UNIT 3: BIO-ETHICS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

3.1: Learning Objectives

3.2: Introduction

3.3: The Concept of Bioethics

3.4: History of Bioethics

3.5: Meaning and Definition of Bioethics

3.6: Different Area of Bioethics

3.7: Conclusion

3.8: Let Us Sum Up

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3.10: Answer to Check Your Progress

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through unit you will be able to

- Know the Concept of Bioethics
- Explain the History of Bioethics
- Explain the meaning and definition of bioethics
- Know the different areas of bioethics

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you the concept of bioethics. After going through this unit you will be able to know that bioethics is a part of applied ethics. Unlike other traditional ethics, bioethics tries to explore some of the important real life issues like abortion, euthanasia, animal ethics, environmental issues, stem cell research, and reproductive issues like IVF etc. from the moral perspective. Now let us study and discuss the concept of bioethics in more details.

3.3 THE CONCEPT OF BIOETHICS

Bioethics is one of the latest trends in philosophy, especially in ethics. It can be regarded that bio-ethics uses to study various ethical issues related to human and non-human like, abortion, euthanasia, stem-cell research, animal rights, environmental issues like pollution, environmental degradation etc. At present bio-ethics is studied by the students of philosophy only, as it comes under the discipline of philosophy. But bio-ethics deals with such important issues which should be known by all. Bioethical debates, particularly in animal ethics and environmental ethics, are concerned with issues of moral status and moral protection. The vital question is, for example, whether all animals have a moral status and hence are members of the moral community enjoying moral protection or whether they do not have a moral status at all (or only to some degree for some animals, such as higher mammals such as great apes, dolphins and elephants). But, even if animals do not have a moral status and hence have no moral rights, it could be the case that they still are morally significant in the sense that human beings are not allowed to do whatever they want to do with them (for example, to torture animals for fun). The fundamental idea of granting a living being a moral status is to protect the particular being from various kinds of harm which undermine the being's flourishing. For example, one can protect the great apes by granting them a moral status which is important for their survival since one can then legally enforce their moral right not to be killed.

3.4 HISTORY OF BIO-ETHICS

For the first time the term "bio-ethics" has been referred by a biological scientist named Van Rensselaer Potter in the year 1970. For him bioethics is a subject which is a mixture of scientific knowledge and moral knowledge and which cover the evolutionary understanding of human in nature. Again in 1971, the Kennedy Institute of Ethics was founded at Georgetown. The main aim of this foundation is to do new

research in the field of medical ethics, the founder of this foundation, Andre Hellegers has also regarded this kind of this ethics to be 'bio-ethics'. The Encyclopaedia of Bioethics, which was begun by Kennedy institute by 1972, has defined bio-ethics as "the study of the ethical dimensions of medicine and the biological sciences" (Reich, 1978). It is observed that some great literaures have been found in different cultures of the world like Greco-Roman, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, Islamic etc. where people have practiced medicine by giving importance to values and Moral behaviour. It is said in those scriptures that medical practitionars in the traditional age were competent, dedicated, kept confidences, and cared for the sick poor without change.

This moral temaparament have been adopeted by the bio-ethician and extend their scope of study to other issues like euthanasia, human reproduction animal rights and environmenatl issues etc. too.

3.5 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF BIO-ETHICS

When we generally talking about ethics, most of the people cannot define it properly or not able to provide proper definition of bio-ethics. If we want to understand bio-ethics, first we have to make our mind to think the answer of the following questions:

- Should we allow the use of cloning by somatic cell nuclear transfer to help an infertile couple haave a child?
- Should genetically modified crops be grown in the UK, where it will be very difficult for organic farmers to maintain their required genetically modified free status?
- Should genetically modified pigs be used to provide organs for transplantation into human patients, with a much reduced risk of immunological rejection? (Mepham, 2005)

So far as the defintions of bioethics is concerned, it can be said that the different definitions can be presented in this respect. According to one definition, bioethics is 'the study of the moral and social implication of techniques resulting from advances in the biological sciences.

(Honderich, 1995) Another philosopher, whose name is Bernard William defines bioethics to be ‘a philosophical structure, which together with some degree of emperical fact, will yield a decision procedure for moral reasoning’ (William, 1993) Another important defintion is presented by Onora O’Neill. According to him,’bioethics is not a decipline It has become a meeting ground for a number of descipline, discourses, and organisations concerned with ethical, legal, and social questions raised by advances in medicine, science, and biotechnology ’(O’Neill, 2002)
So if we analyse the above mentioned definitions, it can be pointed out that bioethics is something which moraly deals with some of the most important of the world. Now let us see the different topics that can be studied within the scope of bio-ethics.

3.6 DIFFERENT AREAS OF BIOETHICS

Bioethics studies within its scope different problems related to human and non-human. Some of the main areas of bioethics are presented as follows:

3.6.1: Medical Ethics

The oldest sub-discipline of bioethics is medical ethics which can be traced back to the introduction of the Hippocratic Oath (500 B.C.E.). Of course, medical ethics is not limited to the Hippocratic Oath; rather that marks the beginning of Western ethical reasoning and decision making in medicine. Other more critical elements of the Hippocratic Oath such as the strict prohibition of euthanasia and abortion seem to be rather debatable and raise the vital question of how to distinguish between valuable and less valuable principles it proposes. In contemporary bioethics, euthanasia is—in general—widely regarded as an eligible autonomous decision of the patient that must be respected. With regard to abortion, most bioethicists believe that it should be allowed, at least, under certain circumstances, but this issue is still hotly debated and causes

many emotional responses. In medical ethics, one is concerned with the general ethical question of “what should one do” under the particular circumstances of medicine. In this respect, medical ethics is not different from basic ethics but it is limited to the area of medicine and deals with its particular state of affairs.

3.6.2: Animal Ethics

The idea that animals should be part of the moral community mainly evolved in the context of the ethics of utilitarianism in the nineteenth century, most notably spearheaded by Jeremy Bentham, who famously argued that it does not matter morally whether animals can reason but rather whether they can suffer. Current problems include research on animals (including vivisection), livestock farming and animal transports, xeno-transplantation, human-animal chimera, meat eating versus vegetarianism/veganism, the legitimacy of zoos and circuses, religious freedom versus animal protection, recreational hunting, and the growing conflict between the protection of the environment and animal welfare. These pose complex moral issues that need to be addressed appropriately by responding to the question of whether animals have a moral status in general (and why), and, if they do, what their exact moral rank is.

3.6.3: Environmental Ethics

It can be said that environmental ethics deals with the moral dimension of the relationship between human beings and non-human nature”animals and plants, local populations, natural resources and ecosystems, landscapes, as well as the biosphere and the cosmos. Strictly speaking, human beings are, of course, part of nature and it seems somewhat odd to claim that there is a contrast between human beings and non-human nature. At second glance, however, it seems reasonable to make this distinction because human beings are the only beings who

are able to reason about the consequences of their actions which may influence the whole of nature or parts of nature in a positive or negative way.

Bioethics use to study all these sensitive issues in the light of ethics.

3.7 CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it can be said that bio-ethics is an important dicipline. In the contemporary world, so many unethical practicecs are found to be practiced in the world. In the name of research animals are used. Stem-cell research is also going on. Again with the development of tchnology or with the invention of ultra-sound machiene, sex-selective abortion become a regular issue. The most important point here is that many educated people are parcticising these unethical things. So moral conciousness is too imporatnat for a person of every dicipline.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Mention some of the ethical issues related to bio-ethics.

Q 2: Under which discipline 'bio-ethics' comes into?

Q 3: With what, bioethical debates like animal ethics and environmental ethics are concerned?

Q 4: Who has referred the term 'bioethics for the first time?

Q 5: in which year the Kennedy Institute of Ethics was founded at Georgetown?

Q 6: What is the oldest sub-discipline of bio-ethics?



3.8 LET US SUM UP

- Bio-ethics uses to study various ethical issues related to human and non-human like, abortion, euthanasia, stem-cell research,

animal rights, environmental issues like pollution, environmental degradation etc

- Bioethical debates, particularly in animal ethics and environmental ethics, are concerned with issues of moral status and moral protection.
- For the first time the term “bio-ethics” has been referred by a biological scientist named Van Rensselaer Potter in the year 1970.
- In 1971, the Kennedy Institute of Ethics was founded at Georgetown. The main aim of this foundation is to do new research in the field of medical ethics, the founder of this foundation, Andre Hellegers has also regarded this kind of this ethics to be ‘bio-ethics’.
- It is observed that some great literaures have been found in different cultures of the world like Greco-Roman, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, Islamic etc. where people have practiced medicine by giving importance to values and Moral behaviour.
- According to one definition, bioethics is ‘the study of the moral and social implication of techniques resulting from advances in the biological sciences.
- The oldest sub-discipline of bioethics is medical ethics which can be traced back to the introduction of the Hippocratic Oath (500 B.C.E.). Of course, medical ethics is not limited to the Hippocratic Oath; rather that marks the beginning of Western ethical reasoning and decision making in medicine.
- The idea that animals should be part of the moral community mainly evolved in the context of the ethics of utilitarianism in the nineteenth century, most notably spearheaded by Jeremy Bentham, who famously argued that it does not matter morally whether animals can reason but rather whether they can suffer.
- It can be said that environmental ethics deals with the moral dimension of the relationship between human beings and non-human nature”animals and plants, local populations, natural

resources and ecosystems, landscapes, as well as the biosphere and the cosmos.



3.9 FURTHER READING

Jonsen, A. (2000). *A Short History of Medical Ethics.* Oxford University Press.

Jonsen, A. R. (2010). A History of Bioethics as Discipline and Discourse. In N. S. Jecker, A. R. Jonsen, & R. A. Pearlman, *Bioethics: An Introduction to the History, Method, and Practice.* Jones and Bartlett.

Mepham, B. (2005). *Bioethics: An Introduction for the Biosciences.* Oxford University Press.

O'Neill, O. (2002). *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics.* Cambridge University Press.

Reich, W. (1978). Introduction. In W. Reich, *The Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (Vol. 1, pp. xiv-xx). The Free Press.

William, B. (1993). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy.* Fontana



3.10 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Some of the human and non-human issues like abortion, euthanasia, stem-cell research, animal rights, environmental issues like pollution, environmental degradation etc.

Ans to Q No 2: Philosophy

Ans to Q No 3: Moral status and moral protection

Ans to Q No 4: In 1970, biological scientist named Van Renesselaer Potter has taken the term bioethics for the first time.

Ans to Q No 5: In 1971

Ans to Q No 6: Medical Ethics



3.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions:

Q.1. With what issues, environmental ethics actually deals?

Q.2. How has Honderich defined bioethics?

Q.3. Mention Onora O'Neill's definition of bioethics/

Q.4. What are the different areas of bioethics?

B. Short Questions:

Q.1. Write a short note on medical ethics.

Q.2. Briefly explain the concept of animal ethics.

Q.3. Briefly describe the concept of environmental ethics.

Q.4. Write a short note on meaning and definition of bio-ethics.

Q.5. Write a short note on the history of bioethics.

C. Long Questions:

Q.1. Explain the concept of bioethics.

Q.2. Describe the different areas of bioethics.

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