

**BIOETHICS AND ADDICTION:  
THE PROBLEM OF ALCOHOLISM AND BIOETHICS**

**Abstract:**

Because bioethics is a morality, a science and a skill of retaining and developing anykind of life, one of its main topics and tasks today are the addictions, which are becoming a major threat to the individual and are amongst the strongest violators of life, its meaning and essence, and its real perform. Therefore, today there is a big debate about addictions, because people easily and mass become victims of addictions.

Addiction is a state of unstoppable human need of something to which it strives with all his soul and makes all possible actions to satisfy the desire. There are many types of addiction - from agents that awake wishes to something, agents that cause addiction from persons, to owning and acting, various defects and bigotry... One of the most widespread today, according to the cultural and social milieu, is certainly a dependence on alcohol.

Even treatment is possible, especially today when the medicine, ethics and psychology have great knowledge, still bioethics necessarily addresses the problem of addiction and insists on overcoming them. Although they are health problem, the best method is ethical - **reasonableness** and genuine virtue is **temperance**, moderation. Prior to addiction, until its end, the most important norms are man not to succumb to her challenge and influence, to preserve its freedom of the will, to consider before commencing addiction actions.

**Key words:** bioethics, addiction, alcoholism, reasonableness, temperance.

## **BIOETHICS AND ADDICTION: THE PROBLEM OF ALCOHOLISM AND BIOETHICS**

*"The alcohol is a king of liars ... He is allied with Death.  
It provides a clear vision and obscure dreams. He is the enemy of life  
and teacher of wisdom beyond the life vision.  
He is a bloody murderer, he kills the youth.  
- Jack London in "John Barleycorn " (1913)*

### **Introduction**

Ethical action for the protection of life is influenced by the threats of life and fears for it, in another words by the knowledge that people badly run life. Therefore, it is quite justified the conclusion that the waking of ethics in our era was mostly driven by the negative conditions in the sphere of life. Human awareness is shaken by the destruction of the natural environment and living beings, by the great danger of various old and new infectious diseases, by the serious health conditions of the people, especially from the problem of addictions ..., shaken by the uncertainties in front of the emerging trends in biological sciences, which directly intervene in life grounds.

Thus Bioethics as a new ethical discipline was born, "as a science of human responsibility in the protection of life, of all life forms and health, requiring from people to be serious in front of the big questions of endangering our natural grounds. That's why it directs people toward creation and having pure and good life and encourages it for engagement in advancing the vital foundation of human existence"<sup>1</sup>.

From the many areas with which bioethical research and norms are related today, three areas are key, i.e. on protection of Nature, on cognition of Life (Live) in its foundations and in its entirety, on not destroying, i.e. on the protection of all living Beings. "It is about aimed research of bioethics on three major categories: Life, Nature and Personality"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Дејан Донеv, *Етика во новинарството*, УКИМ, Скопје, 2011, стр. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Кирил Темков, *Етика за III година*, Просветно дело, Скопје, 2004, стр. 184-186.

The last of these is the highest point of the development of life on Earth - man as a developed biological being which is, at the same time, psychological and social and ethical as such. With these own dimensions it is unavoidably responsible entity of acting with a rational function which allows him fully to connect its forces and acts, to evaluate them, to build a good attitude, to decide, to create norms that will lead him to good results and to follow them.

Because the overall presence of life and its commonality does not help the man directly to perceive the importance and vulnerability of life, the rationality is that force with which he will understand the dimensions and the meaning of life, and the mind and the wisdom will be its potential that will lead towards the understanding of the necessity to respect the life, without prejudice, not to harm, but to protect and promote.

### **Ethics of health (as a part of Bioethics) and addictions**

In this sense, one of the particular areas of concentration of bioethical interest is certainly health, i.e. health ethics, because it is believed that health is an important element of human existence, a necessary requirement of his condition, source of human feeling and mood, and the basis for a well-functioning<sup>3</sup>. That is why health is the first duty for the individual moral of each person<sup>4</sup>.

This ethics is not interested directly in the function of the body, its parts, and the human psyche, but for "the conditions that depend from the man which has to provide a good and smooth operation of its"<sup>5</sup>, and therefore its meaning is contained in the prevention, in having awareness for the negativities from our actions, in directing our own decisions and actions towards good actions and avoiding bad ones.

In its basic dimensions, this health ethics, as a part of the wider area of research of bioethics, particularly emphasizes the ideal of good health, like ours, as well as others, then the care for health, norms for the preservation and promotion of health, as well as actions that are aimed toward protection and improvement of health, and especially self-

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<sup>3</sup> More detailed about the stipulation of the term "health" see Leon R. Kass, "Regarding the end of medicine and the pursuit of health", in *The Public Interest*, 40 (1975), pp. 11-42.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Callahan, "The WHO definition of health", in *Hastings Center Report*, 1 (1973), pp.77-87.

<sup>5</sup> Hugo Tristram Engelhardt, "Health and Disease. Philosophical aspects", in Warren T.Reich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, New York, 1978, pp. 509-606.

awareness of the person about the conditions of its body and psyche, for their proper function and needs<sup>6</sup>.

Hence, in the specific dimensions, except for the not making harm to others, particular attention is paid on avoiding addictions through out taking care for the bioethical and health responsibility, in another words through one special concentration and moral activity of the individual. Life transparency and freedom of actions on each individual in today's society require seriousness in the approach to life and his powers, in which is ethical sublime exactly the strength of selfshaping!

This, especially because the addictions cause many problems in a person's life and in society<sup>7</sup>. They are similar to fanaticism, as a final delirium, blindness, complete dedication to an idea, or to fetishism, as too blindly worship a person or an object, for which the addict individual considered to have magical properties that are necessary to him. He unreasonably, uncritically praised his passion and the object of his mania - which resembles to milder form of madness, and certainly is great thirst, painful for the addict individual, and even more for his closes ones. From these desires strongest wobbles consumption of narcotics (from ancient greek word *нарке* - dullness) as something poisonous and intoxicating, which in medicine serves to soothe the pains, and in life as a means for bad pleasures that bring the person to a serious conditions of dependency and often to death, and certainly to suffering of his loved ones.

However personal meltdown is considered the strongest because it affects into the core of human existence and into the essence of social relations. Hence, in the modern epoch of free persons, the problem of addiction appears with great seriousness, because now people, who are assumed to be free, imprisons themselves in adaptations of the passions and actions that lead to enslavement. This speaks enough that addiction means imprisonment and enslavement of the person, i.e. causes its non-freedom and impairment of its dignity. A general problem is that it degrades human will, and this negatively affects on person's moral.

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<sup>6</sup> Michele Aramini, *Uvod u bioetiku*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 2009, str. 102-103.

<sup>7</sup> G. Bonfiglio & E. Caffarelli & B. Baricelli, "Alcolismo. La droga che uccide di piu", *Delfino*, 1980, n. 5.

## Bioethics and the problem of alcoholism

Previous only confirms the notion that in modern epoch many things all around us threat life. But the biggest threat comes from the man it selves who violates nature, harm all living beings, cut down trees and ruthlessly destroys animals. And the biggest problem he creates its toward himself - when hurts his health and the health of the others, when he doesn't care on infection, when he leaves on the passions that lead him to addiction.

Generally speaking, there is a large number of addictions and a variety of their species, while all addictions are the same according to the essence of their request for liability of the will and for the liability of the personality of being to the object of addiction. But still, having in mind the source of addiction and the subject to whom the addict person is attached, there are several groups of addictions:<sup>8</sup>

- addictions toward people;
- addictions toward possession;
- addictions toward action;
- addictions toward enjoyment and having fun;
- fanatisms (of different nature);

- and among the most widely spreaded are the addictions from agents which awaken desire inside addict person and to which he is liable (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, food, medicine drugs).

This kind of addiction by stimulating agents have become the most prevalent, the most visible and highly problematic form of addiction in the modern world. Such agents are drugs, tobacco, food, medicine drugs, especially alcohol, and from which as bioethically the most dangerous, right after the drug addiction is alcoholism<sup>9</sup>, in which suffers both: soul and body of the mindless individual.

Alcoholism is an addiction of taking alcoholic beverages with which into the body is entering substances that contain alcohol, causing proper pleasure, euphoria, drunkenness, escaping from the reality, forgetting, up till death<sup>10</sup>. As noted by the famous

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<sup>8</sup> Кирил Темков, *Етиката денес*, Епоха, Скопје, 1999, стр. 79-80.

<sup>9</sup> Velimir Valjan, *Bioetika*, Svjetlo riječi, Sarajevo-Zagreb, 2004, str. 325.

<sup>10</sup> WHO Expert Committee on Mental Helath, *Alcohol subcommittee. Second report*, Tehnical Report Series, 1952, No. 48.

writer and journalist Jack London, in his famous work *John Barleycorn*: "My friend and brother Alcohol leads to death ... Disease of the soul, disease of life, a sentences with which man have to pay his friendship with John Barleycorn ... He changes all the values: Good is evil, Truth is a fraud, and Life is a joke. From the height of his quiet insanity, with certainty of divinity, he sees on hole life as something evil. Women, children, friends - in the clear white light of his logic are proved as lies and deceptions ... The only thing that he sees is only his sensitivity, his pettiness, filthiness and misery ..." <sup>11</sup>.

It is so because addiction is a state of inexorable need of something. Man that passion does not control, but aims with the whole soul to it and makes all possible actions to satisfy that need. The addiction means liability to something. With her, man from an entity who runs his life, it becomes subject to an external force that guides his actions or to which he aligns many things or everything. Addiction means dependence, conditionality but not from itself, but by something else, i.e. the actions of man are limited by the strange will and influence. Addiction has the necessary consequences, i.e. before and above all change in behavior or suffering, if the desired one can't be realize.

At the same time, addictions represent an abnormal situation - they are disease. In person they creates obsession, distorting its health, mandatory mental and indirectly or consequently also and physical. It is considered that the worst consequence of addiction is that they necessarily cause breaking of the mental and physical unity of the person, i.e. capturing the will of a person, so it is impossible for her to decide freely, and instantaneously also collapses the body<sup>12</sup>. Breaking the person in two, the addictions lead the same through various extremes and falling apart.

The reason for this is the fact that the life and acting solutions of the person are aimed toward satisfying the passion. The addiction person will no normally acts as a mature, responsible individual, but rejects or neglects its obligations and desires, plans mainly actions to meet its additional passion and act only for its execution. By the time addictions begin to reign with the person, usually killing all her other actions and ambitions, leading it to reduction of its existence on a contractor of addiction and to the general degradation of existence.

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<sup>11</sup> Jack London, *John Barleycorn*, pp. 10. Retrived 04.12.2012, <http://ebookbrowse.com/gdoc.php?id=425491787&url=53efe00bf823a218063c395ab06a0afa>

<sup>12</sup> Lino Ciccone, *Salute e malattia. Questioni di morale della vita fisica*, II, Ares, Milano, 2003, n. 441-442.

In this context, "alcohol stops the moral. Dishonesty which man will never do while it is sober, would make it quite easy when it's not sober. In fact, he can only do that because the commandments of the Brother Alcohol are making wall between immediate needs and long learned moral rules ..." <sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the bioethical active approach is required in interception of the addictions by healthy moral person, with which they will be limited, bypassed, and rejected, because here is not about emotions that are concentrated toward binding, toward giving..., as in love, but to disintegration, to separation. This destroys person and its bioethical sensibility and potential.

In other words, it can be say that addiction gives to the person an illusion of doing what he wants and that allows some enjoyment, with which it can justify commitment to passion. However, that enjoyment is wrong - does not really last, and it make a lot of bad consequences and suffering <sup>14</sup>. It is a false pleasure - the man believes that this "beauty" is something that is the most important and only necessary, but it is about something imagined that is climbed to the value of height <sup>15</sup>. It is false because it does not allow free and broad action, but liable person narrowing its overall life initiative, leading it into only one direction, destroying its potential.

## Conclusion

In the modern era particular life problems emerged, which - like other such major problems in any previous epoch - because of its importance and big consequences, become so ethically relevant. In this sense, ethics, especially Bioethics, can not avoid them, and even more it/ they become serious and productive means for intercepting them, and in some cases almost the only obstacle in the way of their negative manifestations.

Today this concerns the problem of addictions - many people become victims of addiction, of different types of addiction. All together can equally be used for observation of this terrible (bio)ethical problem of our epoch, which degrades a person and distorts the social dimensions of the mutual venture and interconnected life <sup>16</sup>. Because they

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<sup>13</sup> Jack London, *John Barleycorn*, pp. 64. Retrived 04.12.2012, <http://ebookbrowse.com/gdoc.php?id=425491787&url=53efe00bf823a218063c395ab06a0afa>

<sup>14</sup> Sheldon Zimberg, *La cura clinica dell' alcolismo*, Ferro Ed., Milano, 1984, n. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Michele Aramini, *Uvod u bioetiku*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 2009, str. 345.

<sup>16</sup> Velimir Valjan, *Bioetika*, Svjetlo riječi, Zagreb-Sarajevo, 2004, str. 331.

constitute interference of the normality of life and on freedom of the person, not only psychologists and physiologists, doctors and social workers, but also and (bio)ethicists are occupied with them.

In other words, people are not only sensible, but also rational beings. They can know how to use nature, can invent forms of life that will enable a good life, freedom and dignity - also can see that on the problem of addictions should pay attention and need to do everything to get rid of them.

All this stresses the possibility that man depends on many things in life area. Biological foundations of life are not bad, but the human evil will and willfulness are the worst, because they make him a creature who destroys everything around him and hurts himself to death. That is why "in the name of life should prevail (bio)ethics"<sup>17</sup> - everyone needs to take care of nature, to keep the elements of life, to promote its health, to preserve the unity of existence and each person should keeps its psycho-physical unity, morality and biosensitivity.

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<sup>17</sup> Дејан Донеv, *Етика во новинарството*, УКИМ, Скопје, 2011, стр. 119.



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