Book Reviews
Нови заглавия

PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE SCIENCES IN DIALOGUE

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Abstract. The volume *Philosophy and Life Sciences in Dialogue* is a result of the IV International Summer School *Bioethics in Context*, organized by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and *FernUniversität* in Hagen. The book is exemplary in many ways. It contains 11 high-quality articles on fundamental themes and concepts with real philosophical depth – nature, autonomy, the future of trans- and post-humanism, the metatopic of bioethics and its relations with life sciences. The authors present illuminating historical backgrounds as a context to these theoretical discussions and a source of interesting or forgotten arguments. Most of the articles analyze recent and avantgarde scientific research with its social implications: CRISPR-Cas9 technology, digitalization of health care, justification of animal experiments, questions of human cloning, moral enhancement and the artificial synthesis of life. The main idea of the book is that bioethics is necessarily connected to human practice: it is not just knowledge but a *living culture*.

Keywords: bioethics; life sciences; nature; autonomy; CRISPR-Cas9; moral enhancement; digitalization; human cloning

The English-language collection *Philosophy and Life Sciences in Dialogue* is a result of the IV. International Summer School *Bioethics in Context* (2017; Kiten) organized by the Faculty of Philosophy (Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski") and the Chair of Practical Philosophy – Ethics, Law, Economy of the Institute of Philosophy (*FernUniversität* in Hagen). The volume contains 11 philosophical articles (one of which is double-authored) and all of them are of high research quality and philosophical depth. There are three important strands in the book which run across most of the articles.

Firstly, there are important theoretical discussions on various fundamental concepts. We can start with the notion of nature and the difference or nullification between the natural and the artificial, or the ambiguity of the word "nature" because of its descriptive and normative sense; furthermore the crucial concepts of free agency and autonomy are analyzed from various different angles; also the role of

science and its experiments; then the body and its extensions from philosophical point of view or the body as an experience of the incarnated subject; the problem and the future of trans-humanism and post-humanism; and the meta-topic of ethics, bioethics and its relationship with life sciences. Of course, one of the most important moments is the paradoxical nature of *bioethics* itself: the tension between the *bios*, on the one hand, and the ethics on the other – a discipline of reason, which does not have its origin and its normative terms in nature (p. 22). And even more importantly, we can say that bioethics is challenged to rethink the anthropological foundations of ethics itself. And there, in the core of ethics, lies one of the most interesting and important ideas: our *vulnerability* (p. 57). All these theoretical analyses are built upon the contemporary philosophical debates and they obviously improve our understanding of such difficult or controversial topics.

Secondly, there is an illuminating and sometimes unexpected historical background (philosophical and scientific) which is presented both as a context to these theoretical discussions, and more importantly, as a source of interesting and forgotten arguments. They help us to grasp our contemporariness. From this point of view the analysis of a previous philosophical discourse (Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant…) or the analysis of the historical foundations of modern experimental science is not something outdated, but quite the opposite – it presents us with novel perspectives, it sheds light on important tendencies that shape our contexts, and finally, it gives us *alternatives* to the solutions we have already formulated; i.e. an alternative to Cartesian dualistic paradigm or Baconian scientific program.

Thirdly, many articles deal with specific issues related to recent and avant-garde scientific research and its social implications: i.e. problems related to the transformation of medicine to biomedicine or the simultaneity of dehumanization and non-alternativeness (as scientific validation) of randomized clinical trials (Valentina Kaneva); CRISPR-Cas9 technology, genetical modifications and their ethical implications (André Marx); the treatment of HIV-positive patients and the social context of stigmatization or discrimination (Kristiyan Hristov); the problems with collection and usage of big data and digitalization of health care (Ludwig Krüger and Michael Spieker); the justification of animal experiments – in the framework of Leibnizian philosophy (Lydia Kondova[1]) or in the contemporary biomedical research (André Marx); the radical idea of moral enhancement (Eleni Kalokairinou); or liberal eugenics, the questions of human cloning, and the artificial synthesis of life (Marcus Knaup). All these analyses elaborate on various practical and experimental difficulties in the implementation of the theories; plus, they show the extremely problematic or controversial nature of some of these ideas themselves.

The above-mentioned strands only form the most general outline of the book. It gets much more interesting and provoking when you grasp the particular interpretations by the authors. Let me just point to three of them.

(1) Starting with the first article by Thomas S. Hoffmann, we are already presented with one of the most important contemporary (and maybe forthcoming) divisions. This theme is reflected from different angles in most of the other essays as well. It has two parts. On one hand, there is the old metaphysical and platonistic concept – an idealistic idea of nature. On the other hand, the contemporary scientific, objectivistic, and abstract concept, which is so powerful that it threatens to become the only possible way of thinking about nature. It is even more tempting to embrace it when we realize that it is a methodologically constituted objectivity: prepared, dominated and produced by us. But interestingly, says Hoffmann, regardless of its domination, today we no longer take the methodologically objectivated *images* of nature for *natural* nature – even if these images are produced not by classical sciences but by recent 'life sciences' (p. 18). Between those two opposing concepts – one idealistic and the other scientific – Hoffmann proposes a "complementary medial" concept of nature. In order to fully grasp it we have to relearn, to educate ourselves, to develop our culture so it can dialectically intertwine the opposites we face today, i.e. *dialectical relation between subject and nature* (p. 20). That's why this approach is called integrative bioethics – "integrating freedom and necessity, culture and nature, normative reflection and non-propositional knowledge of all aspects of real life" (p. 22)[2)]. And if we look at ourselves through this complementary medial concept of nature, we will see a concrete corporeal being endowed with freedom. A different but related perspective is presented in the article by Marcus Knaup, where the modern tendency of *transforming the Natural into the made (or artificial)* is analyzed in three different ways. All of them clearly explicate the controversy behind the contemporary idea of *control over nature*.

(2) Another common theme throughout the book, presented in the beginning by Stavroula Tsinorema, is the ideological position of science (not the scientific findings themselves), which insists that we will eliminate gradually our *personal* self-conception via an objectifying scientific description and as a consequence the intentionality, subjectivity, and normativity will vanish completely (p. 31). This ideology states that the physical world is all there is, and besides this the world is causally closed (p. 33). There are several difficulties and problems within such a naturalistic approach (Tsinorema lists three of them), but there is one deeper and more fundamental objection. It is clarified via the well-known Kantian philosophy, where a clear *differentiation between objects and agents* is proposed. First, a purely naturalistic conception could not adequately explain neither freedom, nor free agency. Furthermore, such a naturalistic approach inevitably leads to antinomies. Kant's solution is that only intelligible (not supersensible) connections can *presuppose* the sensible and empirical ones. That's why the idea of freedom (autonomy) is the fundamental presupposition; and it is inseparable from the practical reason as such. Agency is the presupposition of every causal explanation (p. 44). The problem of autonomy is additionally elaborated by Evangelia Delivogiatzi through the complex Aristotelian notion of *prohaire-*

sis (*προαίρεσις*) as "a voluntary choice preceded by deliberation that lies between Physis and Logos, i. e. between human nature and reason" (p. 116).

(3) Of course, we can rephrase these problems with completely different concepts, and we can trace them within our societal contexts. And the reason for this rephrasability is that they are important social and normative themes – especially the internal tension between the logic of development of *scientific research* which does not acknowledge any limits, and, on the other hand, *ethics* which draws boundaries and always forms norms to protect the participants in the research (p. 51). Valentina Kaneva offers the general and historical outline of this theme, and some of the other articles elaborate it further.

Finally, all themes and concepts intertwine and form an *integrative philosophical and bioethical milieu* which simultaneously differentiates and connects the above-mentioned approaches, themes, and subjects. That is why the book is a type of theoretical and practically oriented dialogue. In other words: *the idea of interdisciplinarity is at the heart of this project*[3]. But this is not just a dialogue within philosophy itself. As is stated in the introduction by Thomas S. Hoffmann and Valentina Kaneva: "The "dialogue" between sciences is not comparable to the everyday dialogue between individuals. The "dialogue" between sciences is a "dialogue" between comprehensive "systems" of interpreting the world; it is a dialogue between "perspectives" which normally include their own concepts of what is true and valuable and of how truths and values should be expressed." (p. 7).

Hence, bioethics has to be understood as necessarily connected to human practice. It is not just knowledge, but much more than that – it is a type of education and a *living culture*. It is absolutely vital to keep such a dialogue open and running.

NOTES

1. Kondova points out that through Leibniz's "provisional empiricism" he "extended the boundary of the morally permissible treatment of the organic nature far beyond our contemporary notions" (p. 139).
2. A reoccurring thesis by Hoffmann is that: "a completion of the freedom of the subject in its confrontation with nature can only be achieved hand in hand with attaining the freedom of the subject to set nature free" (p. 20, 22).
3. It is worth remembering that bioethics is situated in the very gap that connects (or divides) philosophy on the one hand and life sciences on the other. It is the key intersection of dramatic social change, slow historical scientific trends, political decisions, contextual cultural differences, and normative or critical philosophical positions.

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