

## Quantum bioethics: ethics for all beings

Bioética quântica: uma ética para todos os seres

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**Abstract** *The present paper introduces elements for conceiving ethics for all beings based on the idea of laic compassion.*

**Key words** *Ethics, Bioethics, Quiddity, Compassion*

**Resumo** *No presente manuscrito são apresentados elementos para se pensar uma ética para todos os seres, tendo como base a idéia de compaixão laica.*

**Palavras-chave** *Ética, Bioética, Qüididade, Compaixão,*

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*When the finger points to the moon  
The fool looks at the finger  
The wise man, at the moon.*

Chinese proverb

Over the latest three years *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* has published a great deal of articles on bioethics, focusing particularly on the aspect of protection<sup>1-3</sup> and on the relation of this discipline with public health<sup>4</sup>. This short communication is aimed at contributing to the debate.

Bioethics, as originally formulated by oncologist Van Rensselaer Potter in 1970, was conceived as a new scientific ethic capable of giving answers to the deterioration of the mankind-nature relation, with the main objective of ensuring the perpetuation of humankind and its quality of life<sup>5</sup>. Doubtless, over the last thirty-six years, the discipline has acquired distinct connotations ranging from applied ethics to biomedical actions to a moral reflection of questions concerning the planet earth as a whole, for instance in the conception of Leonardo Boff<sup>6</sup> and in the most recent ideas of Potter himself<sup>7</sup>.

Similar to the theories of these authors - and in intimate relation with both Schramm and Kottow's protection bioethics<sup>8</sup> and Derrida's unconditional hospitality<sup>9</sup> - the concept of laic compassion has been proposed as an important element in the current bioethics debate. It presupposes offering support, shelter, refuge, and protection to others - in the sense of the Homeric ethos - characterizing the unquestionable acceptance of the other, along with the development and construction of ethical relations<sup>10</sup>.

This process of unconditional acceptance, typical of the laic compassion, will ultimately depend upon the comprehension of the condition of equality among living beings, rooted on the two inextirpable dimensions of existence, birth and death. Such essential equality - in terms of

its deepest and most intimate roots - includes every living thing inasmuch as one is born and will die; there is no life that hasn't experienced a coming into being and that will not necessarily be extinguished in a ceasing to be. Once that is set up, it is feasible to place all living beings on the same level, as they are by definition limited in space and time<sup>10</sup>.

The immediate attitude in face of an equal will thus be unrestricted support because the understanding of this essential equality would not allow the self to experience itself as completely independent and apart from the other. This is the foundation of laic compassion as primarily enounced: support established among living beings - with a distinction, but not separation, between the one who receives and the one who is received - and the acceptance of equality as an essential condition of being a living being<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, the conception of intrinsic essential equality of living beings may be conceived as an abstraction of a much deeper issue, the *quiddity* of all beings, which has been described through different metaphors of either religious (the Buddhist nature) philosophical (the Schopenhauerian will), or scientific nature (the quantum reality). In fact, quantum physicist David Bohm proposes the existence of a basic unit in the universe, a constitutive interdependence of all things<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, based on these postulations, it is possible to conceive an ethic of *quiddity* using quantum theory as an allegory, as discussed in the film *What the Bleep do we Know?*. This would be the first formulation of a largely understood ethic able to include all beings in its core, presently denominated quantum bioethics<sup>12</sup>. Obviously, it is not the intent to use contemporary physics as a basis for the bioethics discourse but to adopt it as an image able to point to the *quiddity* of all beings, yet paying full attention so as not to confuse the finger with the moon.

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