

## **BOOK I**

### **GENERAL ETHICS**

#### **CHAPTER 1**

##### **ON THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS**

**Art.- 1** The Ethics of the Health Team is a special aspect of Ethics, hence the need for certain special considerations. In the first place, we should try to answer what Ethics is, which would thereupon lead us to the need for a definition as a conceptual starting point. But because there are many definitions, specific treatises should be consulted.

**Art.- 2** Frequently, Moral and Ethics are considered synonymous or interchangeable with each other. This is inappropriate as it generates confusion between Principles and Practice.

**Art.- 3** Morality is the set of universal rules of conduct aimed at preserving the foundations of coexistence among human beings as if they were religious commandments. "Human acts", as opposed to "man's acts", are the product of reflection and willpower; conversely, the latter may not be such, as is the case of actions carried out by forces that are alien to will.

**Art.-4** Ethics is the guide of conduct which, based on moral principles, directs itself toward a special class of actions within a specific social or cultural group in a certain historical moment. Ethics deals with the value of goodness of conducts themselves, with what is right or wrong on condition that actions are free, voluntary and conscious. It searches for universal causes that are able to adapt human acts to the universal good.

**Art.-5** Also, a philosophic historical review of Morality and Ethics should be carried out which includes the changes that thinking and conduct have undergone since the Ancient Greeks until today. This aspect, however, falls beyond the scope of this brief analysis. Yet, it is necessary to list the basic principles of morality that should be understood before arriving at an ethical discourse of a practical nature.

**Art.-6** Morality is thought to be implicit in the human nature, probably at the level of biogenetic mechanisms that are appropriate to build a protective system to make up for man's vulnerability as an individual, in view of the demands for interaction and social adaptation that are stressed by the process of cultural evolution.

**Art.-7** Every moral doctrine is centered on a core of ideas of **Equality, Solidarity, Justice and Search for Common Welfare**, which can be traced back to the ethics of primates and hominids, to the different stages of Natural Laws, the Categorical Imperative, Consensualism, Altruism, the Theories of Justice and the Ethics of Discourse

in modern times. These, together with the Ethics of Responsibility, identified with masculine features, and the Ethics of Solidarity, more akin with the female nature, allow to think that contrary to the notion that there can be no progress in Ethics, the changes the world underwent in the last century have endangered man's survival, not only as an individual, but as a species.

**Art.-8** A growing concern for **BIOETHICS** and the urgencies affecting the conservation of the Environment characterize today's society and point to the pressing need for an ethical commitment with life preservation in the best possible conditions for everyone, regardless of race, sex, age, culture or creed.

**Art.-9** General Ethics has been linked to the development of Democracy and Human Rights, while Medical Ethics has remained in its initial state for twenty-five centuries. Traditional medicine was essentially paternalistic and absolutist because its *raison d'être*, the patient, was always treated as a "non responsible" being. Not before the 1950s was the patient granted moral citizenship and her or his status as an autonomous, free and responsible moral agent acknowledged.

**Art.-10** Bioethics involved humanity, and in so doing it raised the siege of traditional Medical Ethics to welcome different disciplines connected with biology, such as philosophy, law and religion. It expresses itself as an interdisciplinary ethics, a bridge between science and humanities.

**Art.-11** The essential principles of Medical Ethics are rooted in ideas and procedures derived from General Ethics, which is the Ethics governing the rest of the citizens, and which can be summarized as follows:

Principle of Autonomy: obligation to respect everyone's freedom to decide for herself or himself and about herself or himself.

Principle of Non-Maleficence: obligation to do no harm.

Principle of Beneficence: obligation to do to others what one understands is good for oneself.

Principle of Justice: obligation not to discriminate and to treat others equally.

**Art.-12** The basic moral rules that allow putting the fundamental ethical principles into practice are three: confidentiality, veracity and fidelity.

**Art.-13** Generally speaking, it can be observed that the Patient acts guided by the moral principle of autonomy, the Health Team by the beneficence-non-maleficence principles, and Society by that of justice.

**Art.-14** Ethics is a behavioral process with **individual** characteristics that takes the sense of **responsibility within human beings** to its farthest end. It does not have a metaphysical basis because there are no ethical formulas that can be derived from

abstract deductions. And no moral doctrine can be built to support it because it does not have simple repeated elements. Therefore, there is no systemic ethics, nor can the pedagogy of ethics be constructed. This is why Ethics cannot be **taught** in orthodox terms, yet it can be **learned**.

**Art.-15** The human being is the reason and foundation of Ethics. The object of society is common welfare.

The articles below will gradually develop the different aspects in connection with each of the topics that are the object of this Code of Ethics.