



## Fostering the art of convergence in global bioethics

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He teaches in the international Master in Bioethics (in Spanish). He is also the academic director and professor at the Master in Global Bioethics Online, where he teaches the course “Bioethics and Biolaw”, a 60 ETCS program co-organized by *Universidad Anahuac México* and the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights. He also lectures at the Masterclass in Bioethics at *Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum*, at the Diploma in Neurobioethics organized by *Anahuac University Mexico* and at the Diploma in Biolaw and Human Rights organized by the *Institute of Legal Sciences of Puebla, Mexico*.

He is a member of the ‘Group of Study in Neurobioethics’, the ‘Group of Study in Bioethics, Multiculturalism and Religion’ and the ‘Group of Study in Bioethics and Human Rights’ promoted by the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Human Rights. He is also a co-

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### LEADERS IN ETHICS EDUCATION

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leader of the ‘Working Group on Law and Technology under the auspices of the Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development’ at the World Bank. Furthermore, he is a researcher of the Human Rights Institute at *Universidad Complutense* of Madrid.

Currently, García Gómez is involved in three EU projects: CivicAL (Civic Dimensions for Social Inclusion), EUcom4U (European Union: common past, present and future for you) and the Horizon 2020 project i-CONSENT (Improving the guidelines of informed consent, including vulnerable populations, under a gender perspective). He also participated in EDUBIOETHICS (for the improvement of the existing educational programs on bioethics between 11 international university teams by providing a multicultural, multidisciplinary and multi-religious approach) and in EUROSOL (Solidarity in Times of Crisis).

Alberto García Gómez has been a member of the following Ethical Advisory Boards: ITERA (International Tissue Engineering Research Association), Life-Sciences Network, Cryo-Save and EU Projects CASCADE and REBORNE (within the 7th EU Framework Program). Awarded by COEBIO for his contribution to bioethics and human rights at the international level, he received in 2014 the “Otto Meyerhoff Award” for his outstanding achievements and innovations in the field of human rights and bioethics.

For five years, García Gómez served as a member of the Steering Committee of Bioethics in the Council of Europe and was appointed as an expert representative by the Ministry of Justice of the Government of the Kingdom of Spain. In 2005, he was honored with the National Prize of the Spanish Royal Academy of Doctors in legal and social sciences.

## **You are one of the leaders in global bioethics. Why did you become interested in this area of ethics?**

After graduating in Law, I lived for many years in Mexico City (1986–1996). There I worked as a school administrator and started teaching at the *Universidad Anáhuac México* Law School. In this university, I knew that there was a Faculty of Bioethics. It was a strange thing to me, and I did not really know what bioethics was, and I had never heard of the existence of a faculty in that area. During those years, I took the courses of my doctorate in Law at this university, in a joint doctoral program with the *Universidad Complutense* of Madrid. During the two years of the program that I made compatible with my work in administration, I had the opportunity to learn more about this Faculty of Bioethics, but it did not attract my attention.

Years later, I moved to Rome (1996) to work on administrative issues that I tried to reconcile with some studies at the Bachelor of Philosophy at the *Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum*. It turns out that this university, which is part of the same network of universities (RIU), also had a Bioethics Faculty. I was surprised, and it caught my attention. During these years, the law studies that I had done years ago gained a special light with the study of philosophy. It was then that I began to understand how bioethical issues required an interdisciplinary background where scientific, technological and medical aspects are analyzed through the light of anthropology and philosophical ethics and which in turn also require study in the light of Law and particularly of human rights.

In 2001 I moved to Madrid to write my doctoral thesis and it was then that the option of researching the ethical and legal aspects of some important issue of bioethics matured in me. At that time, one of those topics was human cloning. And so, it was that I got down to work to investigate this question, which I dedicated myself to for four years. As I did not have scientific and medical knowledge, I enrolled in a doctoral program in biolaw, which was organized by the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Biolaw in Madrid. And to cover the expenses of the classes, the founder and director Dr. María Dolores Vila-Coro offered me to work with her part-time. During that period, I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Mónica López Barahona who, together with Dr. Vila-Coro, represented Spain in the Council of Europe for issues related to bioethics. She asked me for help in reviewing and analyzing the preparatory documents for the meetings that later took place in Strasbourg. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to get acquainted with the issues and the functioning of this international organization and to be very up-to-date on bioethical issues in Europe.

And it happened that, since Dr. Vila-Coro was unable to participate in one of those sessions of the “Steering Committee in Bioethics of the Council of Europe” – which are held twice a year – she thought that I could replace her. I was scared initially because I did not consider myself prepared, so I told her so. However, she placed her trust in me and made the arrangements with the Ministry of Justice of Spain so that I would take her place in those meetings. Without a doubt, it was a wonderful experience that I later had the opportunity to enrich myself since I continued to fulfill this mission for five years. It was possibly during those years that I delved further into the significance and importance of human rights in bioethical issues.

When I moved to Rome 12 years ago to work full time at the Faculty of Bioethics, its existence no longer seemed a surprise or a rarity. On the contrary, it was a stimulus for my decision to move to Rome. Regnum Christi, which is the promoting organization of the network of universities (RIU) – and of which the religious congregation of the Legionaries of Christ is a part – had given me proof that it was not a strange idea to study and teach bioethics as a profession and dedicate a faculty to this type of studies. Upon my arrival in Rome, I began to teach at the Faculty of Bioethics. It is quite a challenge to learn and speak Italian, although I had already learned it during my previous philosophy studies. But teaching in Italian was another fascinating challenge.

At the same time, I wanted to give continuity, in some way, to the work and the experience that I had acquired in the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Biolaw (from Dr. Vila-Coro), so I took on the task of preparing and presenting a project in order to establish a new UNESCO Chair in the two universities of the RIU network that have their headquarters in Rome: the *Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum* and the *Università Europea di Roma*. After several vicissitudes and obstacles, since it was an audacious and innovative initiative to link these two universities in some way with an international organization such as UNESCO, we submitted the proposal. Throughout this period, we counted on the advice and support of Prof. Henk ten Have (then director of the Division of Ethics of Science and Technology at UNESCO) in Paris. After a while it was happily concluded with the signing of the “Agreement” between the Director General of the UNESCO and our two rectors. It was July 7, 2006, the feast of San Fermin.

Living in Rome, I have studied more in-depth the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. It has been a great help to guide my teaching and research in bioethics from a more social and less individualistic perspective. The Church's view keeps the person at the center, but always considers communities and peoples. This social, multicultural and universal dimension has seemed to me to be very well articulated in the social thought of the Church. I believe that it can greatly enrich the thinking and actions oriented towards sustainable development, as one of the great needs and priorities of the planet, with special attention to weak and vulnerable people and communities. That is why I believe that global bioethics can and must make a significant contribution to the development of peoples.

### **Who were the teachers who have inspired you to choose a professional career in bioethics? What have they learned you?**

The names of some very loved and admired people come to my mind. Some of them are already mentioned above. I'll mention below in the chronological order in which they appeared in my life and, after mentioning the institutional affiliation they had in the moment I met them, I highlight the lessons that I have learned from them:

César Miñambres Puig (professor at the Faculty of Law at the *Universidad Complutense*, Madrid): his deep university vocation and passion for excellence in education and research. He motivated me and helped me to discern about devoting my life to academia.

María Dolores Vila-Coro (chairholder of the *UNESCO Chair in Bioethics and Biolaw* Madrid): her sagacity and ability to engage in political life striving in favor of the defense of life and values.

José Miguel Serrano (professor of the Faculty of Law at the *Universidad Complutense*, Madrid): his acute vision of bioethical issues from the perspective of human rights. He was my thesis supervisor and my master.

Mónica López Barahona (director of the faculty of biotechnological sciences of the *Universidad Francisco de Vitoria*, Madrid): her insight and competence in scientific matters and her deep commitment to enlighten and influence political life and get into dialogue and debate in the bioethical arena.

Henk ten Have (Director of the Division of Ethics of Science and Technology at UNESCO, Paris): his temperance and capacity for dialogue in the international environment and his aptitude to build consensus without slipping into an easy relativism.

Gonzalo Miranda (dean of the Bioethics Faculty of the *Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum*, Rome): his agile and deep communication skills and his teaching capacity with depth and straightforwardness.

Martha Tarasco (professor and researcher at the *Universidad Anáhuac México*): her capacity for work and availability to collaborate in initiatives to promote personalistic bioethics and human values.

Laura Palazzani (professor at the LUMSA University, Rome): her enormous capacity for work and her lucidity and clarity to analyze bioethical questions with simplicity and profundity.

## **What is your view of the current status of bioethics teaching?**

Undoubtedly, bioethics today has become and continues to become increasingly important within the educational context, but also in public debate and political choices. This relevance is due to multiple factors that contributed to making it a strong point in obtaining methodological and epistemological tools, guiding ethical judgment on the challenges related to life and health sciences.

Thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, open to pluralism, the discipline of bioethics can well adapt to places of dialogue, confrontation and operation, sometimes located in very different contexts. As a result, bioethics' applicative and transversal nature attracts students because they can benefit from their education in innovative contexts, as in the case of emerging and converging technologies.

Although it is easy to see the growth of bioethical studies, it is necessary to emphasize the need to increase investments in this educational field: the specificity and complexity of bioethics require targeted programs that guide the development of skills and competences useful for the training of independent professionals, capable of moral integrity and critical thinking. Fundamental to achieve these goals is to assume a global perspective (we often speak of "global bioethics"), which has the advantage of being able to identify the overall scope of the impact of bioethical issues and to seek greater cooperation. The massive predominance of Principlism within the academic paths makes it difficult to set up a global perspective. The lack of a robust anthropology of reference and a hierarchy among the principles proposed is also a challenge.

## **How do you assess the development of ethics education over the past decades in your area of work?**

Especially in the last decades, there has been a shift from a clinical approach to wider bioethics, summoned within fields very marginal at the beginning, if compared to the typical circuit of interest of the educational programs in bioethics (e.g., think about computer sciences and neurosciences; or public health related to ecological and climate problems, etc.). Clearly, the educational itineraries focused on ethics applied to clinical cases, experimentation and medical practice still play a central role in bioethics education, but this has been complemented by new fields of study. On the one hand, the latter extends the area of incidence of bioethics and, on the other, require more specializations within the discipline itself with complex, rapidly evolving technical skills.

The most urgent problem, which emerged in connection with the aforementioned change, is the weakening of bioethical advisory bodies within health care facilities, as well as in preparation for the medical profession. It is necessary to point out this phenomenon, we could say, of countertrend concerning the development of bioethics, because if ignored, it would prove to be a severe and harmful gap in the long term.

What would be defined as a retrospective advancement of contemporary bioethics (i.e. keeping an eye to its origins as it continues on its path towards the future) takes inspiration both from the concerns raised by the "ecological" movements that helped to stimulate the danger perceived by Van Potter when he publicly baptized bioethics and from the task of taking charge of the survival of the human species by protecting man

from the dangers of an unlimited power directed against himself and the common good. In other words, today we live again a reminder of the birth of bioethics.

### **What are the challenges for developing ethics education across the world?**

Although it is a time of globalization and interconnection, it remains difficult to bridge the gap in order to reach the global perspective that the interest of bioethics assumes. This challenge is not infrequently exacerbated by the absence of educational programs focused on ethical training in developing countries. This problem fuels the inequalities between those who cannot and those who can, to the detriment of both: the former because they are prevented from accessing forms of knowledge from which they could draw unquestionable local benefits and on which they could make valuable contributions; the latter because they remain in a partial rather than global comparison, lacking opportunities for research and exchange. Taking note of this implies the identification of some decisive strategies, among which there is certainly that of supporting and encouraging ethical and anthropological training, where it is lacking or absent, through online programs, facilitating direct participation. It could act as an incentive for other structured training projects in person.

Another contemporary challenge is that of making people understand the importance of ethics in the various social dimensions. This challenge has two opposing nuances: one is to make institutions and cultures aware of what the study of ethics is, its role in the community, and why its influence must be an indispensable prerogative for a civil society that is attentive to fundamental human rights and that lends itself to legislate around them; the second is to protect the assets safeguarded by bioethics from the interference of politicization, which sometimes decays in forms of biopolitics.

Both nuances require, in turn, to counter the third, probably greatest, challenge of our time, which is relativism, absolutized to the point of preventing us from speaking unambiguously and without compromise of the value of the person. Because of relativism, together with the phenomenon of secularization, the common language that allowed us to speak with one voice about human nature has disappeared. The result is a strong pragmatism in the bioethical approach, committed to dialogue but lacking on the anthropological level. This challenge undermines the fruitfulness of ethical education in its social impact.

### **What are the differences in ethics education between developed and developing countries?**

The experience gained over the years of teaching in international contexts (due to collaborations between universities in different countries; meeting students worldwide; working in international institutions) allowed me to consolidate some convictions on the most critical issues found between developed and underdeveloped areas.

First of all, the skills and level of training: often, in fact, there are experts, professionals, highly talented minds whose importance struggles to emerge because the quality of training between more or less developed countries is not equally

standardized. The need to increase the number and level of professionals and teachers is present in both cases but is accentuated in certain contexts.

Working on this divide is also essential to overcome a second dimension that I must propose: the inter-religious approach. It is necessary to create opportunities for comparison between different cultures and traditions within the research sites, from the world religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Through exchange and interaction, perspectives are multiplied, mutually enriching the various realities' cultural heritage and intellectual structures. Above all, new forms of attention and care are experimented with ethical dilemmas that were at first unknown, underestimated or misunderstood, due to the lack of inter-religious and intercultural exchange. Every ethical and bioethical dilemma refers to a moral structure (model), perhaps often homogeneous and shared, but the ways in which the same problem can be found in different cultural, religious, economic, social realities makes it extremely heterogeneous. This does not mean relativizing or trivializing, but rather making the fundamental moral principles defended concretely universal.

Seeking to foster integration and exchange is a strategy for working in the perspective of the integral human ecology proposed by Pope Francis, in continuity with the Social Doctrine of the Church. This perspective appeals to a moral and spiritual crisis of global scope where everyone is equally called upon as a human being, guardian of himself and the other.

Intensifying, then, interaction is a way to nourish another critical theme, which is the correlation between aesthetics and ethics; that is, how morally beautiful behavior is a vehicle for change. The transformative power of "moral beauty" – underestimated in Western culture, for example, if compared to Eastern culture – is a means to raise awareness of how ethics is a constant in daily life and how it passes through the testimony produced by the actions taken.

## **You are director of the UNESCO chair in bioethics and human rights. Can you tell us about the activities of this chair?**

Established in 2009 at the *Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum* and the *Università Europea di Roma*, the Chair seeks to create a forum for diverse leaders of bioethical thought. We work together in a spirit of respect and friendship, seeking to offer a common framework to guide the application of bioethical principles in the light of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. In this way, we can inform and enlighten ethical, legal and public opinions, decisions and actions related to medicine, life sciences, human rights and responsibilities.

Our privileged UNITWIN partners are *Universidade Agostinho Neto* (Angola) and *Universidad Anáhuac* (México).

The main areas of interest and groups of research of our UNESCO Chair are the following:

- 1) Bioethics, Multiculturalism and Religions: to provide a forum in which representatives of diverse religions and traditions can: engage one another in a sustained scholarly dialogue about global bioethics; cultivate an amicable atmosphere so participants can learn about each other's tradition or religion with discursive

- empathy; promote mutual understanding of global bioethics through respectful discussion and scholarship; strive to develop the linguistic and conceptual space in which common ground or convergence can emerge and be mutually recognized and appreciated; and finally, foster creative cooperation while respecting the dignity and uniqueness of each tradition. Seven international conferences and workshops on “Bioethics, Multiculturalism and Religion” have been held in Jerusalem (2009), Rome (2011), Hong Kong (2013), Mexico City (2014), Houston (2016), Rome (2018), Casablanca (2019). These academic conferences sought to foster the art of convergence and cooperation in global ethics among experts in bioethics coming from the world religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.
- 2) Neurobioethics: to address the new ethical questions raised by modern neuroscience and their social and legal implications, on the basis of an in-depth and critical analysis of their scientific basis. The issues that have been tackled lately have to do with the anthropological, ethical and biopolitical implications of robotics and artificial intelligence. For two years we have been offering a master’s class on this subject that has aroused much interest,
  - 3) Bioethics Global Art: to study the relation and interaction between bioethics and art and the impact of art in human behavior; evaluate the impact of the transformative power of arts in research and medical ethics as well as in environmental ethics; to bridge the gap between academics involved and working in bioethics and the art world by carrying research activities and publications. This group of study intends to contribute to inspire art lovers to appreciate the universal language of arts expressing moral values, ethical principles in respect of human dignity and human rights in a diverse and globalized world, evaluate and disseminate the transformative power of arts in bioethics and its influence culture, stimulate academic communities on the importance and role of the arts and its precious contribution in education and training people in bioethics.
  - 4) Dignity and equity in women’s health issues: to acknowledge there is a special women genius that has an important social and cultural contribution to society and that fundamental equality of all human beings in dignity and rights is to be respected so that women are treated justly and equitably, especially in developing countries; to promote accessibility and non-discrimination of women in the areas of education and participation in the workforce, especially in the fields of science and technology, while acknowledging the delicate balance between the roles of work, family and maternity; we seek to engage in non-polemic bioethical reflection on the integral development of women in health issues especially in the areas of sexuality, reproductive and procreative health.
  - 5) Bioethics and Human Ecology: to address the different pressing environmental concerns, safeguarding the centrality of the human person and his or her dignity. This does not mean unbridled anthropocentrism and unlimited exploitation of natural resources. While it is true that humans are partly responsible for many wounds inflicted on the environment, it is also true that they can be the solution to these problems.

Among the academic programs, the UNESCO Chair, in collaboration with *Universidad Anáhuac México*, established the inter-university and international Master in Global

Bioethics Online. The program's main goal is to train future university professors, health care professionals, biomedical researchers, social and political agents with high academic knowledge and skills in bioethics. The program also provides an integral formation in global bioethics, allowing participants to develop their professional activity, both in the private and public sphere, with social responsibility and grounded in person-centered approach. Overall, students should possess a disposition for an interdisciplinary investigation that integrates scientific, philosophical, juridical and medical approaches to investigate the main bioethical challenges facing contemporary society and learning capacity to teach bioethics in the future at the university level. A similar Master's degree, *Maestría de Bioética en línea*, is also offered in Spanish.

In addition, the Chair co-organizes every year the Summer Course in Bioethics, the Master Class in Neurobioethics and supports Diplomado en Biojurídica y Derechos Humanos, promoted by the Instituto de Ciencias Jurídicas de Puebla.

Furthermore, the Chair has been working in several projects funded by the European Union such as: *EUROSOL*, *i-CONSENT*, *CivicAL*, and *EUcom4U*.

- a) The European Citizens for Solidarity project (*EUROSOL*), co-funded by the Europe for Citizens programme, brings together partners from eight EU Member States to promote the solidarity of European citizens in this period of the refugee crisis. We organize the public to discuss EU resolutions related to the refugee crisis and propose new strategies and actions to address the urgent issues of the day: promoting intercultural dialogue, combating the stigmatization of migrants and fostering tolerance and empathy.
- b) *i-CONSENT* project (Improving the guidelines for Informed Consent, including vulnerable populations, under a gender perspective), co-funded by Horizon 2020 programme, aims at improving guidelines for informed consent, including vulnerable populations, from a gender perspective. The main objective of the project is to develop guidelines on how to present informed consent to citizens and facilitate citizens' participation in research. The UNESCO Chair explored and analyzed the basic knowledge of informed consent from a multicultural and interreligious perspective.
- c) Civic Dimensions for Social Inclusion (*CivicAL*) project, co-funded by the Erasmus + programme, is coordinated by the Altius Francisco de Vitoria Foundation, Spain. The aim of this project is to give to migrant and refugee adults access to civic education to integrate more fully into the community. In other words, *CivicAL* is responding to the increasing demands of the European Union (EU) to be a large family of multiethnic and multicultural societies, to witness in each state a growing diversity due to the migration flows where a national cultural identity is compatible with a European identity.
- d) Finally, European Union: common past, present and future for you (*EUcom4U*) project, co-funded by the Europe for Citizens programme, aims to increase knowledge and raise awareness of the EU history and the differing perceptions and understandings of past and present significant events among citizens of 6 European communities in 6 member-states, involving 630 direct participants and touching 5500 indirectly. By getting to know more on the different commemorations in EU history of the twentieth century, this project aims to help local communities to understand the development of EU, to re-read and re-evaluate our common values,

to value and apply them in their everyday actions and behaviors and to act respectively. The main theme of the planned project activities is “Peace and Unity”.

### **Can you describe your teaching activities? Who are your students?**

My students’ profiles are very diverse due to their geographical origin, cultural background, and professional occupations. Many of my students make university studies specializing in bioethics compatible with their ordinary work occupations. They have a lot of merit because they have to sacrifice their free time and legitimate rest to better prepare in this field. They are, in most cases, highly motivated students willing to learn.

The students who attend face-to-face classes in Rome are mainly doctors and health personnel, school teachers, journalists, priests and pastoral workers from the Catholic field, who come specifically to Rome as part of their formation and training process. The cosmopolitan character of the city as a significant place of Christianity and the Church makes students from very diverse countries congregate: 30% Latin American, 20% of the students are African, 5% Asian and a good part come from Italy and others countries in Europe.

In the face-to-face mode, students attend weekly classes where they receive in-person teaching and prepare tasks that allow them to deepen their reading and reflection on the proposed topics. During the face-to-face sessions, the results of their own work are shared, promoting the exchange of ideas, the critical evaluation of their own work and that of others. They practice the art of public presentation of their own ideas and assigned topics and in debate.

Students who participate in online programs are primarily health professionals and university professors. Their origins are very varied as I have students from 23 different countries, most of them come from developing countries. They are people with a great interest and passion for training in this field and who would find it impossible to leave their jobs for a while and move to follow a face-to-face program. Some of them have important responsibilities in their countries, because they form part of the ethics committees of hospitals. They are professors in their medical schools, and some even form part of the national committee of bioethics of their countries. Among the students, we have people of diverse religious beliefs and convictions, which is an enrichment for the students and me when they interact through online forums.

In the asynchronous online mode, students follow a program of compulsory readings and tasks that allow them to study the fundamental topics of each of the courses, structured in different modules. They should also view selected YouTube videos on the issues studied. In light of these, we offer the students a self-assessment exercise that allows them to assess whether the assimilation of the content has been adequate. In addition to the essential readings, students have a bibliography and additional teaching materials at their disposal to delve into the topics of greatest interest to them. Weekly they prepare tasks in papers, essays, concept maps, and infographics that allow them to express the assimilated contents and to exercise with practical cases.

In addition to the face-to-face program in bioethics (in the pontifical universities they are known by the name of “Licenza in bioetica”, with a value of 120 ETCS) we have a highly respected “Doctorate in Bioethics” program in which we have about 30 students. Personally, I am following 5 doctoral students. They are students who have already completed university studies who want to carry out their research on topics

related to bioethics. To help them in this task, they must follow a good part of the courses of the “Licenza” which thus facilitates the transdisciplinary methodology of bioethics and offers them the necessary elements under the guidance of a moderator. They are generally students who in their countries will have the responsibility of teaching or directive responsibilities in Catholic universities or at the service of the pastoral care of life and health of the dioceses of origin.

### **In your view, what are the core objectives of bioethics education?**

In part they have been mentioned in the previous answers. Still, I would say that among the main objectives of the current era, there is first of all the contrast to the “dictatorship of relativism”, as Benedict XVI defines it, which can only happen by relating ethics to anthropology. Both define the meaning of the person from whom rights and duties derive. Together, the fields ensure that the individual and community are responsible for protecting the human family and the goods entrusted to it. Not infrequently, the offenses to life, freedom, and dignity of the person occur through utilitarian or socio-biological philosophies. It follows – and it is both objective and criticism – that there is greater disagreement and difficulty in identifying the general or specific ethical problems (if referred to the individual case). Knowing how to identify the nature of the dilemma that presents itself to the attention is fundamental in order to build a path of discernment on what is good or evil, lawful or illicit. To refine the capacity of judgment and, before that, the tools useful to form it is one of the main objectives of ethical education today.

Two other concatenated objectives are: first of all, to embrace a social, communitarian perspective in opposition to the spread of a Western approach tending towards individualism; secondly, to refine our gaze towards the new challenges that also involve applied ethics, as many of those advanced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations to the whole of humanity. Some of the SDGs have delegated to all nations the task of working to reduce social inequalities by creating not only fair and balanced prosperity and development, but by acting on the situations of need that most affect populations (from access to health care and drinking water, to the resolution of serious problems arising from malnutrition or food disorders due to excess food; or the prevention of new social inequalities due to the impact of technological innovation).

We understand well that the primary objective of opening up to a less individualistic and indifferentist approach coincides with the commitment made in Agenda 2030. However, in both cases, a personalist vision must be strengthened as a prerequisite for genuine substantial equality.

### **What is your vision for ethics education? Will it expand and become more important? Will it be sidelined because of financial or political pressures? Will it be associated with global concerns and growing awareness of bioethical problems?**

Most national and supranational crisis situations of the contemporary era derive from a lack of ethical contribution in resolving conflicts. The unrest generated by war,

discrimination, violence, poverty, technological-scientific interference against life and human integrity or the environment are the symptoms of a civilization that, to a large extent, decided to confine ethics to marginal positions. There would seem to be an intellectual awakening in this regard, but there is still much work to be done to educate consciences (particularly in the political and financial world) about the need to respect a hierarchy of values in behavior. If this commitment fails, then history runs again the danger of annulling the inalienable value of the person, making him an object of negotiation, secondary to economic policies.

We can respond to this situation by integrating ethics into the political vocation to reinforce the awareness of how political action is not a neutral administrative act but an action for a people composed of human beings. This challenge is also easily seen in the influence historically generated by human rights, currently weakened by the modern imbalance of rights over duties. This reality is undoubtedly one of the teachings that the pandemic drama has highlighted. It is necessary to assume ethics as a virtue, as a habitus, that is, an element entirely belonging to everyday life.

In my opinion, ethics and bioethics are destined to reaffirm and consolidate their global urgency by becoming rapidly growing areas of interest. But the problem is: which ethical model? Taking note of the need to give a common answer to this question, as well as of the lack of openness towards personalist proposals, we can work in a proactive sense by intensifying (or strengthening) the exchange networks between academics, experts, bodies, commissions/committees involved in (bio)ethics and, at the same time, by bringing ethics into the design, research and development phases of business, training and institutions.

### **What kinds of activities are needed to expand bioethical education at the global level? And how can these activities be promoted?**

First of all, it is necessary to promote the university and school institutionalization of bioethics programs. There is no rapid proliferation of courses specifically dedicated to this discipline, which can be found in small doses in courses of philosophy, medicine, theology, law. The risk is that bioethical knowledge will be dispersed and proposed minimally.

I would like to add three other measures that, in my opinion, should be taken. First of all, to bring bioethics out of the academic, or in any case more professionalized, environment to “lower” it to children, adolescents and young people who attend primary and secondary schools, educating them to judge the good, the beautiful, the right and the true that are the object of ethics and bioethics. Secondly, to facilitate training through investment in online courses built to accompany (not abandon) students and producing simple teaching materials, as a reference guide for learning. Moreover, since bioethics is a field of study with a direct impact on concrete reality, we should try to spread it in an original way through the different cultural channels that societies use.

I return to refer to bioesthetics that is concerned with transmitting bioethical instances through the aesthetic-artistic experience from which culture comes and culture is created, often adhering effectively to a people’s identity. I would include, among the educational novelties related to bioethics and projected towards its greater

global diffusion, the need to organize courses in journalism, media and digital communication within the university cycles of bioethics; alternatively, to include training courses on bioethics for those who carry out professional programs in that fields. One of the main channels of diffusion of bioethics is, for better or for worse, the media machine that, unfortunately, suffers the disadvantage of not providing sufficient attention to ensure the transmission of sound bioethical content. Sometimes it happens that the information itself contains inaccuracies capable of subverting the entire judgment on the subject discussed. It is essential, therefore, to create networks between the two worlds.

### **What is the role and challenge of ethics education in connection to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

What the whole world continues to face with enormous effort and radical changes will affect what, in its own way, constituted the normality of entire communities. As it happens in the great crises that upset history, also the Covid-19 pandemic put humanity with its back to the wall in front of the sense of existence. It has pushed many towards attitudes of great ethical value such as solidarity, subsidiarity and compassion in resilience.

If I had to summarize the role that ethics has in all this, I would say virtue. The crisis has led to virtue by recognizing the value of human life in vulnerability, which is a discovery for the society of well-being uneducated to pain and suffering. This aspect impressed the centrality of ethics also in the purely health care context: one of the major bioethical problems often complained about, in fact, is the dehumanization of medicine, which has undergone a reversal during Covid-19, strengthening the alliance between doctor-patient, imposing analysis on the best professional ethically correct behavior. This consideration emerged worldwide when there was discussion about access to care and whether it was legitimate to make the patient's age a criterion of priority/exclusion from health care (triage in an emergency). The contribution made by ethics has been resolute and curbed forms of discrimination. I can say that with the pandemic, the authentic medical-healthcare vocation has been rediscovered.

Finally, a broad ethical debate has been applied to the economy and resource management that led to a rethinking of investment policies in health and disease. In this regard, I can already see two challenges, not unprecedented, but undoubtedly unresolved: the first is to return to the definition of health and disease, a theme still an open debate. The second challenge follows from the previous one and is the distribution of resources at the macro and micro-allocation level that strictly depends on what is meant by health and disease and, based on this, on what to invest primarily or secondarily avoiding imbalances in favor of what is called "medicine of desires".

There is also the responsibility (also present in SDGs) to promote equity and accessibility to health care necessary, at a basic minimum level, for all, giving priority to it in the distribution of resources. Ethics will now also become the primary spokesperson of individual and collective responsibility for the life and health of citizens life and health as goods that everyone is called to protect in a perspective of education for prevention.

Finally, I would add two more provocations for “post-pandemic” ethics. The first one involves what has already been expressed but places it in the activities of ethics committees as the bodies responsible for guiding and influencing political and organizational decisions on the ethically correct choices to be made. These committees ought to find public spaces of intervention. Such organizations have the duty to propose guidelines, especially when dilemmas arise regarding experimentation on a national and global scale. This makes it necessary to focus on the sacredness of the person’s life and the commitment to protect such life from possible abuse or choices of interest/power.

Finally, among the ethical challenges is the digital conversion of the social fabric and health. This new reality provides for the emergence of new facets of rights already belonging to the human being (such as privacy), about which it is now necessary to renew the moral discourse.

### **Compliance with ethical standards**

**Conflict of interest** The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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