

From literary bioethics to bioethical literature

Natalya Nikolaevna Sedova and Maria Vladimirovna Reymer

Volgograd State Medical University, Volgograd, Russia

Tel. +79033702203, +7(8442)385325

e-mail: nns18@yandex.ru

Abstract. Bioethics as a cultural complex is characterized by the internal heterogeneity. This heterogeneity is intentionally associated not with goals-values, but with the mechanism of their translation. On the one hand, bioethics represents the apologia of the moral attitude to such values as life, death, health and therefore, it aims to develop the axiological apparatus of their understanding and interiorization through philosophy and culture theory, through education, enlightenment and upbringing. On the other hand, practical bioethics is rulemaking in essence, and it involves the creation of the system of expertise, control and sanctions. Only interacting with each other, both of these components of the cultural complex ensure its existence. It would seem that the axiological potential of bioethics should most distinctly manifest itself in culture, particularly in art culture. And its normative potential is realized through interaction with other cultural complexes in their *institutional*, but not in valuable aspect. Unfortunately, in the age of technological civilization and global market, the significance of bioethical norms increases, whereas the development of axiology becomes more abstract in nature. We consider classical literature as the axiological source of bioethics, so the first phase of bioethics formation can be called a literary one. But modern normative determinant in bioethics actualizes a different aspect: bioethical problems cause the creation of literary works and become their plot. Bioethical literature is coming into existence. To appreciate the significance of this transformation it is necessary, above all, to analyze its first stage, and our article is devoted to this analysis.

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Introduction

In recent years in the Western tradition of the bioethical reflection on medical (and not only!) reality, along with the traditional pragmatist orientation, there is a strong influence of postmodernism, which pretends to have the role of culture theory in addition to its philosophical status [1;2;3]. The terms “narrative bioethics” and “literary bioethics” emerged [4;5;6]. Texts analysis became one of the methods of the bioethical reflection. It would seem that the cultural intentions of postmodernism should explicate that status of bioethics, which we insist on, namely, the status of a cultural complex. But the paradox is that the original humanistic message disappears in the detalization of the texts analysis. Moreover, the subject of the analysis— literary texts— is replaced by “stories” and ... medical histories [7; 8]. As a result, the usage of the postmodernist methodology leads to the interpretation of bioethics as the technique of conflict resolution and decision making. One of authors wrote about this phenomenon in “Bioethics in the space of culture” [9, 273 – 276].

Apparently, the reason lies in the fact that the conceptual status of bioethics has not been determined yet. Some scientists position bioethics as a science while others consider it as applied philosophy [10;11;12]. In recent years there has been the distinct trend of bioethical issues towards law [13]. Without

going into the discussion, we only note that the uncertainty of the intellectual status of bioethics is caused by the unique correlation of knowledge and assessments. The scientific truth is formulated as a behavioral norm as well as by the special nonformalizing method of proving fundamental principles, which would be most correctly called the axiological description [14;15;16]. The uncertainty is removed if we give up the necessity of classifying bioethics as any class of sciences, philosophical schools, or moral and legal systems. H.Brody wrote that “ethical problems do not simply have logic—they have a history; they have narrative meaning; and they occur within social and cultural contexts” [14, 109]. Although there is much overlap, Howard Brody, a physician, wrote that “the tension between bioethical and literary goals seems unavoidable . . . in the question of ambiguity” [14, 99]. We believe the most promising in this respect is to consider bioethics as a phenomenon of culture, which has autonomy and at the same time integrates all cultural intentions, which relate to life as value, since the subject of bioethics is the moral attitude to all living beings and, above all, to human life. In this context typical problems of bioethics, such as the issues of cloning, euthanasia, medicalization, in vitro fertilization, transplantation, clinical trials on humans, can find their solution in the terms of cultural traditions, cultural experience,

cultural stereotypes and expectations [9].

Literary sources of emerging bioethics in Russia

Bioethics has much longer history than it is commonly believed now. Let us illustrate this fact using the example of the artistic reflection on bioethical problems in Russian literature.

For a number of reasons bioethics in Russia appeared later than in the West, just 20 years ago, when bioethical principles and the mechanisms of their practical application in medical activity have been already formed. But in the current period of healthcare reforms in Russia it is evident that American and Western European practice of the moral conflicts regulation in the field of medicine is not always applicable. In the USA, for example, modern bioethics is considered as an element of legal culture. Its peculiarity is to review some particular cases of conflict between patients' rights and advanced biomedical technologies. And this is not accidentally. As a state the United States was formed on the basis of the establishment of civil equality [17].

Much was said about the "mysteries of the Russian soul" in the Russian cultural tradition of the XIXth century. Remember though the poetic form of N. Berdyaev's reasoning on contradiction, "antinomy" of Russian existence. The contradiction of paternalism and the hierarchical pattern of the Russian social structure had been formed over centuries on the base of the combination of factors: the community with its collective employment assistance, the special geographical position between the West and the East, the vastness of the ethnic territory. It's more correct for us to consider the moral relations in bioethics in close association with the Russian cultural heritage because the Russian literature of the XIX-early XX centuries was the quintessence of human understanding of morality and proper attitude to life.

"Nравственность" (personal morality) in the XIX-early XX centuries became an important social-psychological category of the Russian culture. There is no adequate translation for "nравственность" in other languages as this word means the category which is typical only of the Russian national consciousness. We believe the phrase "personal morality" most fully conveys the essence of this category. And only in the Russian cultural tradition this category remains. In the West it is unambiguously understood as more abstract and impersonal "morality" without the Russian traditional element of spirituality. At the same time the core of the Russian intelligentsia was formed in the culture of Russia. It included philosophers, doctors and writers. Russian literature became the unique highly moral and philosophical phenomenon of the world culture.

One can analyze a number of literary works

of this period that are included in the treasury of world culture. These works consider medical, private medical questions from moral and philosophical perspectives. According to Russian tradition, literature was the primary way of the discussion and formation of philosophical views. Literary creation of that period undoubtedly can be called "philosophical searches" of the Russian intelligentsia. At that time preperception, feeling, "guessing", which cannot be logically and rationally explained, became attractive for the philosophical reflection.

Moving from the intuitive, "super-rational" preperception and guessing can be clearly observed by analyzing literary works. All the art of the last third of the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century is based on irrationalism. But literature is the most "rational" art form. In literature irrational things can be packed in the rational, linguistic shell. No wonder that literature was recognized as the most important art form during that period. This is because language is always the rational form of thinking.

Long before bioethical problems were clearly formed in the last third of the XXth century, they had been already felt deeply in the Russian literary community: the questions, which haven't been answered yet, had been the subjects of lively debates by the Russian intelligentsia.

Leo Tolstoy's bioethics

We can say that bioethics grew out of Russian literature. Moreover, in the best traditions of the genre, it was formed as the set of principles and rules, the system of moral requirements, personified in the images of a doctor and a patient.

For example, biomedical problems from the point of view of axiology and moral reflection are considered in the story "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" by L.N. Tolstoy [18]. Tolstoy distinctly shows how such rational and reasonable in his actions Ivan Ilyich gives a cry of surprise in the face of his imminent death: "How ridiculous it is and how stupid!" Such an insignificant act (stumbled up the stairs, giving instructions to the upholsterer!) stumbled then and now he is dying. Tolstoy clearly notices the amazing characteristic of the Russian mentality. Russian people think too much about death in general and do not think of their own. "The example of a syllogism, which Ivan Ilyich studied in Kizevetr's logic— Kay is a human being, all humans are mortal, therefore, Kay is mortal— all his life seemed right only towards Kay, but not towards him". The amazing thing is "he could make many people respect his person, but he never really respected his own life or other persons' life". And it was very terrible when he saw that "the doctor treated him like he treated the defendant before..."

Here we see not only the problems of purely

medical ethics; we also observe the reflection on the fundamental bioethical issue – life as value. In fact, the value perception of the changes is recorded primarily as the fear for life. Life always takes an important place in the hierarchy of values, and the attitude to it determines, in varying degrees, all human relationships. Obviously, from all numerous interpretations of the notion of “life”, its moral sense is actualized in the first place.

But just here we see that the actual ethical pathos of the profession, which specifies the model of healing, is replaced by the socio-political pathos; bioethical option is not used, and the question if the doctor will deal with his role in the situation of “humanistic paternalism” has no answer.

Here failure to tell all, typical of Russian classic literature, is distinctly demonstrated. Ethical reflections on existence on the base of medical material do not lead to clear and evident principles of bioethics. That theurgical concern, which is typical of the Russian intelligentsia in general, and especially typical of Russian literary classics, takes them into social problematics. Is it the lack of philosophical intentions, preventing from understanding the essence of the problem? Or has not the time for bioethics come yet? Obviously, both reasonings are correct.

Ivan Turgenev’ bioethics

The classics of Russian literature always have the absolute preference for the paternalistic model of healing. Though they have compassion on patients and try to understand them, constantly calling to see personalities in them. But these are only appeals. A real personality is a doctor, at least for the heroes of Gertzen [19] and Turgenev. Only Turgenev attempts to have a look at ethical problems in medicine on the other hand. He creates an intermediate option – the doctor in the role of the patient, in other words, terminally ill Bazarov in the novel “Fathers and children” [20].

Does this mean that Turgenev outachieved Gertzen on the way of the bioethical reflection on medicine as the specific sphere of culture? Did the idea that every human life was not less valuable than the life of the society excite his mind? We will never know it, but the fact that his novel brings about these reflections expresses volumes. Moreover, this work shows the understanding of the direct relation of medicine with eternal values, its belonging to them. That is why medicine itself acts as value at the end of the novel. Here, on the one hand, there is the distrust to paternalism (the ambiguity of “medical” characters in the novel) and on the other hand, there is the inevitable recognition of its right to exist, implicitly associated with the recognition of the value of medicine.

The reason of these observations is promoting

the definite ethical concept, which recognizes the absolute value of life and the idea of the inevitability of punishment for the denial of this value. In general, we can say that Turgenev avoided sociologization of the medical subject, outlining the prospect of its ethical development.

Anton Chekhov’ bioethics

At the turn of the XIX-XX centuries the historical situation required the critical approach to assessing the state of medicine in Russia. And at the end of the XIXth century much of the actual and integrated material on medicine was gathered in the journal “God’s world”. This edition was famous for the first publication of “A doctor’s notebook” by V.V. Veresaev. Here we also see “Rural pictures. From the memoirs of a woman doctor” by A. Rozellon-Soshalskaya and a story of the famous Russian scientist and practitioner A.N. Beketov “Doctor Froman”. Medical problematics is touched upon in the works of D.N. Mamin-Sibiryak “On a new way” and in “Ascetic” by S. Zheromskiy. But is this problematics really medical?

In all cases the authors sought to show the characters of the heroes, starting out from the profession of a doctor. Here the focus is not only on the definition of ethical problems in medicine, but also on creating the image of the ideal doctor who carries out the mission – the cure of body and soul through love and mercy for people. And this is the field of bioethics, but not medicine. All the works of “medical subject” show a very distinct paradigm – medicine can and must not only heal, but also educate, change the person for the better; not only health is associated with medicine, but also the soul of the human being, his/her world-view and attitude.

Chekhov shows it most brightly. Of course, Chekhov as a doctor perceives medicine as a professional. Chekhov as a writer reveals axiological, but not operational aspects even when he considers medicine as the center of the truth. This truth is morally interpreted as it is about life and death, about the ability to create life in very real and at the same time wonderful senses. Remember though a well-known story “Ionitch” [21]. This is the story about how the doctor refuses to feel the sense of being if death puts a limit to life, the “perfect body” decays, and there is nothing except physicality in the world.

All Chekhov’s works reveal his personal medical creed exclusively as moral law, almost according to Kant. An ideal doctor appears to be much easier, more available and closer to the ground, to everyday life. The doctor will not take on the excessive role of Christ, but he will approach Christ to the best of his human forces, healing the body and soul of the fellowman. Such high requirements for a doctor

are shown in the story "A doctor's visit" [22].

The peculiarity of this story lies in the description of the Orthodox way of life: the journey of doctor Korolev to the patient's place happens on the eve of the holiday when everybody is inclined "to relax and maybe to pray". Everything is very ordinary in this story: no bright search, no sharp storyline (like adultery, love, unrighteous deed, etc.), no even fatal patient. On the contrary, the patient "is all right, only nerves are out of order". The motives of the general social disorder are sketched by implicit lines: the factory monotony, mutilated by capital, people and relationships. But all that is the usual earth circle. Chekhov evidently reduces the social pathos of Korolev's observations. By a single remark the author transfers that pathos into the eternal layers of religious metaphysics. In another style this remark would become the most pathetic gesture: "the Master, for whom everything is done here, is the devil". Chekhov recognizes *who* is "the Prince of this world", and he takes his character from the direct combat with the devil to sympathy for the *fellowman* that the doctor will treat as an *equal*, equal in the common destiny of mankind, not dominating the suffering "patient".

Vikentiy Veresaev's bioethics

It is obvious that the famous Russian doctor-writer V.V. Veresaev tries to prove that a true doctor is not just a doctor; he is a healer of his own and patients' souls. The writer shows the doctor's activity as both a scientific and spiritual search, as the healing of all things on the earth, the rebuilding of the world. His work "A doctor's notebook" [23] had a wide public response; it brought Veresaev wide popularity not only in Russia, but also abroad. "A doctor's notebook" was continually republished, actively discussed in the press and at specially organized medical debates as this work showed very clearly his bioethical position. Bioethical problems are not only the problems of the medical community, they are problems for everybody.

Here are the same ideas as in A.P. Chekhov's works. Chekhov and Veresaev have different talents and literary skills, but the ethical-social approach to the problems of life and health in the society unite them. Unlike Chekhov's prose, "A. doctor's notebook" is not fiction in the usual sense of this word, and it is not pure opinion journalism. Here the presentation of the events and the special attention to the author's experience become important (for example, in "The notebook of student Pavlov" by S. S. Yushkevich, "A Young doctor's notebook" by M.A. Bulgakov and so on). Based on the traditions of F.M. Dostoyevsky and L.N. Tolstoy, a new type of notes-essays was created in Russian culture, in which philosophicity, documentary authenticity, artistic merit, publicity and spirituality, which show the consistent formation of

personality and the formation of identity in the result of understanding the experience, were equally important. We know that this essay method is typical of the theoretical thought in modern bioethics, according to which, each case is individually interpreted and evaluated. Thus, we can assume that these literary experiments of understanding and experiences of moral collisions of life, death and health introduced the way of their rationalizing in modern bioethics.

"A doctor's notebook" by Veresaev (1901) was a very significant phenomenon of Russian culture. Throughout the whole of the XXth century, the issues, identified in this work, were of immediate interest and indicated the moral aspirations of all the Russian intelligentsia at the turn of centuries. Here we should note another aspect of the moral reflection of Russian doctors and the intelligentsia in general. The hero of "A doctor's notebook" comes to the conclusion that for the salvation of people, in the first place, it is necessary to work for the elimination of those conditions which "make young old, which, in fact, reduce their short human life as it is". As mentioned above, this conclusion is based not only (and not so much!) on the experience of medical practice, but also on the common cultural foundation, which was firmly established in Russia by the beginning of the XXth century.

The genre uncertainty became the typical phenomenon for the Russian literature of that period. From this point of view, "A doctor's notebook" is not an exception as well as "Sakhalin Island" by A.P. Chekhov, "the Diary of a writer" by F.M. Dostoyevsky and others. Obligatory veracity of lifestyle, originating from the rich factual and documentary material, philosophical generalization, plasticity and figurative specificity, associated with literature, are connected in these works.

Mikhail Bulgakov's bioethics

The impact of ethical searches, reflected by Veresaev, can be seen in one of the early works by Mikhail Bulgakov – "A Young Doctor's Notebook" [24]. This work shows not only the writer's features, which in course of time will be his author's individuality. It also demonstrates his sincere desire to find together with readers the answers to the complex moral tasks, which the XXth century began to raise before the person. From his own experience the hero of Mikhail Bulgakov acquires the sense of the extraordinary responsibility of the doctor before patients.

But there is another theme in Bulgakov's and Veresaev's "Notebooks...", including the preface to "A doctor's notebook", written by Veresaev after several years after the first edition. It is an urgent

question – is it necessary for “ignorant people to know about the existence” of serious problems, the solution of which is not unambiguous even for a doctor? Cannot that “destroy trust to doctors”? This question is the basic for paternalism in the whole, for not only medical, but for “all-Russian” paternalism as well. Recall that the question of patient’s trust to a doctor was one of the main questions in A.P. Chekhov’s views.

As mentioned above, the generalized image of the Russian doctor - public figure was created in that period. Joining art and actuality in the text, Russian writers succeeded to show that the spiritual self-development necessarily brought heroes to wisdom through mistakes and weakness. As a result, it was created the impressive objective picture of not only modern medicine, but the society as a whole.

The professional analysis of literary works by medical specialists always ends with the discussion of moral problems. The analysis of these works allows singling out not only medical problems, but bioethical problems in them. Health and cultural contexts of bioethics are integrated into a single whole in these works. Unfortunately, modern scientific research in bioethics often fails in doing this. “Medical portraits” of Russian classics, doctors’ view on the ordinary person amazed even contemporaries.

Franz Kafka’s bioethics

But why is the interpretation of bioethical problems is so different in Europe and Russia? Twenty years ago Russian science treated bioethical problematics as “international”. It goes without saying that bioethical problems are common. But evidently, as mentioned above, the moral response and answers to them are unlike in different cultures. And in recent times this fact has been observed more distinctly. This difference did not appear yesterday, and we can view it in the framework of the distinction of cultural grounds.

Of course, Western literature has also many works in which complex questions of medical ethics are shown for an ordinary person. But their interpretation, the “feeling” of these issues and the conclusions, made on the basis of all axiological systems, markedly differ from the Russian cultural tradition. As an example, we can study the famous novel “A country doctor” by Franz Kafka [25].

Generally, the comparison of values, aesthetics against ethics, and the preference for the latter seem anachronistic to the Western writer-modernist of the beginning of the XXth century. Kafka’s prose attracts readers, first of all, by the aesthetic perfection, promoted not only by the refined decoration and completeness of each paragraph, but also by the mystery of his works.

In Europe a doctor inevitably faces the fact

that he/she has to identify himself/herself with a patient. Kafka shows it in the stunning by its emotion and intensity scene: the doctor was placed in the bed with the sick boy. The author describes the great feeling of helplessness and professional incompetence. The hero of the story is a country doctor, who at the same time demonstrates the inability to sacrifice himself and becomes a victim in the rite of sacrifice and atonement; he does not undergo affiliation with the country community. No conclusions, no rational explanations, nothing. It is like a dream, which does not demand the explanation in reality.

You never see the similar situation in Russian literature. All the works of Russian writers show the clear theme of compassion. But the compassion is fundamentally different. It is rooted in the paternalistic attitude of a doctor to a patient. This paternalistic attitude is based on the spiritual mission, given by God. It may be no accident that such an evident conservative approach to bioethics is observed in the territory of the former Russian Empire [26].

According to White, there are objective methods for assessment of culture since “culture is a tool to make life safe and long for the human race. One tool can be better than another”. In the end, the progress, according to White, “is reduced to the extent in which people may exercise the control over the forces of nature through culture” [27, 31]. Moreover, by such manners it is possible to compare not only technical achievements, but also social systems, philosophy, religion, ethics. But this can be done only without the separation from the corresponding cultural context.

Conclusion

The modern understanding of the moral problems in Russia is impossible without the interpretation of the moral foundation, which was laid at the turn of the last century. Moreover, the birth of bioethics in literary works had initiated the program of its development for the next period until enshrined values and developed norms became required for the science. Therefore, the hermeneutic analysis of “medical” themes in literature appears to be perspective. It gives the possibility to explicate the configuration of values on the base of which modern bioethics can be structured. Due to such analysis, we can realize that the formation of principles and values of bioethics had begun long before the name of “Bioethics” appeared. This axiological structuring had the purely cultural nature and was most fully reflected in fiction literature. George Khushf writes, “bioethics is a large, interdisciplinary field, with contributions from philosophy, theology, literature, history, law, sociology, anthropology, and the diverse health professions” [17, 105]. Properly bioethical literature

did not exist. Indeed, it is difficult to name some classical work which exclusively deals with a bioethical problem. But considering the classical works, the key words of which are "doctor", "disease", "death", "life", we can speak about literary bioethics with certainty. In his introduction to the revised edition of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, editor in chief Warren T. Reich defines bioethics as "the systematic study of the moral dimensions—including moral vision, decisions, conduct, and policies of the life sciences and health care, employing a variety of ethical methodologies in an interdisciplinary setting" [28, 2950]. Interdisciplinary setting can be completed by fiction literature. General reflection on the meaning of life in these works became the impulse for the further development of bioethical problems in the scientific field. Now, in the era of high technology, we observe the opposite situation: the use of bioethical problematics in the plots of literary works. Does that mean the transformation of literary bioethics into bioethical literature? To answer this question it is necessary to carry out a special research, the presupposition of which we have tried to formulate in our article.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Sedova Natalya Nikolaevna
Volgograd State Medical University, Volgograd,
Russia, Pavshikh Bortsov Sq., 1, office 411,
Volgograd, 40131, Russia
Tel. +79033702203, +7(8442)385325
e-mail: nns18@yandex.ru

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