

# Editorial

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In the last three years, the word “ethics” has taken centre stage in Brazilian national life. Proffered in diverse scenarios, it is the slogan of the crowd in the streets, social movements, debates promoted by the media and judicial decisions, including those of the highest courts of the country. All these players have referred constantly to this idea, demonstrating its growing importance in the symbolic perspective of Brazilians.

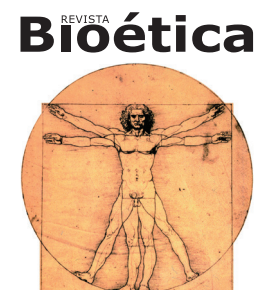
The growing use of the term seems to indicate the renewed importance that the notion gained in the social imagery. Could it be said that previously Brazilians could do without ethics, that they did not value it in social interrelations? Not at all. What has begun to change in the concept of ethics in our society are the values that underpin social morality.

As indicated by sociological literature that has shaped the description of the national character throughout the twentieth century<sup>1-6</sup>, Brazilians would have trouble grasping values related to modernity and the urban environment, those behaviours that emphasize legal regulation and its egalitarian logic, preferring to keep the relational dimension, of affections and cronyism, which mark out not only the living standards in the family circle, but also relationships in public spaces. The description of the national character underpinned by the intimacy generated in the interrelations of the primary groups<sup>3</sup>, in the morality of personal contact, reveals the relational pattern that traditionally directs the ethical norms of society, accustomed to maintaining a hierarchy of identitarian privileges (class, gender and ethnicity) and points out the reasons for the difficulty of Brazilians to experience other values in which to base modern relationships, specifically egalitarianism.

Therefore, the phenomenon that we witness now does not denote the elevation of ethics into the social imagery, but it refers to a slow and gradual change in values that support hegemonic morality, redefining the limits of what society considers ethical: one begins to require behaviour in the public sphere, of the institutions and their representatives, to be guided by egalitarian standards, which begin to take shape as basic values of social morality by allowing the most vulnerable to gain citizenship. Thus, it can be said, with relative certainty, that it is not that society is becoming more or less ethical, but that what is defined as ethics is changing, and turning to inclusive processes and values, which are committed to dignity and citizenship for all human beings.

Although, at this time, it may be difficult to see reason to celebrate this social clamour for ethics, as it reflects a situation that shows a lack of ethics in dealing with public affairs, one cannot fail to record and celebrate the very existence of this process, that seems to indicate the slow awakening of the notion of human rights. This process does not fail to bring comfort in face of the diagnosis of the unfailing inability of Brazilians to act according to an egalitarian morality, an omen that has been oppressing the national self-image for over a century.

When removing the focus from the immediate reason for the public outcry, and thinking only of the very existence of these protests, it is possible to believe that there is reason – yes – to welcome (even if tentatively the arrival of new times: the emergence of a social consciousness that challenges the canons of traditional



Brazilian morality. It is possible – perhaps – to begin to rejoice (albeit sparingly) to intuit that we are immersed in the genesis of a process of transition and a social boiling point: the emergence of values associated with this new morality that, focusing on humanity, conceives the individual, recognizing them as the holder of rights in the social contract<sup>7</sup>. That contract would then be the tacit agreement by which the *sovereignty of society, the political sovereignty of the collective will, prevails*<sup>8</sup>.

The recognition of citizenship rights rests on the notion of human rights. It is the egalitarian notion of these rights that articulate the protests in the in Brazilian street, that have aimed to ensure access to education, secure housing and public transport, that call for social justice, gender equality, respect for sexual diversity and the end of corruption. That is, they manifest the population's acknowledgment of a morality that has begun to dissociate itself from the pattern that traditionally guided, ranked and discriminated interrelationships

If, currently, one cannot predict the course of the events arising from the requirements of this new morality, which can both lead to emancipation and autonomy or degenerate into ruin and barbarism, it is important to record the mere existence of this call for ethics that appears in citizens and institutions more like an epidemic than the result of a deliberate plan society. One can even imagine that it results much more from the contact between people with diverse morals, which is currently allowed by the technological support of the media, than by any government or private initiative aimed to promote and socially provide this awareness through access to health and education.

It is clear, however, that simply increasing communication does not ensure a change of morality that is able to increase access to quality of life for more people. As Eco stated regarding the use of the internet, the “*village idiot*”<sup>9</sup> amplifies, through the network, their ideas, which reverberate worldwide, globalizing information. Sometimes, when distorting truths or interpreting it in a clumsy way, these communications generate tragedies, stimulating collective fear and resentment that promote lynchings, which are justified as mechanisms of “popular justice.”

But if the network amplifies these perverse communication, it can also stimulate the dissemination of values linked to the construction of citizenship and human dignity. This is the case of the values associated with human rights, notions of equality, fairness and respect for human life, which have been widespread, capturing the imagination and the behaviour of social groups and populations that, until very recently, considered the asymmetry and injustice inherent to the social order. Considering that it has been only 70 years since the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*<sup>10</sup> was proclaimed, and only 30 years that the Federal Constitution was enacted in Brazil<sup>11</sup>, one can understand the proportion, meaning and significance of the transformation that is being observed today in our society.

So, even not counting on institutional projects to build citizenship through relevant, consistent and sustained education and public health policies, it seems that Brazilian society is managing to emerge from the behaviour that naturalized inequality imposed by its two historical roots and to envision a moral standard that is more focused on equality, on the inclusion of all in society. We begin to realize the ruin imposed on indigenous peoples and the barbarity of slavery and, at least in part, this is due to our increased contact with the world and with information about human rights.

And it is exactly in the spirit of this new morality, in the expectation for a just society, a responsible and transparent government, an end to corruption which has been institutionalized by the “*brazilian way*”<sup>3-4</sup>, and the implementation of constitutional guarantees, that one can understand the importance of documents such

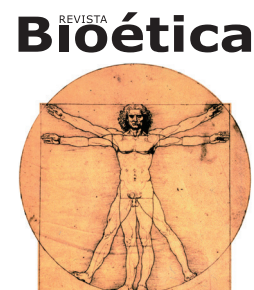
as the note released on the 23<sup>th</sup> February by many research and education institutions, providers of public health and health education services in response to the cut in the budget of the Unified Health System (SUS)<sup>12</sup>. Highlighting that the cut imposed on the sector a loss of *approximately R\$10 billion in 2016*, the document also referred to the increase in population and reduced access to private health care, as a result of the closure of jobs, and considers that these factors mean that the reduction in resources provided is, in practice, even higher.

Underlining the difficult current epidemiological situation, marked by the increasing spread of contagious infectious diseases such as dengue, zika and chikungunya (which can be attributed to lack of government investment over decades), the document manifestly contradicts the presidential vetoing of paragraph 8 of article 38 of the Federal Government Budget Guidelines Law, *which ensured that there would not be any loss to SUS funding in the transition from the minimum federal spending in health rule of Constitutional Amendment no. 29/2000 to the new level given by Amendment no. 86/2015 - because the new limit should not be less than the amount resulting from the application of the previous rule*<sup>12-15</sup>. This veto will incur adverse consequences, direct and indirect, for the health of the population, contradicting also the inherent participative management character of SUS. Therefore, the note from the institutions lists the *“five good reasons”* for the overthrow of the veto by the legislative.

Considering that this document exemplifies the proposal of Brazilian bioethics to promote a reflection on health in the social dimension without losing sight of its correlation with the individual perspective of attention, we reproduce the full text at the end of this issue, informing that it was signed by, among others, the Brazilian Public Health Association (ABRASCO), the Brazilian Society of Bioethics (SBB) and the Federal Council of Medicine (CFM). We believe it will be an important topic for reflection by our readers, who are already accustomed to the fundamental role of ethics in everyday social interrelations. Good reading!

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