairs, citizenship has lost the interest in the participative instances and in manifesting through vote, preferring alienation of politics, and turning back to private life and personal interests*. Thus, the neoliberal stance is reinforced based in classics like A. Smith and Tocqueville: *well understood, the doctrine of own interest is the best moral theory of our times, such as points Hardin when he quotes Tocqueville in his article* <sup>43</sup>. Citizen's stagnation in private life and the display of professional politics in public space constitute possibly a spontaneous evolution in developed countries, but they are altogether inadequate for people where inequity and disempowerment governs. Real citizen participation and civil society's political strength need to be reinvented, strengthened, and by all means abandoned under the pretext that a genuine democratic participation is difficult to implement <sup>44</sup>.

## Protection

It is important to use two digressions that derive, in their essence, from contemporary French thought, but whose seeds are present already in previous writings by Simone Weil and Hanna Arendt. It is pointed

that human rights speech is not absolutely universal, as it establishes a divergence between those who effectively have claimable rights – who are citizens – and the excluded – who are the marginalized, the expelled, and the -. Secondly, it is indicated that humans are not equal or, better still, they are while constituting a community but no while structured as society. Society requires labor division, the distinction between producing and controlling, the inequity *that arises since labor now is recognized as source of assets and as measure of its value*. Concluding, *[S] equality is the community law, society belongs to inequality* <sup>45</sup>.

If power differences and their popularization are inherent to every social order, it will be sterile to struggle for equality. And it should be sought an ethical way for tolerating power inequalities, requiring that the most powerful to protect the fragile, at least in the path that the later will have to pursue in order to integrate society, and to project his life *and for others inside fair institutions* <sup>46</sup>. Thus, the importance of a protection ethics replacing the unattainable pursuit of an unreal justice <sup>47</sup>.

Justice is a utopian ethical desideratum whose iterative proclamation attempts to hide that in all times, but more accentuated now, inequities are increasingly more notorious and the socioeconomic gaps are deeper, both inside societies and in the global context. The mismatch between the rich and the poor increases, and the possibilities of a State power that

serves equity is increasingly less probable toward citizenship.

considering the governing economic and political globalization. Elster's idea, quoted by Miller, is that *the car of procedural justice should not be put before the horse of the substantive justice* <sup>48</sup>.

Several contemporary philosophers indicate that justice does not mean equality *regarding distribution of economic resources, the important is from a moral perspective is not each has the same, but that each has enough* <sup>49</sup>. The concept of justice remains empty without political strength while not specified and one reflects, even if critically, on equalitarianism, justice in inequality, complex justice.

Based in these uncertainties and discrepancies, the speech of empowerment and social support develops in order to reduce special vulnerabilities – susceptibilities – and to achieve that people develop competences to structure their lives in freedom <sup>50,51</sup>. In view of the difficulties in applying the definition and specifying a principle of justice that could inspire political action, it was suggested to develop a bioethics based in an ethics of protection that proposes empowering the destitute in order to strengthen their presence and management capacity. Allowing them to achieve the exercise of autonomy to which every human being has the right. Autonomy free of social constraints is transcendental for the effective participation in the task of civil society. The empowerment under the guidance of an ethics of protection constitute the most acceptable path to gain participation spaces

## Deliberation

Aristotle describes deliberation as the appropriate rational method for decision-making unpostponable under uncertainty conditions, which has been updated to exercise practical reason as the most suitable way to solve bioethical issues and dilemmas whose feature is having empirical information and axiological propositions. Deliberation in ethics accepts both arguments based in data and events – epistemic elements –, as judgment of values that incorporate opinions and emotions - doxastic elements –.

However, this tolerance of intuitive arguments have gone to extremes of allowing biased stands or based in dogmatic assertions that are not correctable by opposing ideas, the so-called *wisdom of repugnance* or the *reasons of the heart* is an example <sup>52,53</sup>. Arguing with doxastic elements in complete lack of attention of epistemic aspects and formal logic, bioethical argumentation becomes sterile because where there is not contrasting elements by argumentative exchange, one loses the capacity of convincing or to reach agreements. It is necessary to avoid *false popularizations, hasted generalizations, to make naturalist fallacies since, despite presenting our argumentation as objective, it must be based in previous opinions, indoctrinated values and cultural presumptions...which could reinforce our prejudices by justifying them as substitute of reasons instead of developing a sound*



*Argumentation, valid and consistent regarding involved moral values*<sup>54</sup>. It is necessary, in order to bioethical deliberation be representative of social years and rationally convincing, to submit it to certain validation criteria own of a logic applied to ethics – that differs it from analytical logic<sup>55</sup> –, to develop sound arguments – coherent, proportioned, specific – but refutable and correctable<sup>56</sup>.

Bioethics has two fundamental tasks in public reasoning: a) to place in citizen agenda topics from the private space that attain to the world of people's life, which are been threatened by biopolitical violations of the personal and intimate space of people; b) to advise on the appropriate use of practical reasoning in order to deliberation respect the public non-interference in the private realm, the plural validation of diversity, the respect of and by people, including the non-maleficence mandate in respect to the other, and related with the common good. All this should happen with equity in the exercise of autonomy and in accessing the primary goods needed to develop each individual's life project. B. Brecht had said it already, bread proceeds moral and, in the present, equitable provision of primary goods has to be assured at time of bioethical deliberation, a mandate in which protection seems more realistic than an utopia of justice.

The ultimate end of deliberation is to strengthen citizenship participation in the elaboration of public policies that are not

subordinated to the sovereign power, but aimed at fomenting the common good share by all.

### **Pragmatism**

Pragmatism, as the fourth element of a public bioethics, stands out while a path to reach community agreements necessary for the fluidity and ethnicity of the social functioning<sup>57</sup>.

Crucial conviction of pragmatism is that agreements require flexible, modifiable postures and, therefore, free of unmovable convictions and absolute principles<sup>58</sup>, but a floating pragmatism should be avoided, short of principles and of all conceptual specificity. It is necessary to request a *structured pragmatism*, based in common moral and from where it is possible to deliberate also in structure way those issues that concern the community and that require clarification in their unknown factors and advised in their indecisions<sup>18</sup>.

Public bioethics contribution to parity participation of citizenship in the decisions that ordain and structure its society bases in education and in extension. Bioethics shall be incorporated and spread in communication media and proclamation scenarios in search for shelter in the political world, the legislative, in working benches, focal groups, associations and diverse nature civil movements: programs against family violence, associations of the sick, of the disabled, of the excluded due to ethnical reasons. In the educational, bioethics should be brought

down from the academic Olympus to seek its insertion in the most primary levels of education: schools, capacity building programs, education of multipliers as are teachers, social workers, and managers. Concrete initiatives are needed to introduce bioethics as school assignment and to establish a basic curriculum in professional training. It means institutionalizing bioethics teaching and to draw programs of pedagogical action at the several levels of citizenship formation.

### **Objectives of the National Bioethics Commissions (NBC)**

The pragmatic requirement of disciplinary appropriateness, conceptual flexibility, historical coherence, and social contingency are difficult to achieve through the political and social structures and institutions, currently governing in our western societies. In an opinion about the political scenery in Chile, but likely valid for other Latin American nations, one points that *looked from institutions' perspective, what happens is that political parties are not capable today to comply fully with their traditional role of articulating and aggregating social demands and represent them in the Parliament and before the Government...Perhaps the first step in this direction is the establishment of pre-legislative advisory commissions or pre-formation of governmental initiatives with participation of all affected sectors or stakeholders in the respective topic, of politicians from diverse tendencies, delegations, and domestic and international experts that enjoy needed status and*

*accreditation. The moment may come when mechanism of this type are explicitly considered in the institutional* <sup>59</sup>.

The first Advisory Commissions to the President regarding bioethical issues were created in 1974 in the US with *ad hoc* feature and a specific agenda. These Commissions have been diversely evaluated from pioneers to obscurantists and reason for polemic if they fulfill their role of being a open forum at the service of a public bioethics <sup>60</sup>. These controversies, and the strong politicization attributed to them, have prevented that Presidential Commissions to constitute a stable institution for bioethics deliberation.

France was the first nation that understood the need of a permanent instance to develop a relevant and sound bioethical speech, inspired in rational deliberation, plural, socially outreaching, and capable to develop an advisory disciplinarily sound, when it created the National Bioethics Advisory Committee, which acted as model for the establishment of the National Bioethics Commissions in over one hundred nations, and the functioning of Unesco Assisting Bioethics Commissions (ABC). The importance and actuality of the topic reflects in 'Ethically speaking', a periodical publication of the European Commission that *provides information about the activities of the National Bioethics Commissions* <sup>61</sup>.

The NBC, by articulating the interaction of society with the public power that pays attention to its needs and worries, shall be

understood as the assurance of the ethical and democratic participative *desideratum* according to which *legitimacy* will proceed to *legality*. Comprised by a sufficient number of members to ensure its multi-cultural and plurality, NBCs work as a double funnel, open in one side toward civil society, and in the other to the State. The double front features of a NBC has been characterized as its function of expertise in one hand, and its task of setting a deliberation agenda (*agenda-setting*) in the other. In the relationship between the Commission and civil society should prime education, consultation, and the debate. The outcome of participative deliberation allows the NBCs to study and design of clarifying documents that advise the formulation of public policies targeted to foment the common good aimed at citizens' empowerment and emancipation. The French NBC model, without designating itself as such, works as a public bioethics instance that may be example for nations where the deliberative feature of their democracy is still too fragile and where bioethics is exerted in large measure from principalists and doctrinaires convictions.

growing tension of double nature: colonization of the emancipating communicative reason, and the domination of private space by the public sphere <sup>62</sup>. Macro-political forces such as globalization, the entrepreneurial trans-nationalization, market hegemony, and debilitation of the national States are leading to where large populational sectors live in insecurity, uncertainty, and non-protection <sup>63</sup>.

Medical care, public health, ecology, and scientific policies issues are primary concerns of bioethics that should leave the self-referencing shelter of academia. The proposal to develop a sound public bioethics which, in analogy to public sociology, assist priory issues that interest and affect civil society, does not mean not attending rigorous academic reflection over those issues that required finish knowledge and normative accuracy: regulation of research and management of Committees, programming of minimum curricula both school, undergraduate, and for working professionals, designing of specific arguments for health policies and programs, or to purify the market of medicine. This institutional bioethics should keep alert and turn to its original inspiration of been a bioethics for pertinent agendas of public policies.

### **Final considerations**

Bioethics vertiginous development has produced a hypertrophy of its academic features and a distancing from issues of the world of life that really concern citizens affected by a

## Resumen

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### Bioética pública: una propuesta

La bioética se encuentra en riesgo de volverse una disciplina académica desligada de las inquietudes de la ciudadanía, lo cual es especialmente preocupante en regiones de desarrollo atrasado, por el impacto de la globalización, las inequidades socioeconómicas, la escasez de recursos, y la falta de políticas públicas que protejan adecuadamente a la población. Este artículo propone una bioética pública que aborde los problemas de salud pública, atención médica, investigación biomédica, ecología y resguardo del espacio privado de su colonización por la biopolítica. Se sugiere entroncar la bioética pública en 4 pilares: participación social amplia, deliberación democrática, desarrollo de una ética de protección que se proponga empoderar a la ciudadanía, y la propuesta de un pragmatismo estructurado que genere instancias y programas destinados a enfrentar las necesidades de la comunidad y a fomentar el empoderamiento de marginados y desposeídos, canalizando estas acciones a través de la creación de robustas Comisiones Nacionales de Bioética.

**Palabras-clave:** Bioética. Participación comunitaria. Inequidad social.

## Resumo

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### Bioética pública: uma proposta

A bioética está em risco de tornar-se uma disciplina acadêmica desligada das inquietudes da cidadania, o que é especialmente preocupante nas regiões de desenvolvimento atrasado pelo impacto da globalização, nas iniquidades socioeconômicas, escassez de recursos e falta de políticas públicas que protejam adequadamente a população. Este artigo propõe uma bioética pública que aborde os problemas de saúde pública, atenção médica, pesquisa biomédica, ecologia e resguardo do espaço privado pela colonização biopolítica. Sugere-se embasar a bioética pública em quatro pilares: participação social ampla; deliberação democrática; desenvolvimento de uma ética de proteção que se proponha a empoderar a cidadania; e a proposta de um pragmatismo estruturado, que gere instâncias e programas destinados a enfrentar as necessidades da comunidade bem como fomentar o empoderamento dos excluídos, canalizando essas ações mediante a criação de comissões nacionais de bioética fortes.

**Palavras-chave:** Bioética. Participação comunitária. Iniquidade social.

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