

Evolution of the teaching of bioethics in graduate education in Brazil

Evolución de la enseñanza de la bioética a nivel de postgrado en Brasil

Antônio Macena Figueiredo*

Abstract:

In Brazil, Bioethics has evolved since the beginning of the nineties. Throughout this period, educational programs dedicated to the teaching-learning process in Bioethics were initially created at the level of Specialization, and more recently at the levels of Master's and Doctorate degrees. From a brief review of institutional initiatives of great influence for the formal teaching of bioethics in Latin America, the author presents the main Study Centers, Nuclei, Institutes and graduate programs dedicated to training professionals in Brazil.

Key words: teaching, bioethics, *graduate*, Brazil, education

Resumen:

En Brasil, la bioética se ha desarrollado desde principios de los noventa. Durante este período, los programas educativos dedicados a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en bioética se crearon inicialmente en el nivel de conocimientos, y más recientemente en los niveles de maestría y doctorado. De un breve repaso de las iniciativas institucionales con la mayor influencia de la enseñanza formal de la bioética en América Latina, el autor presenta los principales centros de estudio, centros, institutos y programas de postgrado dedicados a la formación de profesionales en Brasil.

Palabras clave: enseñanza, bioética, postgrado, Brasil, educación

Resumo:

No Brasil, a Bioética tem evoluído desde o início dos anos noventa. Durante esse período, os programas educativos dedicados ao processo de ensino-aprendizagem em Bioética foram criados, inicialmente, em nível de Especialização, e mais recentemente nos níveis de Mestrado e Doutorado. A partir de uma breve revisão das iniciativas institucionais de maior influência para o ensino formal da Bioética na América Latina, o autor apresenta os principais Centros de Estudo, núcleos, institutos e os programas de pós-graduação dedicados à formação de profissionais no Brasil.

Palavra chaves: ensino, bioética, pós-graduação, Brasil, educativos

* Doutor in Health Sciences (UnB - Bioethics), Master in Education, Specialization in Applied Ethics and Bioethics, Lawyer, nurse and university teacher (Fluminense Federal University - UFF / RJ/Brazil). macenaso@vm.uff.br

I. Introduction

Notwithstanding the fast spread of Bioethics around the world, from its recognition as a branch of Applied Ethics (Engels, 2004) to the need to teach it in universities along with other traditional disciplines, it was originally established as a knowledge field in the United States during the seventies (Reich, 1994). It quickly spread to Europe in the eighties followed by the countries of the southern hemisphere, becoming, in the nineties, a worldwide phenomenon (Mori, 1994).

The development of the *theory of principlism* based on a group of *prima facie* principles – beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy and justice (Beauchamp and Childress, 2009), has made Bioethics one of the most recognized moral tools for the analyses of ethical dilemmas in the biomedical field. Moreover, this concept was theoretically supported by the disciplines associated with this subject in various academic courses such as biomedical and health sciences, social sciences, law and philosophy, at both graduate and post-graduate levels.

Because of the systematization and simplicity of these principles, the “theory of four principles” has become the central theme of Bioethics, a reference that is occasionally confused with the discipline Bioethics itself. Therefore, by virtue of the universal technique of automatic application of these principles to conflicts and ethical dilemmas in different cultures, they are also known as the “Georgetown mantra” (Clouser and Gert, 1990).

With the first dissenting voices regarding this theoretical reference, made by U.S. scholars in the beginning of the nineties, emerged different theoretical conceptions, which stood out in the United States as well as in the other English-speaking countries. Among these are the Practical Ethics, of utilitarian inspiration, developed by Peter Singer; the update of the traditional case study, the Virtue Ethics; the Liberalism; and the Health Care

Ethics. In Europe, there was the Personalist Paradigm (especially in French); the Hermeneutic; the Narrative Ethics; and the Discursive Ethics in German, among others (Schramm, 2002).

In Latin America, besides the principlist theory that was responsible for the spread of Bioethics in the region, there appeared two other proposals in the passage of the new millennium. They emerged from an ethical reflection on the “persistent problems” (related to the level of social exclusion, in particular, distributive justice and equity) and “emerging problems” (issues arising from the acceleration of scientific and technological development that emerged in the last fifty years). These two Latin American lines of bioethics reflection are: the Bioethics of Intervention, called the “Hard Bioethics”, formulated by Garrafa and Porto (Garrafa and Porto, 2003), and the “Bioethics of Protection”, developed by Firmin Roland Schramm and the Chilean, Miguel Kottow (Schramm, 2002).

Based on principlism and the above-mentioned theoretical support, there are several research centers, institutes and educational programs in Brazil that promote the development of Bioethics and its incorporation as an independent discipline in the curriculum of several academic careers in health. There are a number of universities that include Bioethics as a discipline of philosophical reflection at many levels of education– Specialization, Master’s and Doctorate degrees – chiefly to train professionals in the fields of teaching, research and Research Ethics Committees.

Today, it is almost impossible to count the number of courses that offer this subject throughout the country. Similarly, there is no precise point which can be elected as a landmark of academic activities regarding the inclusion of Bioethics in the academic curriculum. Therefore, the author seeks to highlight aspects of major relevance related to the consolidation of teaching Bioethics at the graduate education in the various public and private institutions of higher in the Brazilian territory.

II. The evolution of Bioethics in Brazil

In the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, Bioethics has evolved for approximately 35 years. Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Brazil can be counted among the countries considered pioneers in this field. Argentina, which is merited with starting the movement of humanization of medicine in the seventies, was the first country to initiate academic activities related to Bioethics (Correa, 2008).

However, this initial inception should not be understood as a formal introduction of the discipline in the countries of the southern hemisphere. In the beginning of the eighties, the word "Bioethics" was not common in the academic field. In addition, as this neologism began to spread, there was a strong rejection by those who defended the traditional Medical Ethics. One of the themes that became central was the term *informed ethical consent*. This idea represented a paradigm shift in the traditional paternalism of Medical Ethics as it promoted the patients' autonomy as free agents in the decision-making process in a doctor-patient relationship. It should also be emphasized that the basis of ethical obligations was *beneficence* (Macklin and Luna, 1996).

The end of the eighties witnessed the emergence of centers, institutes and groups of professionals from different fields interested in the subject throughout the Latin region. With the assimilation of academic and public discourse, the discipline was institutionally established following the North-American model. The first initiative occurred with the foundation of the Latin American School of Bioethics (ELABE), toward the end of the eighties, in Argentina. It organized, over a period of ten years, a program of teaching Bioethics, whose objective was training professionals to allow them to assume the leadership of the discipline in their countries

of origin. In the nineties, Bioethics was consolidated as an academic discipline in several countries (Correa, 2004).

Another initiative of great impact for education in Bioethics occurred in the beginning of 1994. Through an agreement among the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the government of Chile and the University of Chile, the Regional Program on Bioethics was created in Latin America and the Caribbean (RPB) (Current Unity of Bioethics). This is a technical program integrated with the Division of Health and human development of the PAHO. Its mission is to collaborate with public and private entities in the development and application of concepts and procedures for ethical sustainability of decisions related to scientific investigation, technical training, professional formation, health care assistance and formation of sectoral and intersectoral health policies (Stepke, 2000).

Gradually, advanced-level programs were created in the training courses of short duration, Specialization and Master's degree in more than 25 countries. Some of them were created in the University of Chile (Chile), Technological Institute of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), National University of San Marcos (Lima, Peru), National University of Cuyo (Argentina) (Lolas, 2007), University El Bosque (Colombia), Sao Camilo University Center, and University of Brasília (UnB) (Brazil).

Nowadays, in almost all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, there are courses and programs dedicated to training in Bioethics in the field of health at different post-graduate levels of. The demand for online courses is also growing rapidly as can be observed from the success of the *Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative* (CITI), which can be accessed on the Internet at www.citiprogram.org. This is a course developed by volunteers who provide educational material on the protection of human subjects in the field of biomedical research, good clinical practices, responsible conduct of research and humanitarian treatment of animals in laboratories. It is a joint effort of the

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the University of Miami in collaboration with specialized institutions in Bioethics in Chile, Costa Rica, Peru and Brazil (Litewka, Goodman and Braunschweiger, 2008).

Similarly, there are Research Ethics Committees at major university centers and/or hospitals of reference, especially in Brazil, where the number of Ethics Committees already exceeds 550. The Ethics Committees played a key role in the development of Bioethics, since they also had the task of monitoring the progress in awareness and encouraging education in Bioethics in different university bodies.

The most recent initiative in the continent took place with the creation of the program of Permanent Education in Bioethics. An initiative of the Latin American and Caribbean Bioethics Network (Redbioética) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it has the objective of developing an educational task aimed at promoting a plural, interdisciplinary and critical reflection about the ethical problems that emerge in the field of human life and health in the region, through the implementation of post-graduate events and courses. Presently, it offers two courses in the distance study mode: a course on Introduction to Ethics Research involving human beings and an Introductory course on clinical and social Bioethics (UNESCO, 2008).

The Redbioética was finally achieved during the Sixth World Congress of Bioethics, promoted by the International Association of Bioethics (IBC) and organized by the Brazilian Bioethics Society, held in Brasília – Brazil, in 2002. Among its objectives is the epistemological construction of references to the most appropriate socio-cultural reality of Latin America. It was officially founded in Cancun, Mexico, in May 2003. (Garrafa, Kottow, and Sadada, 2006).

III. Institutionalization of the teaching of Bioethics in Brazil

In Brazil, Bioethics has approximately 20 years of academic activities; its institutionalization, therefore, was late. The term “late” is a record of the emergence of Bioethics in the country because when it appeared on the national territory, an important paradigmatic transition was emerging (Schramm, 2002a).

Despite some isolated initiatives toward the end of the eighties, Bioethics was established as a field of interdisciplinary knowledge only during the nineties, when the Brazilian Bioethics Society was born. Only then was it legitimated in the academic field with a highlighted interest in the issue of public health (Garrafa, 2000; Schramm, Anjos and Zoboli, 2007).

With the end of military dictatorship in Brazil, in 1985, and the implementation of the 8th National Health Conference which established the Brazilian Sanitary Reform, in 1986, new democratic winds began to blow across the country. And with them, the need for deeper ethical issues was raised in several sectors of society, including the health field. Immediately after this period, professionals of several isolated areas began to display interest in themes related to Bioethics.

In terms of post-graduation, one of the first notable initiatives was the inclusion of this discipline in a post-graduate course in medicine at the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) of Rio Grande do Sul, in Porto Alegre, in 1988. It was the first Brazilian university to worry about the preparation of practitioners of medicine to solve problems and dilemmas of Bioethics (MS, 1998).

In the beginning of the nineties, three facts contributed decisively in the consolidation of Bioethics in the country:

1. Creation of a specific journal in Bioethics, in 1993, sponsored by the Federal Medical Council (CFM) – Bioethics. This is a biannual magazine with a circulation of more

than 10,000 copies in the medical field (Garrafa, 2000). Its editorial philosophy aims at creating conditions for a multidisciplinary and pluralist discussion on the approach of several topics related to Medical Ethics and Bioethics. Each issue brings specific subjects of multiple interests such as abortion, euthanasia, terminal patients, research in human beings, teaching of Ethics and Bioethics, allocation of resources in health, ethics, genetics and medical errors, among others (MS, 1998).

2. Creation of the Brazilian Bioethics Society (SBB). The SBB was officially formed on February 18, 1995. Since its creation, it has played a significant role in the development of this new area of knowledge in the country (Ministério da Saúde -MS 1998). Seven national congresses have already been held, the most relevant being the 4th World Congress of Bioethics of the International Association of Bioethics.

This event marked the adult phase of the Brazilian Bioethics, with the theme "*Bioethics, power and injustice*". Among the themes considered relevant to the consolidation of the conceptual framework are: 1) improvement of basic ethical theories in the Brazilian context, and 2) discussion and elaboration of an epistemological statute whose core is the ontological questioning of Bioethics while characterizing it as a field of knowledge appropriate to the reality of the country (Oliveira, Vellapouca and Barro, 2005). It is important to emphasize that the SBB has also created a journal of national circulation: the Brazilian Bioethics Review (RBB).

3. Approval of Resolution n 196 of the National Council of Health (CNS), in 1996. This rule created the National Commission for Ethics on Research (CONEP) and the Committees for Research Ethics (CEPs). These bodies started exercising social control so as to examine and monitor the ethical aspects of research involving human beings throughout the national territory (MS, 2005). Currently, there are 607 CEPs distributed among five regions of Brazilian

territory. Most of them are installed in hospitals and Public University Centers.

This Resolution incorporated the model of ethical analysis based on four *prima facie* principles of principlist Bioethics – beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy and justice – which form the theoretical framework of Bioethics. This reference was consolidated in the area of Health Sciences as a basic ethical requirement for the rights and duties of the scientific community, the research subjects and the State. Thus, the Committees for Research Ethics (CEPs) played a significant role in the institutionalization of Bioethics as a Practical Ethics discipline in the scope of health professions. This was then incorporated into the curriculum structure of both, basic training (Musse et al., 2007) and professional qualification, at the level of *Lato Sensu* and *Stricto Sensu* Post-Graduate courses (Oliveira, Vellapouca and Barro, 2005).

Since then, the onus of professional training has been shared by courses provided by different bodies such as the Research Ethics Committee and professional bodies, update courses and university extension. As it is also offered as a line of research in post-graduate courses, it has become the object of study in many research centers.

Bioethics education has mostly been included in different courses at the level of specialization in public, private or religious university institutions, and more recently, either at the levels of Master's and Doctorate degrees or incorporated as transverse content in other traditional disciplines. A few of the major academic centers, courses and post-graduate programs dedicated to the reflection on Bioethics, created in the last few years are (Anjos MF, Siqueira JE (eds). 2007):

1. UNESCO Chair in Bioethics at the University of Brasília (UnB) – Brasília Distrito Federal (DF). Was recognized by UNESCO (United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture) in 2004. Its origin was the Nucleus of Studies and Research in Bioethics (NEPeB), pioneer in the area of Bioethics in Brazil to be formally recognized as a consolidated group of research in the National Council for Scientific and Technological

Development (CNPq). The Chair had direct or indirect participation in the organization of five Brazilian Congresses of Bioethics, and also performed as the executor of the Sixth World Congress of Bioethics, in 2002, in Brasília, DF. The Brazilian Bioethics Review (RBB), the quarterly scientific report of the Brazilian Bioethics Society, is also produced entirely under the responsibility of the Chair and is in its fourth year of uninterrupted publication (Cunha, 2008).

Among the distinguished objectives of the UNESCO Chair in Bioethics, with respect to the *Stricto Sensu* Post-Graduation, is its support to the post-graduate program in Health Sciences, having trained 28 masters and 9 doctors in a specific line of research in the area of Bioethics. Since August 1998, it has been offering an annual course of Specialization in Bioethics (with approximately 400 hours of lessons), having trained 290 specialists by 2008. Already in its ninth year in 2007, the course has 36 students and for five years, through its researchers, has published six books specializing in Bioethics (Cunha, 2008).

In 2007, a proposal was presented to establish the Program for Master's and Doctorate degrees in Bioethics to Brazilian Federal Government agencies like the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), responsible for the evaluation and approval of post-graduate courses. The *Stricto Sensu* Post-Graduate Program in Bioethics of UnB began in 2008 (MEC, 2008). This was the first course for public and secular education of bioethicists in the country. The program has a single area of concentration – public health – and three lines of research are proposed: Theoretical grounds of Bioethics; Emerging situations in Bioethics and public health; Persistent situations in Bioethics and public health.

2. Inter-institutional Nucleus of Bioethics of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul /Clinics Hospitals of Porto Alegre (UFRGS / HCPA). .

In 1990, teaching activities were initiated with the implementation of an intensive course of Bioethics in the HCPA, with the participation of Prof. Robert

Veatch of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics. In 1993, the program was implemented to focus on the problems of bioethics in the field of clinical bioethics, and from 1994, the discipline of Bioethics I was included in the curriculum of the Post-Graduate course in Medicine.

3. Nucleus of Bioethics of the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC), Porto Alegre (RS). This University has included the discipline of Bioethics in the Post-Graduate courses in Medicine since 1988.

4. Nucleus of Bioethics of the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (PUC Minas). In addition to the publication of books in the Institute of Continuing Education, it runs a course of Specialization in Bioethics.

5. Oscar Freire Institute, School of Medicine, University of São Paulo (USP). It has promoted meetings, seminars, workshops and other events focused on Bioethics, along with publications in this area. It has a course of Specialization in Bioethics.

6. Alphonsianum Institute of Theological Ethics in the State of São Paulo. Under the coordination of Professor Márcio Fabri dos Anjos, it works with issues of Theological Bioethics of the Third World in a liberation perspective.

7. São Camilo University Center in the state of São Paulo. The Center is maintained by the Camillian Social Center, one of the many entities of the Camillian Order around the world, present in approximately 30 countries. It is looked upon as a pioneer in the field of bioethical publication through magazines, books and the program of teaching Bioethics in the different graduate and post-graduate courses (Barchifontaine, 2005).

It has its own Nucleus for Studies and Researches in Bioethics, which helps in developing the activities of Bioethics; a Specialization Course and a Program of Post-Graduation with a Master's degree course in Bioethics. In 2004, the Program of *Stricto Sensu* Post-Graduation in Bioethics at the Master's level was approved by CAPES and

MEC. This course is designed for professionals from several areas interested in acting upon and discussing issues regarding Bioethics.

8. The National School of Public Health of Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ). This institution has made a significant contribution in the field of Bioethical reflection at the interface with public health in the country. It has a Center for Applied Ethics and Bioethics (NUBEA) in partnership with the Fernandes Figueira Institute. It has been running the Specialization Course in Applied Ethics and Bioethics since 2002 (Zoboli, 2006), and is preparing to offer a Master's and Doctorate Program in Applied Ethics.

9. Nucleus of Bioethics of the State University of Londrina (UEL) / Paraná. Composed of many groups related to Bioethics at the university, it introduced the Course of Specialization in Bioethics in March 2002, and the discipline of Bioethics was included in the curriculum structure of the graduate course of Medicine (Bioética informa. 2002).

10. University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos - Unisinos - in São Leopoldo. This institution houses the Humanitas Unisinos Institute (IHU), whose main objective is to raise new questions and seek answers to the great challenges of today from a humanistic, social and Christian view. The main activities in the field of Bioethics involve the publication of classical works, with emphasis on the translation of classical references. One of the first published works was the translation of "The Main Issues in Bioethics" (Problems of Bioethics), in 1980, and the most recent, translation of the book by John Finnis - Natural law and natural rights - in 2007.

11. Nucleus of Bioethics of the State University of Feira de Santana - Bahia.

12. Nucleus of Bioethics of the Federal University of Pernambuco - Recife. Through the efforts of this Nucleus, the discipline of Bioethics was included in the post-graduate course of Health Sciences.

13. Catholic University of Parana in Curitiba. It has an active group of study in Bioethics related to the

areas of philosophy and theology and offers an annual course of Specialization in Bioethics.

IV. Publications related to Bioethics in the field of education

Parallel to the above-mentioned programs, by virtue of their being pioneers in this area of knowledge there are several institutions in Brazil that are offering training in Bioethics. It is possible to verify this claim by accessing the Internet. However, one of the main challenges facing these courses is the lack of qualified teaching professionals. Being an area that involves multiple conflicts of interest without a specific academic profile, many professionals consider themselves capable of working as teachers. Nonetheless, only a few have the extensive training required to discuss all the ethical issues related to the multiple areas of knowledge that Bioethics involves. This is evidenced by the small number of researchers who publish papers that deal with topics in education or teaching of Bioethics at different levels of training.

The results of two surveys conducted in 2007 and 2008 are presented below, which illustrate the challenge described earlier.

Silva, in 2007, aimed to conduct a study on the "state of the art of teaching of Bioethics in Brazilian medical graduation". His study was based on the work published in the annals of Congresses of the Brazilian Bioethics Society of 2000, 2002 and 2005; the National Congress of the United Network of 2003 and 2005; the Brazilian Association of Medical Education from 2000 to 2005; and in the journals of the Brazilian Bioethics Society; the Bioethics of the Federal Council of Medicine and the Brazilian journal of Medical Education from 2000 to 2005. He identified 4024 publications, out of which only 89 were related to the teaching of the discipline Ethics and Bioethics. The largest con-

centration was at the graduate level, with 41 publications related to the teaching of Ethics and Bioethics and 29 on the discipline of Bioethics alone. At the post-graduate level, the concentration was 11 works on the teaching of Ethics and Bioethics and eight related to the discipline Bioethics. OuvirLer foneticamente

The same evidence was found in another survey conducted by Figueiredo, Garrafa and Portillo. In 2008, the authors presented the results of a systematic research conducted using six databases from Latin America between 2000 and 2007: LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature Database), SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online), BDENF (The Nursing Database), BBO (Brazilian Bibliography of Odontology), CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) and the Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) of the Brazilian Institute for Information in Science and Technology (IBICT). From these databases, 61 articles and 79 works of the Stricto Sensu Post-Graduation level were recovered (67 dissertations and 12 thesis). As a search strategy, a combination of the terms "Teaching and Bioethics" and "Education and Bioethics" was used. Sixteen articles addressed this theme in graduation and only two referred to the teaching of bioethics at the Master's and Doctorate levels. In relation to the works completed in the Stricto Sensu Post-Graduation, only 12 prioritized the issue of the teaching of Bioethics. All were restricted to the area of health, particularly in the field of Medicine.

These two surveys showed that a wide variety of scientific publications is related to Bioethics in Brazil as a scientific discipline. With regard to studies on the teaching of Bioethics as a discipline in both Graduation and Post-Graduation, the studies are still limited considering the period of development in the national territory.

V. Final Reflection

Reflecting on the review of the history of this field of knowledge in Brazil, it can be claimed that Bioethics, as a discipline of ethical and philosophical reflection, is in the intermediate stage of development at all levels of academic education in Brazil. Furthermore, it is a discipline that is being included in the curriculum structure in both graduate and post-graduate courses, in several areas of knowledge in public and private institutions in the country. In particular, at the post-graduate level, it has successfully carried out the mission of meeting the demand of training specialists, researchers, Masters and PhDs to work both in teaching and research (universities, Ethics Committees and Research Centers), whose central objective is to train professionals with critical and reflective ability, with strong interdisciplinary training based on theoretical and philosophical basis to identify and find solutions to the ethical conflicts or dilemmas in the context of Health Sciences or the society in general.

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