A Philosophical Rethinking of Medical Ethics

Review for the volume

Rethinking Medical Ethics,

Concepts and Principles, by

Jean Piere Clero, Ibidem

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Antonio SANDU¹

¹Professor PhD Hab., Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Stefan cel Mare University from Suceava, Romania,

Abstract: A rethinking of ethics, whether applied to medical space, requires a distraction from the abstract words, grouped together in the so-called system of correlated notions, encompassing the concept of human ethics, and in particular of medical ethics. The first example of such a semiotic distance is offered by Jean Pierre Clero with reference to the concept of autonomy, a concept derived from Kantian philosophy, and almost fetishized in the medical ethics of recent years. However, Cleo argues, this term is not operationalized, nor clearly defined semantically, so that reference to it remains often in the space of a sterile philosophical debate, being less operable in the framework of a utilitarianist ethics based on moral, such as the one derived from Game Theory. Another concept taken from Immanuel Kant's (2010) ethical thinking is that of person, but remains suspended somewhere between legal thinking and moral philosophy, but little operative for practitioners of moral ethics.

Keywords: *Jean Pierre Clero, ethics of care, autonomy, person, bioethics, medical ethics.*

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Introduction

A rethinking of ethics, whether applied to medical space, requires a distraction from the abstract words, grouped together in the so-called system of correlated notions, encompassing the concept of human ethics, and in particular of medical ethics. The first example of such a semiotic distance is offered by Jean Pierre Clero with reference to the concept of autonomy, a concept derived from Kantian philosophy, and almost fetishized in the medical ethics of recent years. However, Cleo argues, this term is not operationalized, nor clearly defined semantically, so that reference to it remains often in the space of a sterile philosophical debate, being less operable in the framework of a utilitarianist ethics based on moral, such as the one derived from Game Theory. Another concept taken from Immanuel Kant's (2010) ethical thinking is that of person, but remains suspended somewhere between legal thinking and moral philosophy, but little operative for practitioners of moral ethics.

A possible utilitarian reconstruction of medical ethics

The rejection of classical bioethics, which is anchored in conceptualism, is correlated by the author with the emphasis on (neo)utilitarianism, which, in the author's view, allows greater clarity of ethical decisions, especially those concerning new medical care practices. The author does not even restrain from criticizing utilitarianism itself for contamination with deontology, especially with the ethics of autonomy. Autonomy is a philosophical fiction, and the author is far from challenging it in the philosophical sphere, for example in the Pascalian one, criticisms are directed exclusively at its inadequate bioethical recovery, which in some way makes it impossible to advance the ethical thought applied to a definitive detachment from its philosophical roots.

Reviewing the revision of medical ethics

The reading of Professor Clero's book on the revision of medical ethics, from a declared utilitarian position, has brought to my attention a series of previous reflections on autonomy (Oprea, Gavrilovici, Vicol, & Astarastoe, 2013; Sandu, 2013), in which I confessed the need for a rethinking autonomy, which in bioethics mainly refers to the ability to make informed decisions about one's own health condition, and which should be complemented by other forms of understanding of expressive autonomy - autonomy as self-expression of the individual - relational autonomy -based

on the process of social construction of autonomy in different social and cultural environments. I was saddened that I did not find answers to these questions in the pages of J.P Clero's book, although I was glad that the sense of the acute need to overcome the philosophical stage of bioethics towards autonomous social science is partly shared by thinkers like the author of this book.

The frequent mention of the Theory of the Games arouses - at least in me - expectations of concrete examples of ethical calculations and pragmatic models of solving ethical dilemmas in a non-utilitarian manner. However, the references proposed by Clero are, rather, classical utilitarianism, remaining in the area of traditional philosophy.

Expanding the semantic sphere of the term *ethics of care* which may have occasioned to me, at first, a series of difficulties in reading the volume, difficulties that I have overcome, making it my fault that I did not understand at the first moment that the reference to the *ethics of care*, is in fact the whole ethics of care and not just that proposed by Gilligan and Nodding. Jean Pierre Clero uses the term *Ethics of Care* in an extension that seeks to encompass the whole sphere of human care, including medical ethics, being distinct but inclusive for the classic of the term *Ethics of Care*, proposed by Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nell Noddings (1999), and which is a particular form of feminist ethics of responsibility understood as care. The introduction of utilitarianism and the theory of ethical decision in the sphere of ethics of care, which is legitimized precisely by the semantic overlap, in the view of J.P.Clero of the notion of ethics of care over all medical ethics.

Instead of conclusions

Professor Jean Pierre Clero's volume *Rethinking Medical Ethics, Concepts and Principles*, Ibidem Publishing House, Studgard, Germany, is an absolutely necessary reading for all those on the path to rethinking bioethics. The boundaries of bioethical conceptualization and the limited understanding of fundamental concepts such as autonomy and personality need to be overcome in the necessary way, and Professor Clero's effort is fully appreciated.

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