

Volgograd State Medical University
Department of Philosophy, Bioethics and Law

Lectures on Bioethics

Lecture 1.

Philosophical basis of ethics and bioethics

Lecturer

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What is Ethics?

The word “ethics” means “custom”.

- Ethics is the philosophical study of morality.
- Ethics and morality are generally taken as synonyms
- Ethics does not create morality or moral behaviour.
- The goal of ethics - to explore the nature of moral experience, its universality and its diversity.

What is morality?

“Morality” means “customs” or “ways”

- Morality is the most ancient regulator of human behavior in the society.
- Its existence is caused by the system of publicly (generally) accepted values and norms without which people can't live.
- When human is born and grows, he (she) finds himself (herself) in a fully developed system of values and norms which is verified and approved by the society.

- Morality regulates both the attitude of every individual towards generally accepted values and the correlation of his (her) individual system of values with the generally accepted one.

In contradistinction to other regulators of human behavior (law, politics, economy) morality is distinguished in two aspects:

1. its instructions are not official (that is not fixed by law);
2. its sanctions are informal (that is violation of moral norms doesn't lead to legal responsibility).

- Meanwhile, people are usually guided by moral instructions than by legal standards and are more afraid of silent condemnation of other people than of the sanctions of legal character.

Biological theory of morality

- morality has biological nature: the necessity of securing certain biological conditions of human survival in understandable forms which belong only to human, gave birth to the system of moral regulators.

Social theory of morality

- morality has exclusively social nature: human doesn't possess any instincts which regulate the behavior of animals, but in the process of collective activities human developed the standards of cooperation which are based on the intelligence.

Divine theory of morality

- According to this theory God or supernatural Being gave people moral principles.

Morality and history

- Morality has never been unchangeable throughout the whole history of mankind. Its norms to a large extent have always depended on concrete social-economic situation in the society. Morality has always defended the things which helped the human civilization to survive and to develop itself.

Morality and person

Every person has got three interrelated systems of moral values:

- the values of the society where human lives.
- the values of the social group to which human belongs.
- the values which are connected with human personal experience and with human destiny.

Structure of morality

Morality is a well-balanced system which consists of three parts:

- moral actions,
- moral relationships,
- moral consciousness.

Moral actions

- Every action has motive and aim. Every aim implies for its realization the application of certain means.
- One of the principal questions is the correlation of aims and means. Any moral action is considered to be good only when the motive, the aim and the means are good and noble. This rule can be regarded as the moral ideal to which one should strive for.

Moral relationships

- When one gets a reply to action then it is possible to speak about moral relations which people experience while interacting with each other.
- The whole spectrum of human relations contains moral information.
- Moral relations between the doctor and the patient are kind of interpersonal relations.

Moral consciousness

- The basis of human moral consciousness constitutes the idea of good, evil and duty.
- The dialectics of good, evil and duty to the fullest extent is expressed in the so-called “golden rule of morality” - "One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself." Or “do not do the thing which you do not want to be done to you”.

- The result of the developed moral consciousness is the set of moral principles. They are the most common directives by which people are guided throughout all their lives.

- The most common guiding line is an ideal. The ideal is really unachievable otherwise it won't be the ideal. And if there were not ideal in one's life such life would be meaningless.

- The main structural elements of moral consciousness constitute the norms and evaluations.
- Moral norms originate only as a result of the continuous experience of people's common life in the society. "Norm" means rule, accurate order, model, standard, established measure.
- Practically all human actions are strictly regulated by the generally accepted norms.

- The evaluation in moral has informal character.
- The evaluation is the correlation of real actions with the norms, moral qualities, moral principles and at last with the ideal.
- The evaluations are the directives of further moral actions.
- The structure, character and content of evaluations have always been connected with the certain system of values adopted by human.