

FROM INTEGRATIVE BIOETHICS TO PSEUDOSCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Integrative bioethics is a brand of bioethics conceived and propagated by a group of Croatian philosophers and other scholars. This article discusses and shows that the approach encounters several serious difficulties. In criticizing certain standard views on bioethics and in presenting their own, the advocates of integrative bioethics fall into various conceptual confusions and inconsistencies. Although presented as a project that promises to deal with moral dilemmas created by modern science and technology, integrative bioethics does not contain the slightest normativity or action-guiding capacity. Portrayed as a scientific and interdisciplinary enterprise, integrative bioethics displays a large number of pseudoscientific features that throw into doubt its overall credibility.

INTRODUCTION

‘Contemporary moral philosophy’, as Bernard Williams once said, ‘has found an original way of being boring, which is by not discussing moral issues at all.’¹ Similar criticism can be directed against ‘integrative bioethics’ – a Croatian brand of bioethics conceived by philosophers Ante Čović and Hrvoje Jurić, and further developed and propagated by scholars such as Luka Tomašević (theology), Nada Gosić (medicine), Igor Čatić (mechanical engineering), and others. Integrative bioethics occupies a prominent place in the Croatian scientific community. Numerous articles have been written and regular symposia organized on this topic in the last ten years. The Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports finances research projects about it, its advocates teach about it at various universities, and the Croatian media often portray it as one of Croatia’s most significant intellectual products.

I will argue that all these features of integrative bioethics are just a veneer that hides nothing of any scientific, philosophical or bioethical value. After outlining its basic ideas, I will show that integrative bioethics is burdened by serious conceptual and methodological problems.

¹ B. Williams. 1972. *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: xvii.

Integrative bioethics does not contain the slightest normativity or action-guiding capacity. (Integrative bioethicists, interestingly, never offer their own ‘integrative’ solutions to concrete bioethical dilemmas and keep most of their writings at the ‘programmatic’ level.) Finally, I will argue that although integrative bioethics is presented by its advocates as a *scientific* interdisciplinary project, it actually displays a surprising number of typical pseudoscientific features.

INTEGRATIVE BIOETHICS: THE ‘ZAGREB MANTRA’

In order to understand what integrative bioethics is, let us start with bioethics in general. Philosophical dictionaries and encyclopedias usually define bioethics as ‘the subfield of ethics that concerns the ethical issues arising in medicine and from advances in biological science’,² as the ‘branch of ethics that investigates problems specifically arising from medical and biological practice’³ or as ‘a branch of applied ethics dealing with the moral issues

² D.W. Brock. 1999. Bioethics. In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. R. Audi, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 88.

³ S. Blackburn. 1996. *Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press: 44.

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about life and death arising from the modern biological and medical research and health care practice.⁴ As Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer point out, although the term 'bioethics' is still occasionally used in the sense of 'an ecological ethics', it is 'much more commonly used in the narrower sense of the study of ethical issues arising from the biological and medical sciences.'⁵

Integrative bioethicists resolutely reject the above views of bioethics and emphasize that the term 'bioethics' should cover a much wider set of ethical issues than just those arising within the field of biomedicine; actually, they believe 'bioethics' should cover *all* ethical questions that are *in any way* related to the phenomenon of life. Thus Čović claims that bioethics is 'the pluriperspectival area in which the interaction of diverse perspectives creates footholds and standards for orientation when it comes to questions about life or about conditions and circumstances of its preservation.'⁶ Jurić sees bioethics as 'an open area for the encounter and the dialogue between different sciences and activities, as well as for different approaches and worldviews, which is meant to articulate, discuss and resolve ethical questions related to life, to life as a whole and to all parts of that whole, to life in all its forms, stages, phases and appearances.'⁷ The widest view of bioethics is defended by Tomašević, who holds that bioethics is not merely 'a new interdisciplinary and pluriperspectival science or area', not merely 'a science that works on concrete problems and on the analysis of the rational processes, trying to determine directions of action in order to diminish conflicts within the society', but ultimately 'nothing else than the *love for life*'.⁸

Let us now take a closer look at some more specific aspects of integrative bioethics.

As we have seen, integrative bioethicists strongly reject the narrowing of the term 'bioethics' to 'medical ethics' or to moral problems arising in biomedicine and clinical practice. They usually issue warnings about the danger of 'the misuse of the scientific results that can cause irreversible and catastrophic consequences for the man and the life as a whole.'⁹ According to Jurić, 'the broadening of

the bioethics' subject area' follows from the 'insight about the entanglement of problems that humans are facing in the techno-scientific age and the problems related to other living beings and the nature as a whole.'¹⁰ Tomašević draws attention to the global extent of today's bioethics, pointing out that bioethics has become 'the planetary ethics of life in our time, because our entire life and world is threatened by the scientific-technological approach of domination over nature that, at the end of the day, amounts to utility.'¹¹ Gosić writes in the same vein: 'The increasing complexity of contents left behind scientific-technological accomplishments in human life, in other forms of life and in the nature as a whole, had a tendency to revert bioethics to its original meaning – the moral responsibility of man for preservation and protection of total life.'¹²

Although integrative bioethicists remain silent when it comes to offering their own unique ('integrative') answers to particular bioethical problems (such as euthanasia, abortion or cloning), they do have some ideas about what should be done in order to achieve those answers. Given these ideas, integrative bioethics can be suitably called 'Zagreb Mantra' (just as 'principlism' is sometimes called 'Georgetown mantra'), primarily because of its advocates' persistent repeating of the following five key-concepts: 'multidisciplinarity', 'interdisciplinarity', 'transdisciplinarity', 'pluriperspectivity' and 'integrativity'. Jurić explains the first three concepts in the following way:

Multidisciplinarity means – to gather all human sciences and activities that are relevant for bioethical questions; *interdisciplinarity* – to encourage dialogue and to find a mode of cooperation between all these disciplines; and *transdisciplinarity* – to overcome mutual differences, that is, to unify differences into a unique, bioethical view focused on questions that cannot be unraveled from the perspective of *one* science or *one* area.¹³

'Pluriperspectivity', says Jurić, denotes the 'unification and dialogical mediation of not only scientific, but also of non-scientific, i.e. a-scientific contributions, including diverse ways of reflection, diverse traditions of thought and cultural traditions, that is, diverse views that rest on cultural, religious, political and other particularities.'¹⁴ However, multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and pluriperspectivity need to be *unified* or *integrated* (hence the name of this bioethical school) in the following way:

¹⁰ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 77.

¹¹ Tomašević, *op. cit.* note 8, p. 11.

¹² N. Gosić. 2005. *Bioetička edukacija*. Zagreb: Pergamena: 16.

¹³ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 84.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 84.

⁴ N. Bunnin & J. Yu. 2004. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell: 84.

⁵ H. Kuhse & P. Singer. 2006. Introduction. In *Bioethics: An Anthology*. H. Kuhse & P. Singer, ed. Oxford: Blackwell: 1.

⁶ A. Čović. 2004. *Etika i bioetika: Razmišljanja na pragu bioetičke epohe*. Zagreb: Pergamena: 11; see also A. Čović, 2005. Bioethik unter den Bedingungen des Postkommunismus – Fallbeispiel Kroatien. In *Bioethik und kulturelle Pluralität: Die südosteuropäische Perspektive*. A. Čović & T.S. Hoffmann, eds. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag: 151.

⁷ H. Jurić. 2007. Uporišta za integrativnu bioetiku u djelu Van Rensselaera Pottera. In *Integrativna bioetika i izazovi suvremene civilizacije*. V. Valjan, ed. Sarajevo: Bioetičko društvo BiH: 83.

⁸ L. Tomašević. 2009. Predgovor. In *Od nove medicinske etike do integrativne bioetike*. A. Čović, N. Gosić & L. Tomašević, eds. Zagreb: Pergamena / Hrvatsko bioetičko društvo: 11.

⁹ Čović, *op. cit.* note 6, p. 164.

Integrativity should therefore denote the task (that is, the capacity) of bioethics to gather all the abovementioned differences into a unique *bioethical view*, rather than into a disciplinary and disciplined scientific framework. Therefore, it is more about promoting a bioethical view in various disciplines and approaches, than about compressing different and particular views into one bioethical disciplinary mold.¹⁵

As an added explanation of the peculiar nature of integrative bioethics Jurić offers the following analogy: '*Integrative bioethics* could be understood as a solid body in a given space, whose role is to permanently absorb the energy and to radiate it towards other bodies in space that are susceptible to that energy'. He also emphasizes that the role of bioethics is not 'to establish final objective truths about *bios*' but to 'provide *orientation*', because 'providing *orientation* for solving some of the crucial problems of the mankind and of the Planet' is the 'first and most important aim of integrative bioethics'.¹⁶ However, as I will try to show in the following sections, to expect help and orientation from this kind of integrative bioethics is too optimistic.

CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION, INCONSISTENCY, DOUBLE STANDARDS

Integrative bioethicists take definitions of bioethics extremely seriously: they often repeat their own definition and, sometimes, harshly criticize definitions that differ from their 'Zagreb Mantra'. In doing this, however, they fall into conceptual confusions, inconsistencies and the use of double standards. A good example of this is Jurić's¹⁷ scrutiny of the characterization of bioethics by Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer.¹⁸

Jurić criticizes Kuhse and Singer for defining bioethics as both (a) 'a branch of ethics, or, more specifically, of applied ethics' and (b) 'a specialized, although, interdisciplinary, field of study'.¹⁹ Jurić believes that there is a contradiction between these two parts of their definition because, as he says, 'if something is disciplinary, defined as a discipline and as such demarcated, then it cannot at the same time (in itself) be interdisciplinary, because

interdisciplinarity implies interrelations between two or more distinct disciplines.²⁰ For Jurić, the first part of the Kuhse-Singer definition (according to which bioethics is 'a branch of ethics, or, more specifically, of applied ethics') is particularly problematic because, as he says, 'something cannot be interdisciplinary, and still remain within the domain of one discipline'.²¹ Jurić concludes his 'dialogue' with a comment about Kuhse and Singer by refusing to 'continue deciphering their contradictions', and by warning the reader that their definition of bioethics reflects a mistaken and too narrow understanding of bioethics as the (new) medical ethics and/or a branch of (applied) ethics.²² Jurić's criticism of Kuhse and Singer can be summarized as an argument with two premises and the conclusion:

- (1) Applied ethics is a discipline and as such cannot be interdisciplinary.
 - (2) Bioethics is interdisciplinary.
- Therefore: (3) Bioethics cannot be the branch of applied ethics.

What is wrong with this argument? It begins with the characterization of applied ethics as the 'discipline' (a characterization that is usually just 'nominal' or 'instrumental') and draws the far-reaching ('essentialist' or 'realist') conclusion that applied ethics cannot be interdisciplinary. This reasoning from 'concept' to 'reality', however, is totally arbitrary and absurd: if universalized, it would imply, for example, that geography or social psychology cannot be interdisciplinary just because they are sometimes called 'disciplines'. Applied ethics is probably one of the 'most interdisciplinary disciplines' of contemporary philosophy, which is confirmed already by the diversity of its issues: from euthanasia and abortion to terrorism and torture. In order to deal with such issues, besides being competent in philosophy and ethics, one needs to be competent in at least some other science(s). If this is not interdisciplinarity, it is hard to say what is. Dictionary definitions also emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of applied ethics. Brenda Almond observes that 'practitioners of applied ethics may be more willing than proponents of traditional academic moral philosophy to recognize that psychology and sociology, a knowledge of culture and history, the insights of good literature, and even an understanding of humans as biological entities, are all relevant to the determination of moral issues in personal and public life'.²³ By introducing the arbitrary and absurd assumption that applied ethics is

¹⁵ Ibid: 85.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ H. Kuhse & P. Singer. 2006. Introduction. In *Bioethics: An Anthology*, H. Kuhse & P. Singer, eds. Oxford: Blackwell; H. Kuhse & P. Singer. 2009. What is bioethics? A historical introduction. In *A Companion to Bioethics*. H. Kuhse & P. Singer, eds. Wiley-Blackwell. Texts by Kuhse and Singer cited here are from editions later than those cited by Jurić. However, since both texts (including their paginations) remained unaltered, that does not affect my argumentation in this section.

¹⁹ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 81.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid: 82.

²³ B. Almond. 2005. Applied ethics. In *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. E. Craig, ed. London and New York: Routledge: 25.

not interdisciplinary, Jurić's criticism of Kuhse and Singer becomes itself arbitrary and absurd.

Jurić's reading of Kuhse and Singer is also a 'straw man argument'. It should be noted, contrary to Jurić, that Kuhse and Singer are not rigorously trying to 'define bioethics', let alone to define it once and for all, which is obvious from the fact that they, in the very same texts,²⁴ describe it relatively freely: as the 'field of inquiry', 'field of study', 'field of learning', 'field of thought', 'discipline', 'enterprise', and even 'interest'. Jurić misrepresents their claims when he says that they 'define bioethics as "a modern version of a much older field of thought, namely medical ethics"'.²⁵ Kuhse and Singer say something altogether different. They say: '... bioethics *can also be seen* as a modern version of a much older field of thought, namely medical ethics' [emphasis added].²⁶ By glossing over one part of their sentence ('can also be seen') Jurić himself creates the impression that Kuhse and Singer define bioethics *exclusively* as the modern version of medical ethics. In the same way, Jurić misrepresents their words when he attributes to them the definition of bioethics as the branch of ethics or applied ethics. Kuhse and Singer say: 'Bioethics *can be seen* as a branch of ethics, or, more specifically, of applied ethics' [emphasis added].²⁷ Once again, Jurić glosses over the important part of their sentence ('can be seen') because otherwise his criticism would miss its target entirely.

One of the basic principles of philosophical argumentation is to present the opponent's views faithfully and in their strongest version, and only afterwards to criticize them. Apparently, Jurić did not respect this principle of fair argumentation, just as he did not respect another important principle: consistency or avoiding doing exactly what we criticize in others. Namely, something that Jurić sees as a 'conceptual vice' of Kuhse and Singer (defining bioethics as part of applied ethics or ethics) is a "sin" present in his own approach when he explains the connection between integrative bioethics on one hand and philosophy and ethics on the other. Jurić claims that certain early attempts to establish bioethics remained unsuccessful due to their 'lack of a more firm foundation and more precise apparatus', that 'only with the help of philosophy can one prepare the conceptual apparatus for the bioethical debate', and that 'only philosophy can provide the conceptual foundation and framework for that debate, that is, to conceptualize and realize transdisciplinarity, pluriperspectivity and integrativity, including also a solution to the principal and individual problems of cultural relativism'.²⁸ Čović claims that bioethics, on

one hand, 'needs to rely on categorial apparatus of the ethical discourse, on developed ethical theories and argumentative structures, while, on the other hand, it has the task to open questions inaccessible to the philosophical profession and to establish responsibility of the higher rank that transcends the ethical horizon'.²⁹

Despite their rhetorical effect, the above claims are hopelessly vague. If 'conceptual apparatus', 'foundation' and 'framework' of bioethics are provided only by philosophy, if 'transdisciplinarity', 'pluriperspectivity' and 'integrativity' of bioethics are realized only by philosophy, and if bioethics needs to rely on the 'developed ethical theories' – is not the bioethics then, *nolens volens*, a branch of philosophy or applied ethics? Furthermore, what is the point of bioethics relying on the 'categorial apparatus of the ethical discourse' and on 'developed ethical theories' if questions to be so opened will remain 'inaccessible to philosophical profession' and will 'transcend the ethical horizon'? Would it not be wiser to rely on the 'categorial apparatus' of some 'discourse' and 'theories' to which the newly opened questions will be accessible? But which 'discourse' is that, which 'categorial apparatus' and which 'theories'? Integrative bioethicists give no answer to any of these obvious and pressing questions.

Inconsistencies are inherent to integrative bioethics in yet another respect. Although they emphasize 'pluriperspectivity' as the vital element of their methodology (in the sense of including 'diverse ways of reflection, diverse traditions of thought and cultural traditions, that is, diverse views that rest on cultural, religious, political and other particularities'),³⁰ it is obvious that integrative bioethicists actually accept only one particular perspective – the perspective they call the 'perspective of European philosophy'. As Čović explicitly says, the task of bioethics is to 'regenerate the spiritual potential of the European philosophical heritage'.³¹ It remains unclear, among other things, which part of the 'European philosophical heritage' Čović has in mind here: Ancient philosophy? Christian philosophy? Rationalism? Empiricism? Idealism? Nihilism? Marxism? All mentioned? And why do integrative bioethicists give preference to 'European philosophical heritage' over some other philosophical tradition? Insisting on European philosophical heritage is obviously inconsistent not only with 'pluriperspectivism', but also with the claim that 'the traditional ethical apparatus has proven to be insufficient for articulation of and answering to novel questions'.³² It remains mysterious why are integrative bioethicists sending an SOS to

²⁴ Kuhse & Singer, *op. cit.* note 18.

²⁵ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 81.

²⁶ Kuhse & Singer, *op. cit.* (2009) note 18, pp. 3–4.

²⁷ Kuhse & Singer, *op. cit.* (2006) note 18, p. 1.

²⁸ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 96.

²⁹ Čović, *op. cit.* note 6, p. 133.

³⁰ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 84.

³¹ Čović, *op. cit.* note 6, p. 12.

³² H. Jurić. 2007. Što je bioetika? [What is Bioethics?], *Vijenac* (340) 15 March: 12. Available at: http://www.matica.hr/Vijenac/vijenac340.nsf/AllWebDocs/Sto_je_bioetika_ [Accessed 5 April 2012].

traditional philosophy and ethics, while simultaneously claiming them to be incapable not only of providing answers to bioethical questions, but even of formulating them.

THE ABSENCE OF NORMATIVITY

Except for its ambivalent attitude towards the tradition of ethics and its absurd understanding of applied ethics, a particularly problematic feature of integrative bioethics is that it does not contain even the slightest normativity or the action-guiding capacity. Ethics and bioethics are *normative* disciplines and, when faced with concrete moral problems, we expect them to guide our decisions and action. As integrative bioethicists themselves acknowledge, concrete moral problems created by science and technology is what actually initiated the birth and rapid development of bioethics as a discipline that should provide solutions to those problems. How important is the action-guiding capacity for any ethics is well captured by Peter Singer who said that ‘ethics is not an ideal system that is all very noble in theory but no good in practice’ and that ‘ethical judgment that is no good in practice must suffer from a theoretical defect as well, for the whole point of ethical judgments is to guide practice.’³³ When it comes to integrative bioethics, however, it is hard to imagine in which way it could guide our practice or help us find solutions to concrete bioethical problems.

Integrative bioethicists, admittedly, do say that their job is to ‘provide orientation’. For them, bioethics is ‘the pluriperspectival area in which the interaction of diverse perspectives creates footholds and standards for orientation when it comes to questions about life or about conditions and circumstances of its preservation’,³⁴ whereas ‘unification of heterogeneous perspectives, both cultural and scientific, into a new paradigm of orientational knowledge is the methodological specificity and epistemological innovation of integrative bioethics.’³⁵ ‘Providing orientation’ and creating ‘orientational knowledge’ are surely normative activities of some kind, but integrative bioethicists are obviously unwilling to unambiguously say that their project is ‘normative’ or ‘prescriptive’.

If we are confronted with a certain concrete and morally problematic situation and ask integrative bioethicist for advice, what kind of answer will she give? She will probably say that we should consult all sciences relevant for that particular situation, and that we have to enter into the dialogue with all cultural, political, philo-

sophical, scientific and religious perspectives that are somehow relevant in that situation. After that, our integrative bioethicist will tell us, we need to integrate all these perspectives (both scientific and non-scientific) into the unique bioethical view. This integration, however, as we will find out next, should not be merely mechanical, but it ought to be the ‘real integration’ or ‘the creation of the unique platform for the debate about ethical problems related to life – to life as a whole and in all its contextually determinable nuances.’³⁶

After this ‘integrative’ counseling, yet more things would remain unclear. Why are integrative bioethicists so optimistic about the ‘real integration’ of ‘diverse perspectives’? Can we really achieve, for example, the ‘real integration’ of some scientific perspective about the status of embryo and some religious perspective about reincarnation? Even if we create the ‘unique platform for the debate about ethical problems related to life’ (whatever that might mean), the fact remains, as integrative bioethicists themselves emphasize, that at that point ‘the debate about ethical problems’ only begins, rather than ends. However, if we then raise some perplexing bioethical question (for example, are we justified to perform an abortion or to sacrifice part of the wilderness in order to build a factory that will employ thousands of people), we will find out only that what (bio)ethicists knew long before the appearance of integrative bioethics – that various philosophical, cultural and religious traditions have different and opposed moral demands and that, in practice, we cannot satisfy them all, regardless of our theoretical insistence on ‘respect’ to and ‘dialogue’ between various perspectives. Integrative bioethics, when faced with real bioethical problems, offers no recognizable normative method whatsoever to help us make moral decisions. It reminds us to be well informed about diverse opinions (which is hardly news in ethics or applied ethics), but it remains mute once important moral questions are on the table (‘What should I do?’, ‘Which preferences to respect and which to reject?’ and ‘How to justify my decision?’).

In spite of all its grand promises it is not likely that integrative bioethics will deliver any bioethically-relevant ‘orientational knowledge’. Its ‘categorical apparatus’ jammed with vague concepts like ‘pluriperspectivity’, ‘interdisciplinarity’, ‘transdisciplinarity’ and ‘integrativity’ is obviously not a particularly welcome place for one of the most important ingredients of any (bio)ethics: normativity. Is ‘integrative bioethics’, then, ‘bioethics’ at all? If bioethics is a normative or action-guiding enterprise, and it should be if it wants to solve concrete problems that practically brought it to life in the first place, then the answer to this question must be negative.

³³ P. Singer. 2011. *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2.

³⁴ Čović, *op. cit.* note 6, p. 11; see also Čović, *op. cit.* (2005) note 6, p. 151.

³⁵ A. Čović. Integrativna bioetika i problem istine. *Arhe* 2009; 6: 186.

³⁶ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 85.

PSEUDOSCIENTIFIC FEATURES

In addition to its shortcomings discussed so far, a particularly problematic thing with integrative bioethics is that it displays many features typical of pseudosciences, that is, of ‘practices that masquerade themselves as science but have little or no scientific rigor or cohesion to them.’³⁷ Which features are those? Some answers to this question can be found in the article by Braithwaite and Jackson, as well as in Gardner’s classic book on pseudoscience, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*.³⁸

A specific feature of pseudoscience, according to Gardner, is its isolation from the real science. Gardner does not have in mind the geographical isolation, of course, but the fact that pseudoscientists stand ‘outside the closely integrated channels through which new ideas are introduced and evaluated’, do not submit their ‘discoveries’ to acknowledged scientific journals, speak only before organizations they themselves have founded, and publish only in journals they themselves edit.³⁹ That such an isolation might be a burning problem of integrative bioethics too is revealed in the fact that its advocates – in spite of self-proclaimed importance – did not publish a single paper about their ‘integrative’ revolution in any internationally recognized journals. Integrative bioethicists, as a matter of fact, publish almost exclusively in journals or collections of essays they themselves edit. (For confirmation see publicly available bibliographical data for individual integrative bioethicists and their past and present research projects).⁴⁰

That the ‘isolation diagnosis’ sometimes applies to integrative bioethics even in the *geographical* sense is obvious from the following fact: In 2008 the 9th *World Congress of Bioethics* took place in Rijeka, Croatia, with ‘cross-cultural bioethics’ as its main theme. This was the ideal opportunity for integrative bioethicists to present their methodological innovations to a significant number of international colleagues. And indeed, they took part in this congress by organizing within it a special forum on

‘Integrative Bioethics and Pluriperspectivism’. However, it would be totally wrong to interpret this as a proof that integrative bioethics does not isolate itself from the mainstream bioethical community. This forum, namely, took place in practically *double* isolation from the rest of the congress: geographical – it was held in Opatija whereas nearly all other sessions were held in Rijeka (15 km away from Opatija), and linguistic – most of its presentations were in German whereas the entire Congress was in English.⁴¹

Contrast the above data, however, with the following glorification of integrative bioethics by Ivana Zagorac and Hrvoje Jurić:

The project of bioethical cooperation in Southeastern Europe and the idea of integrative bioethics – originating from Croatia but surpassing this geographical area – are internationally acknowledged too. Thanks to that and to other bioethical initiatives in Croatia, one can freely say that, in spite of its short history, Croatian bioethics as a whole is already internationally acknowledged. A particular confirmation of that is the 9th *World Congress of Bioethics* that will be held in September 2008 in Rijeka and Opatija.⁴²

This passage is untrustworthy for several reasons. As already mentioned, the international recognition of integrative bioethics is practically non-existent. At the time of writing this article (August 2011), citation databases *Web of Science* and *Scopus* contained no entries on ‘integrative bioethics’ that were not written by its Croatian advocates and not published in journals and collections of essays they themselves edit. It remains unclear, therefore, what kind of ‘international acknowledgement’ of integrative bioethics Zagorac and Jurić have in mind.⁴³ The 9th *World Congress of Bioethics* showed no recognition of *integrative bioethics*. Except for the fact that integrative bioethicists, as we saw, ‘participated’ in this congress in almost total geographical and linguistic quarantine, one should note – contrary to what Zagorac and Jurić say – that Matty Häyry (the then-president of the International

³⁷ J. Braithwaite & J. Jackson. 2006. What is Pseudoscience? Available at: <http://www.ukskeptics.com/article.php?article=pseudoscience.php&dir=articles> [Accessed 5 April 2012].

³⁸ M. Gardner. 1957. *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. New York: Dover Publications.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 8, 11.

⁴⁰ The relevant data can be obtained through the search engine Croatian Scientific Bibliography [<http://bib.irb.hr>] and the search engine on the website of the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports [<http://zprojekti.mzos.hr>]. For the prevailing tendency of publishing in self-edited journals and collections of essays particularly relevant are bibliographical data for the following research projects: *Bioetika i filozofija* [*Bioethics and Philosophy*] (code: 130771, duration: 1996–2002), *Bioetika i filozofija* [*Bioethics and Philosophy*] (code: 0130471, duration: 2002–2006), and *Zasnivanje integrativne bioetike* [*Founding the Integrative Bioethics*] (code: 130-1300990-1085, duration: 2007–present).

⁴¹ Cf. *The 9th World Congress of Bioethics: The Challenge of Cross-Cultural Bioethics in the 21st Century, Final Program*. 2008. I. Sorta-Bilajac, I. Blažević & A. Tancabel, eds. Rijeka: International Association of Bioethics, University of Rijeka – School of Medicine, Croatian Society for Clinical Bioethics: 60–63.

⁴² I. Zagorac & H. Jurić. *Bioetika u Hrvatskoj. Filozofska istraživanja* 2008; 28: 609–610.

⁴³ To be sure, the 9th *World Congress of Bioethics* was an important event for Croatia, especially for the Faculty of Medicine in Rijeka and its professor Ivan Šegota, one of the pioneers of bioethics in Croatia. It should be mentioned, moreover, that professor Šegota taught and wrote about bioethics in Croatia long before Čović and his colleagues ‘invented’ their own brand of bioethics and seized monopoly over bioethics in Croatia. One of the pioneers of Croatian bioethics is professor Valentin Prozačić from the Philosophical Faculty of the Society of Jesus in Zagreb.

Association of Bioethics) in his Welcome Address did not as much as mention any ‘recognition of Croatian bioethics’, let alone to ‘integrative bioethics’. Instead of expressing his admiration for Croatian integrative bioethics Häyry actually praised the ‘beautiful Croatian landscape’.⁴⁴

The article by Zagorac and Jurić in which they praise their own bioethical accomplishments is in yet another way indicative of the isolationist and possibly pseudo-scientific nature of integrative bioethics. Namely, this article, as indicated in its footnote 1, was written as part of the research project *Founding the Integrative Bioethics* whose principal researcher is – Ante Čović. Furthermore, a member of the committee that selected project reviewers in 2006 and decided which research projects (including Čović’s) to be approved and financed was – Ante Čović. Finally, the article was published in the journal *Filozofska istraživanja* when its editor-in-chief was – Ante Čović, its associate editor – Hrvoje Jurić, and its junior editor – Ivana Zagorac. The integrative bioethics, apparently, is an excellent illustration for Gardner’s theses about the phenomenon of pseudoscience.

According to Braithwaite and Jackson, another typical feature of pseudoscience is the ‘verbose language and prose’ or the usage of ‘over-complex words, phrases and overlong sentences’ that are ‘employed in an attempt to “look” scientific and intelligent.’⁴⁵ Gardner similarly suggests that a pseudoscientist ‘often has a tendency to write in a complex jargon, in many cases making use of terms and phrases he himself has coined’, as well as that ‘many classics of crackpot science exhibit a neologistic tendency.’⁴⁶ That integrative bioethics is a good candidate for becoming such a ‘classic’ is not too difficult to illustrate. Remember its pompous definition of bioethics in terms of ‘multidisciplinarity’, ‘interdisciplinarity’, ‘transdisciplinarity’, ‘pluriperspectivity’ and ‘integrativity’. Here is just a small selection of its other ‘neologistic exercises’: ‘biopositivity and biopoeticity of existence’, ‘philosophication of bioethics’, ‘bioethicization of philosophy’, ‘Europaization of bioethics’, ‘phylonic responsibility’, ‘epochal orientation’, ‘new planetary sensitivity’, ‘establishing the responsibility of the higher rank that transcends the ethical horizon’. It is also illuminating to look into some more recent works of this bioethical school and their fresh exotic neologisms, such as ‘theoretical absurdism’ or ‘inductio ad absurdum’ (Čović does not explain what this phrase means, but he is using it consistently, which excludes the possibility of error in

writing of the ‘reductio ad absurdum’).⁴⁷ It is not difficult at this point to recall Alan Sokal’s famous article ‘Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity’.⁴⁸

How seriously integrative bioethicists take their ‘neologistic activity’ is also visible from the following example: In note 21 of his article,⁴⁹ Jurić finds it important to mention that Čović was the first to use the expression ‘bioethical sensibility’, whereas in note 57 he emphasizes that one should be ‘grateful’ to Čović⁵⁰ for coining the programmatic concept of ‘Europaization of bioethics’. Now, if bioethics is primarily about solving real life and real world problems, why is it so important to ascertain who receives credit for inventing some more or less trivial phrases? But even if it were necessary to determine who was the first to use the phrase ‘bioethical sensibility’, there would be more candidates besides Čović: it is used by Green⁵¹ and Fox,⁵² for example, and it is also found on the back cover of Gillet’s book.⁵³ Since the very phrase ‘integrative bioethics’ appears in the subtitle of the book by Sassower and Cutter,⁵⁴ even the concept of ‘integrative bioethics’ is not something specific to Croatian bioethics. Which raises the question: Why are (Croatian) integrative bioethicists not ‘grateful’ to the above authors for coining important bioethical concepts? The answer: Probably because they devised these concepts earlier and independently of Croatian bioethicists, but also because they do not attribute to them the puffed-up and false aura of fundamentality and epochality. At this point, we can cite Immanuel Kant’s words as probably the best characterization of this ‘integrative neologistic tendency’: ‘To contrive new words where the language already has no lack of expressions for given concepts is a childish endeavor to distinguish oneself from the crowd, if not by new and true thoughts then at least by new patches on the old garment.’⁵⁵

Another interesting feature of pseudoscience, according to Braithwaite and Jackson, is that pseudoscientists

⁴⁴ M. Häyry. Welcome Address. In Sorta-Bilajac et al. eds. *op. cit.* note 41.

⁴⁵ Braithwaite & Jackson, *op. cit.* note 37.

⁴⁶ Gardner, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 13–14.

⁴⁷ A. Čović. 2009. Biotička zajednica kao temelj odgovornosti za ne-ljudska živa bića. In Čović et al. eds. *op. cit.* note 8.

⁴⁸ A. Sokal. Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity. *Social Text* 1996; 46/47.

⁴⁹ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7.

⁵⁰ Čović, *op. cit.* note 6.

⁵¹ R.M. Green. 1999. Religions’ ‘Bioethical Sensibility’: A Research Agenda. In *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*. D.S. Davis & L. Zoloth-Dorfman, eds. Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group: 165.

⁵² M.W. Fox. 2001. *Bringing Life to Ethics: Global Bioethics for a Humane Society*. Albany: State University of New York Press: 23, 136.

⁵³ G. Gillett. 2004. *Bioethics in the Clinic: Hippocratic Reflections*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁵⁴ R. Sassower & M.A. Cutter. 2007. *Ethical Choices for Contemporary Medicine: Integrative Bioethics*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

⁵⁵ I. Kant. 2002. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company: 16.

are trying to disseminate their ideas and would-be reputation directly to the widest possible public.⁵⁶ That certain 'media infection' seriously affects integrative bioethics is also obvious. For example, the fact that integrative bioethics is practically without international impact does not prevent its advocates and promoters to overload Croatian media with the exact opposite picture. Consider the following two public statements: 'Croatian bioethicists created a new approach to that science [bioethics] and imposed it on Europe' (Tomašević).⁵⁷ 'Only the pluriperspectivistic approach, which was originally introduced by Professor Čović and is now unstoppable in its spread across Europe, enables one to envisage a problem from the plurality of viewpoints and to reach the optimal decision' (Čatić).⁵⁸ Imposed on Europe? Unstoppable in its spread across Europe?⁵⁹ It is extremely irresponsible, to say the least, when two university professors publicly spread such unsubstantiated claims. One of the best examples, however, of the way in which integrative bioethicists delude the public about their reputation is the following Čović's description of the very first bioethical symposium he organized:

That symposium, which took place in 1998 as part of the manifestation 'The Days of Frane Petrić', definitely enters into the global stream of creating the new ethical culture. In that symposium the foundation was laid for the innovative concept of integrative bioethics, which will be developed and institutionalized during the next decade as part of a wide international project. In general, one can say that during the past couple of decades the most significant methodological turn and

developmental shift in the history of ethical thought took place.⁶⁰

Here is another indication of how strongly integrative bioethicists care about their public image: The back cover of Nada Gosić's book *Bioetička edukacija* [Bioethical Education] (2005) does not contain excerpts (as it is customary) from reviews of renowned scholars, but only a facsimile of a short article (published anonymously in a Croatian daily paper in 1999), reporting that Gosić successfully defended her PhD thesis on bioethics written under the supervision of Ante Čović. The following fact is just as significant: When HINA [Croatian News Agency] reported that the first PhD thesis on bioethics in Croatia was defended in 2004 at the Medical Faculty in Rijeka, Čović issued a heated public statement arguing that the first Croatian PhD in bioethics could only be the one completed by Nada Gosić under his supervision. As he pointed out without mentioning any concrete names: 'It is worrying that the real state of affairs is more than well known to those who might have been the real sources of this (mis)information.'⁶¹ As Braithwaite and Jackson say, the conspiracy theory is also one of the typical features of pseudoscience.⁶²

This section on pseudoscientific features of integrative bioethics can be concluded with two points. Firstly, although integrative bioethicists tirelessly emphasize the *scientific* and *interdisciplinary* nature of their enterprise, it is obvious that scientific *discipline* is not something they care about very much. It is important to remember that the aim of integrative bioethics is not to create 'a *disciplinary and disciplined* scientific framework' but to 'promote bioethical view in various disciplines and approaches' (emphasis added).⁶³ Is it then necessary to amass more evidence for the claim that integrative bioethics is more about promotion and propaganda than about science and rationality? Secondly, the unscientific nature of integrative bioethics is probably best captured by Tomašević's following claim: 'We envisage bioethics in total, integrative way. The principle is that no one is right and, again, everyone is right.'⁶⁴ No one is right and everyone is right? Is it possible to imagine a 'principle' more compromising for some, allegedly scientific, enterprise?

⁵⁶ Braithwaite & Jackson, *op. cit.* note 37.

⁵⁷ In: Merien Ilić. 2009 Splitski studenti uče o ljubavi prema životu čovjeka i prirode [Students in Split Learn about the Love for Life of Humans and of Nature]. *Slobodna Dalmacija* 18 May. Available at: <http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Mali-odmor/tabid/196/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/54870/Default.aspx> [Accessed 5 April 2012].

⁵⁸ Available at: <http://budan.blog.hr/2010/11/1628375117/nezainteresirani-igor-ati.html> [Accessed 5 April 2012].

⁵⁹ It may seem that certain Croatian-German cooperation refutes the thesis about international unrecognizability of integrative bioethicists. However, a more firm cooperation, as it seems, exists only with two philosophers from the Ruhr University in Bochum and manifests, unfortunately, some of the symptoms typical of integrative bioethics in its Croatian habitat. If one takes a look at some results of this cooperation (e.g. two collections of essays: *Bioethik und kulturelle Pluralität: Die südosteuropäische Perspektive*. 2005. A. Čović & T.S. Hoffmann, eds. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag; and *Integrative Bioethik: Beiträge des 1. Südosteuropäischen Bioethik-Forums*. 2007. A. Čović & T.S. Hoffmann, eds. Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag), it is not hard to see that some local ailments of integrative bioethics are only transferred abroad: editors publish collections of essays containing primarily their own essays and essays of a narrow circle of their colleagues. Therefore, it does not seem likely that the work of integrative bioethicists due to this Croatian-German cooperation undergoes independent and rigorous evaluation and selection.

⁶⁰ Godina posljednje hrvatske šanse [The Year of Croatia's Last Chance], An Interview with Ante Čović. *Vijenc* (443) 24 February 2011: 4. Available at: http://www.laburisti-split.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23:prof-dr-ante-ovi-godina-posljednje-hrvatske-anse&catid=8:iz-medija&Itemid=21 [Accessed 5 April 2012].

⁶¹ Available at <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/prof-covic-prva-disertacija-iz-bioetike-obranjena-1999-u-zagrebu-a-ne-prosli-tjedan-urijeci/185227.aspx> [Accessed 5 April 2012].

⁶² Braithwaite & Jackson, *op. cit.* note 37.

⁶³ Jurić, *op. cit.* note 7, p. 85.

⁶⁴ From the newspaper article referred to in note 57.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Integrative bioethics (at least as it pertains to the Croatian academic community) is not some harmless exotic movement. Research projects, journals and publications of integrative bioethicists are usually generously funded by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports through the taxes collected from Croatia tax payers. Integrative bioethicists often receive academic promotions by committees composed of their close academic colleagues (also integrative bioethicists) on the basis of their articles (on integrative bioethics, of course) published in journals or collections of essays edited by the very same close colleagues or even by themselves. A couple of years ago, even a new classification of scientific fields was established by the National Science Council of the Republic of Croatia, according to which 'integrative bioethics' became a special interdisciplinary branch of science.

A particularly good piece of evidence that illustrates the aggressiveness inherent to integrative bioethics is the following: Two journals of the Croatian Philosophical Society (*Filozofska istraživanja*, founded in 1980, and *Synthesis Philosophica*, founded in 1986), after welcoming all types of philosophy for decades, officially became journals 'for integrative thought' in 2006 when Ante Čović, the founding father of integrative bioethics, was named their editor-in-chief.⁶⁵ The 'bioethical turn' of these journals, however, did not pass completely unnoticed in Croatia as one journalist remarked that journal *Filozofska istraživanja* 'looks more and more like a bio-

⁶⁵ A. Čović. *Filozofska istraživanja* kao projekt integrativnog mišljenja. *Filozofska istraživanja* 2006; 26: 3–6. A. Čović. *Synthesis Philosophica* – a journal for integrative thought. *Synthesis Philosophica* 2006; 21: 3–6.

ethical bulletin' and that 'one should discard the prevailing dogma that bioethics is the only possible ethics.'⁶⁶ However, by controlling these two philosophical journals, integrative bioethicists are in a position to control the majority of academic promotions in the field of philosophy in Croatia,⁶⁷ as well as in a position to fill the space of Croatian social science and humanities with numerous articles on bioethics whose arguments and clarity are hard to distinguish from pseudoscience. In this manner they exert extremely bad influence on Croatian students and junior researchers (especially by impeding their understanding of the good work in bioethics and applied ethics) and communicate a half-baked moral philosophy to interested scholars from other scientific fields and disciplines.

All of this, as I believe, is more than sufficient for issuing this warning to both the Croatian and the international scholarly community about the dangers lurking behind the catchy phrase 'integrative bioethics'.

Biography

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⁶⁶ T. Valentić. *Filozofija, znanost i religija* [Philosophy, Science, and Religion]. A review of *Filozofska istraživanja* 2/2007. *Vijenac* (358) 22 November 2007. Available at: http://www.matica.hr/Vijenac/vijenac358.nsf/AllWebDocs/Filozofija_znanost_i_religija [Accessed 5 April 2012].

⁶⁷ When it comes to academic promotions in Croatia, the National Science Council of the Republic of Croatia officially proclaimed that articles published in any of these two journals are equivalent to articles published in highest-ranking international journals.