25. What do grown children owe their aged parents?

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Being raised in a Reformed family in the roaring sixties of the last century, the fifth of the Ten Commandments has left me with mixed feelings. 'Honour thy father and thy mother' (*Exodus* 20: 12) was used in church and at home, in and out of season, to prevent rebellious youngsters to emerge from their parents' authority. Children should not strive for independence and autonomy, but obey their parents, was the message. The fifth commandment was considered as a legitimization of the contested authority of educators in the nuclear family.

Recent exegesis of the Ten Commandments, however, clearly takes distance from this interpretation. Actually, the focus of the fifth commandment is not on parental authority but on filial duties for elderly parents. 'The command … is not about the obligation of (young) children to submit to parental authority, but is directed to adult persons, those who in the patriarchal society are family heads. They, the (oldest) sons, when their parents have relinquished authority, and are no longer able to look after themselves, must provide them with food, clothing and shelter … and after their death give them an honourable burial'[1] (p. 51ff).

Difficult care

The prominence of care for elderly people in the Bible indicates that in ancient Israel respect for the aged was often lacking. Apparently, elderly abuse was such a well-known phenomenon that it could be sanctioned only with capital punishment (compare *Exodus* 21: 15, 17). So even within traditionally oriented societies such as the Jews, with clear reminiscences to an ancestor cult, honouring elderly people is not an obvious daily practice. Oswald Loretz has argued that the commandment to 'honor thy father and thy mother' is an offshoot and an echo of the ancestor cult, because it links the care for elderly people with the promise of the possession of the land (see van der Toorn,[2] p 378).

With the father and mother to be honoured, the fifth commandment points to the filial duties towards dependent and frail elder parents. This rupture within the interpretation history was in particular induced by increased knowledge of other near Eastern texts, a biblical scholar writes[1] (p. 52). But probably the demographic shifts of the last century will also have made the exegetes receptive for this reinterpretation. Although from ancient times until far into the twentieth century parents hardly survived their adult children – the average lifespan in biblical times was around 45 years for the better off; for the socially weak it was undoubtedly even less[1] – nowadays it has become quite common.

With the increase in life expectancy also the number of extended three (or four)-generation families increases. While in earlier centuries the care for dependent parents was rare and seldom lasted for long, a gerontologist foresaw already 25 years ago, that 'nowadays adult children provide more care and more difficult care to more parents over much longer periods of time than they did in the good old days'[3] (p. 23).

This means that many adult children are confronted with the question why and how they should care for and about their frail and dependent parents, and how far their help should go. In developing countries, it seemed for a long time that the 'providential state' could take away the adult children's worries, by providing sufficient state care. But only a minority (in the Netherlands about 6%) of elderly people ever lived in residential institutions. Neoliberalism and the global risk society increase the states' pressure on elderly people's own social network to provide them with the support that they need. But – as the fearful question, often to be heard of how about the near future – will there be enough caring hands available? Due to the ongoing decline in birth rate, only having around one's own children in one's old age seems to guarantee – even in so-called individualized societies – a secure pension, as it was in biblical times and still may be in non-western cultures. Needless to say, in countries without a state pension and with a traditional family culture, the pressure on children to help their parents is much higher. Research among immigrant families in the Netherlands showed that parents consider it to be self-evident that their children take them, once grown old, to live with them in their homes – a thought with which they were socialized in their country of birth. Their children. however, born and raised in an individualized culture, cannot meet that expectation and feel caught in a double bind.[4] A feeling that probably is shared by adult children in many rapidly urbanizing and modernizing countries in the developing world.

What do grown children owe their aged parents? In this chapter I want to describe and evaluate some visions on filial obligation, current in modern ethical theory. The obligation reaches back into ancient biblical times. But *why* should children help their parents? Is it out of gratitude, love or because they are indebted to them? Or is it simply because they are their parents? *What kind of* assistance may parents justly expect their children to offer them? Are children also obliged to feed, clothe and nurture their parents and to take them home, as in ancient biblical times, or is material or financial

support something that the broader community or government should provide? Can children restrict themselves to social and emotional support? And how far should filial care reach? Should children allow themselves to be over-burdened? In particular, the care for a parent with dementia may ask much too much from them, physically and emotionally. May children be obligated to sacrifice themselves (their time, their future) for the sake of their parents, even if these parents once sacrificed themselves for these children in their childhood?

Debt

The Hebrew Bible motivates filial obligation with the argument that your father is your procreator (*Proverbs* 23: 22) and that your mother carried you and gave birth to you (*Sirach* 7:27f, *Tobias* 4: 4) 'The thought behind is that one should return some of the care and nourishment provided by the parents. Love is not mentioned as a motive'[1] (p. 55). The biblical narrative seems to support the so-called debt theory, the first, classical model of filial obligation that I want to present here. Debt theory argues that children are in debt to their parents and that they are repaying them what they owe to them with their care. Your parents covered you with benefits when you were young and dependent on them. Now it is 'payback time'.

Throughout history and quasi-universally, the debt theory is regarded as transparent and self-evident (forcefully imagined in the short film *What is That* by Constantin Pilavios – see www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=MijRS7myeBY). My own parents too, being poor in my early youth, implicitly expected at high age something 'back' from their two grown-up children. They sacrificed themselves to let us attend the best schools available. It went without saying that their two sons, highly educated and relatively well to do, did something in return.

The debt theory, balancing benefits and favours, has a long history and is supported widely. Its evidence is, however, less convincing than it seems. Harry Moody retells a story about a mother bird and her little baby bird, who rides on her mother's back while the mother forages for food. One day the mother bird says to the baby bird, 'Baby bird, when you're a big bird and I'm old and frail, will you take me on your back just as I'm doing for you now?' And the baby replies, 'No, mother, but when I'm a big bird, I'll carry my little baby bird on my back just as you're doing for me now'[5] (p. 229).

The story indicates that reciprocity is not at the heart of the filial relationship. Parents and children do not relate in terms of *do ut des*. They do not enter their relationship in order to obtain mutual advantage: 'If I push your pram now, you will later push my wheelchair.' A child can justly reply that it did not ask to be born. There is an insurmountable and fundamental asymmetry in a parental relationship. From the perspective of children, families are communities of fate, not voluntary associations. Between parents and children there is mutuality, not reciprocity.

Debt theory also cannot account for the open-endedness and ongoing character of filial duties. A child will never be able to say (and may suffer sometimes from that):

'Well, now it's enough – I paid off my debt.' Some may call the adult son, visiting his mother once a month and claiming money for his petrol on the doorstep (a true story), a good merchant; we all will find him a bad son.

The debt theory has other flaws too. It presupposes that it is the children who owe something to their parents, and not the other way around. Even if one continues to think intergenerational relationships within the framework of the balance of justice – as the contextual therapy of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy[6] does – one has to admit that in the transgenerational bookkeeping of merits children come first: 'Reciprocal equity, the traditional framework for assessing justice among adults, fails as a guideline when it comes to the balance of the parent–child relationship. Every parent finds himself in an asymmetrically obliged position toward his newborn. The child has a source of unearned rights. Society does not expect him to repay the parent in equivalent benefits'[6] (p. 55). Not all parents are ready to redeem their debt towards their children in promoting their human flourishing. Children are abandoned, neglected, exploited and abused. Also, some parents might 'in their time' have been heroes or saints, but not every parent deserves to be proud of it. What, then, are children supposed to pay back? According to the debt theory they would simply have to turn their back on their parents, let alone care for them in their frail days. Within such a justice framework, there can only be talk of forgiveness and hope of reconciliation, not of retribution.

In addition, not all children did grow up more privileged than their parents. What can rich, well-to-do parents expect from their poor, highly charged children? Within the debt paradigm parents who did not 'deserve' it cannot require any assistance from their children. And how about 'effortless' parents, who simply enjoyed their parenthood and made only fun out of it? What are their 'merits' that should be paid back now?

Despite its long tradition and apparent evidence, the debt theory meets a lot of problems. The parent–child relationship is richer and more complex than can be expressed within a juridical–economic language game of 'give and take'. Filial obligations cannot be reduced to a book-keeping of benefits and compensations.

Gratitude

Ethicists looking for an alternative, more compatible with a more substantial description of the parent–child relationship, came up with a variance of the debt theory, the model of *gratitude*. The warm language of intimacy, care and love probably offers a better expression of what really goes on between two generations within one family. Children do not 'owe' their parents anything. As Nagy rightly put it, intergenerational debts go in one direction, from the parent to the child. The latter's care for the former is only an expression of their feeling of gratitude towards their own parents. The debts – compare the young bird in the story – are not 'paid back', but 'paid forward' in favouring the next generation.

Good parents surround their children with love and care. They did this out of benevolence, not in order to receive something in return. Although their children do

not owe them anything, they have a moral obligation to show them with gestures their feelings of gratitude and appreciation. Imagine someone who has risked his life for you. The act is beyond price, but at least it is your moral duty to demonstrate an appropriate level of gratitude, by keeping in touch, for example, or sending flowers or a postcard for their birthdays. If you exaggerate and want to pay 'back' too much, they certainly will be embarrassed: that is not why he saved your life!

However, the gratitude model has its flaws as well, comparable to the debt model. First, the model presupposes that parents really 'earned' gratitude, although often this is not the case. Resentment often seems more justifiable than gratitude.

Second, the emphasis on the *feeling* of gratitude may rightly take the filial relationship out of a juridical and economic framework, but at the same time neglects an essential element in the phenomenology of the parent–child relationship. Filial duties are experienced as direct acts, not as the *expression* of a sentiment. Someone who helps a sick mother with dressing or eating is not dealing with the analogy of sending a postcard or flowers: she or he helps because she or he feels obligated, even without any sentiment of gratitude. Caring for one's parents is not an instrumental illustration of an emotion, but an inevitable responsibility.

Friendship

The debt model being too juridical and the gratitude model too authoritarian, in order to escape the shortcomings of both the *friendship model* was developed. 'What do grown children owe their parents?' is the question with which Jane English,[7] the *auctor intellectualis* of this model, opens her seminal article with the same title. 'I will contend that the answer is 'nothing' (p. 147), is her response. She argues that, although there are many things that children ought to do for their parents, it is inappropriate and misleading to describe them as things 'owed'. Parents' voluntary sacrifices tend to create love or 'friendship', rather than creating 'debts' to be 'repaid'. 'The duties of grown children are those of friends, and result from love between them and their parents, rather than being things owed in repayment for their early sacrifices'[7] (p. 147).

The friendship model radically breaks with the pre-modern tradition and its patriarchal and hierarchical ethics, and it seems unthinkable without an egalitarian society where parents and children share households on an equal basis and a daughter can say of her mother that she is her best friend. However, despite its trendy appearance, it offers an attractive alternative for the shortcomings of the formerly presented models. It acknowledges that a parent–child relationship is not typified by a reciprocal give and take, but by mutuality. 'Friends offer what they can give and accept what they need, without regard for the total amounts of benefits exchanged, and friends are motivated by love rather than by the prospect of repayment. Hence, talking of "owing" is singularly out of place in friendship'[7] (p. 149).

The friendship idiom therefore seems to offer a better discourse than the juridical jargon of favours and debts. It accounts better for the uniqueness of the parent–child

relationship than the impartial language of book-keepers and lawyers. Just as with friendship, the care for children requires an ethic of intimacy, instead of an ethic of strangers. Parents and children enter into a particular history with these specific parents, these specific children, just as friends enter a unique relationship. Of course, English knows that not all parents and children *are* friends. To her, however, friendship within the household is an ideal for which parents should strive in order to take, together with their children, advantage of, all along their life course. Then and only then, does receiving and raising a child mean entering into a lifelong friendship. 'The relationship between children and their parents *should* be one of friendship characterized by mutuality rather than one of reciprocal favors'[7] (p. 151, italics added).

English does not consider friendship as an analogy of the parent–child relationship but as a description of her utmost reality. In the ideal case, care for dependent parents is the obvious care for friends through thick and thin. The friendship has been more rewarding in earlier times, sure, but you don't let the other down now. Friends can count on each other. 'The parental argument, "You ought to do x because we did y for you," should be replaced by, "We love you, and you will be happier if you do x," or "We believe you love us, and anyone who loved us would do x."'[7] (p. 153). The friendship model's strength is that it neither gives way to any pre-emptive rights of parents, nor puts unlimited and unconditional pressures on the children. Children cannot nor should provide all of their parents' needs. Love's knowledge develops a subtle balance in which the needs of the one are weighed against the abilities and resources of the other. And what a stranger can do (cleaning the house, medical care, shopping/groceries) a friend does not need to do. Children who are befriended by their parents will rather offer socioemotional than material and/or financial support. Goodin[8] proposed, because of the unique position of children towards their parents, an alternative *need* model: they are in the unique position to grasp and meet their parent's needs, as no one else. Their obligations are comparable to the one of the Good Samaritan towards the victim on the roadside. There are no alternatives. Families are fate communities. Not the question 'should I help here?' is at stake, but: how could I ever refuse to help? 'If one party is in a position of particular vulnerability to or dependency on another, the other has strong responsibilities to protect the dependent party'[8] (p. 39). Also this model turns out to be counterintuitive. Parents are something special, whereas the biblical narrative proposes an ethic between strangers (compare De Lange[9]).

On second thought, the friendship model presents more than a superficial image of modern, non-authoritarian family life. Many adult children do experience, in the final years of their parents' lives, that they become close to each other, entering into a relationship with them as quasi equals. The friendship model is not intended to declare small children in young families as the adults that they obviously are not, but warns, the other way around, adult children against a paternalistic treatment of their mentally and physically weakened parents. Although in the final stage of their lives a process of 'parentification' might become inevitable and children and parents inverse their roles,

children should resist the temptation to treat their parents as a child, but ought to respect their autonomy. The friendship model emphasizes the equality between the adults that both parents (literally 'coming of age') and children (coming of age as well) are now to each other. Even in cases when hard decisions – a nursing home placement, for example – are to be taken with persuasion, rather than with a free 'advice' (see Moody,[5] 100f.)

Psychogerontologists describe how adult children, after a *filial crisis* in which they have to learn to accept their parents' dependency and to meet their needs, eventually succeed in the accomplishment of their *filial tasks*, and reach *filial maturity*. 'Filial maturity means to be willing to provide help voluntary to one's elderly parents and to actually help them, motivated by feelings of love and a sense of duty, without losing one's autonomy in a reciprocal relationship and in the context of a well-functioning family network'[10] (p. 126). Filial maturity requires, from both parents and children, respect for their mutual autonomy: parents should not be over-demanding towards their children, and children in their turn should support their parent voluntary, and not because they feel forced to it.

However, despite its merits, the friendship model also encounters clear limits. What does it tell about parents and children? Are they a majority? Who, for whatever reason, cannot be friends (anymore)? English's answer is by far reassuring. Just as in a genuine friendships is the case, 'what children ought to do for their parents (and parents for their children) depends on ... the extent to which there is an ongoing friendship between them'[7] (p. 151). This restrictive condition is not only threatening for parents too dependent on their children, but also counterintuitive.

It is not helpful to reinterpret the friendship model as Dixon[11] proposes – by saying that parents and children do not need to be real friends, but should consider each other only *as* friends. Even when the parent–child relationship functions as an *analogy* of friendship, after a friendship ends, the duties of friendship ends. However, there is a fundamental difference between parenthood and friendship: friends are chosen (and sometimes left behind) voluntary, whereas parents are a lifelong destiny, even if one feels condemned to them. In this respect, the parent–child relationship is incomparable and irreducible to other relationships.

A second flaw in the friendship model is the flipside of its powerful attractiveness. It rightly abandons traditional patriarchy, but suggests too much equality between parents and children. Parents come first, they precede their children. As generations they follow each other in time. 'The heteronomous [sic] character of his relationship to them has now ceased', writes Karl Barth[12] – one of the few theological ethicists who takes the relationship of adult children with their parents within the framework of an exegesis of the fifth commandment into consideration – about the adult child. 'But they remain the fellow-men who in their way are irreplaceably nearest to him and are given precedence over him' [sie bleiben die ihm *vorgeordneten* Mitmenschen]'[12] (p. 254 [German edition, p. 285]). In his view, the follow-up of generations reflects an

ontological inequality in time that should be expressed in their mutual relationship. It not necessarily results in the natural leadership of the parent and docility of the child. But the elder remains older, preceding the child in time for always.

An ethic of 'equal regard' for families – as recently proposed by Don Browning – ignores the uniqueness of this inequality between parents and children. It introduces a formal, impartial and 'timeless' moral principle as the moral core of a special and unique relationship.[13] Equal regard may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a mature parent–child relationship. Parents will never be siblings for their children, even when they come close to them in age.

Special goods

The ethics of the parent–child relationship requires a description that takes into account its unique character. This ethic will not be convincing as long as it is deduced from other relationships' moral implications. I will assist my parent, not as an instance of a type to whom I have certain general obligations, but in direct response to the particular person that he or she is for me – as my *parent*. An equal regard construction, as Bernard Williams once put it in defending the moral uniqueness of personal relationships, 'provides the agent with one thought too many'[14] (p. 18). Guilt, gratitude, friendship – they remain analogies. Being a child of your parents is something special.

This means, as Simon Keller writes, that 'the goods of parenting are unique in kind, meaning that there are no other sources, or not many easily accessible other sources, from which they can be gained. … For the child, as well as the parent, there are distinctive special goods that comes from the parent child relationship'[15] (pp 265f). In order to give a full account of this uniqueness, Keller then proposes a 'special goods theory' of filial obligation. Ground laying in this approach is the distinction made between generic goods, which could just as well be provided by others, and special goods, which the parent can receive from no one (or almost no one) but the child, or the child can receive from no one (or almost no one) but the parent. Medical care, house cleaning, a ride to the shops, financial advice – these are generic goods that need not be provided by an adult child, if they can be delivered by others. To the special goods in the parent–child relationship, however, belong: keeping in touch, visiting, sharing time together, listening, being present, recalling memories, seeking advice, making plans, opening up one's family life for the other – not with the role and attitude of, for instance, a social worker or a good neighbour but precisely as the *child* of these parents. You provide your parents with something that they will not get otherwise, by making them part of your adulthood. They may 'experience a sense of continuity and transcendence, a feeling that they will, in some respect, persist beyond their own deaths. There is also a kind of joy, and a kind of wisdom, that comes from a close involvement with the development of a person from birth to childhood and beyond'[15] (p. 267). These kind of 'family values' are irreplaceable. On the other hand, Keller observes, there is a special value in having a parent from whom you can seek advice (as a *parent*) and who shares

with you the history of your whole lifespan. An ongoing healthy relationship with a parent can create a link between your life's different stages, helping to see that they are all yours.

To the special goods of this relationship special duties also correspond. Good care for someone's parents implies that a child makes sure that generic goods are well provided, although that not necessarily by the children themselves. Others can do that as well.

In my opinion, the special goods theory offers a richer phenomenology of the parent–child relationship than the approaches mentioned earlier, and therefore also a more convincing vision on filial obligations. On the one hand, it unburdens children from the unjustified pressure to do *everything* for their parents, as some generic needs may also be being met (and often better) by others. The care of children for their parents is primarily a caring *about*, not a care *for* their parents, as one may put it.[16] On the other hand, it takes along, from the parents, the liberty of making unreasonable demands on their children. They are not justified to ask them whatever, certainly not when it exceeds their children's resources. 'What you should do for your parents depends upon what goods you are able to generate'[15] (p. 270). The special goods approach also acknowledges the difference between children mutually in their care for their parents – a common source of animosity among siblings. Children who are not well placed to provide the special goods to their parents are morally justified to do less than those who are better situated to do so. Filial maturity develops, as both parents and children learn to see and acknowledge the delicate requirements of their unique relationship.

But how should we distinguish generic from special goods? Keller concedes that the borderline between them may shift, depending on the historical and cultural context. Growing old in an extended family in a poor society differs from ageing in an individualizing welfare state. Cultural traditions may also value quite differently the relationship between community and autonomy. Aged parents surrounded by a strong social network, a state pension system and good functioning institutions of elderly care will be much less justified in their appeal to their children's assistance than parents in less privileged situations. If any support from the environment is lacking, and children are the only ones to provide their parents with food, safety and shelter, it will be difficult to escape their request to also provide the generic goods. In such a case, and only then, children are required to take the role of Good Samaritan to their parents, as an act of charity, not because of the special relationship that they have with their parents, but because of the unique position that they are in, to fulfil their parents' needs (see above and Goodin's needs theory is relevant here[8]).

At times in which – even in developed countries – there is increasing pressure on families to take over the entire responsibility for their elder members, it is important to retain the distinction between special and generic goods and, correspondingly, between filial and communal duties. 'It takes the whole village to raise a child', the African saying goes. It takes a the whole community to care for elderly people is equally

true. This comprehensive approach first of all unburdens the conscience pressure on adult children in their care for their parents. They cannot do *everything* and should not either. But second, it refers local communities and state government to their social responsibilities. Elderly care should not be left to families alone. The special goods theory offers a balanced ethical framework for both these filial and communal obligations.

A sustainable future – a theological post-script

Let me, by way of afterword, add a short theological reflection that underscores two essential features in the ethical relationship between children and parents. First, filial duties should not be isolated from other obligations that generations have to one another. Family is one of the institutions that makes a good life for elderly possible, not the only one. Next to the families, there is the broader community, next to the community there is the state. Only together, in close collaboration, they can provide the conditions for the good life. Second, families are more than informal relationships; they represent, as an institution, one of the lasting structures that keeps the fabric of society together and guarantees its sustainable future. Taken together, it results in the claim that good elderly care only can be embedded in a *pluralistic theory of institutions* (compare Walzer[17]).

In some theological traditions, both the pluralistic and institutional elements in the regulation of care between generations were expressed in the concept of the 'orders of creation'. The recognition of the irreducibility of the family to other social structures resulted in its being one of the orders of creation, or rather, to avoid their sacralization – as theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called them – 'divine mandates'[18] (pp 68f, 388–408). The reformer Martin Luther emphasized the necessity that each of these different creation orders must be kept within its own borders. None of them can do the job of making a good life on its own. (Luther distinguished three ordines, Bonhoeffer four mandates, by taking the *oeconomia* out of the *ordo parentum* as a distinctive mandate, according to their separation in modernity. For a fuller account, see De Lange.[19]) 'Confusion here is not healthy [*mixtura hic non valet*]'. Bonhoeffer continued in the same spirit: 'Only in their being with-one-another [*Miteinander*], for-one-another [*Füreinander*] and over-against-one-another [*Gegeneinander*] do the divine mandates of church, marriage and family, culture and government communicate the commandment of God'. None of these mandates exists self-sufficiently, nor can one of them claim to replace all others[18] (p. 393).

Within such a broad framework, adult children cannot be held entirely responsible for the full care of their older parents. It is also a specific task for the broader community and the state. (The biblical tradition reflects this plurality in responsibilities. The fifth commandment is not the only one; looking after the 'widows' – a term mostly standing for the older woman – is another. The community's care for the aged was not viewed as a special and separated task, but should be covered by general societal regulations

(compare Houtman,[1] pp 56, 220ff).) By considering families as a 'divine mandate' the theological tradition confers them with an explicit *institutional* character. Family is one of the social *structures* – among others – in which providential care for a sustainable society is embodied. Children do have their own *formal* responsibility in the family – they have to play their specific 'role'. Even if the mutual relationship between parents and children is motivated by feelings of love and affection, the impact of its moral status is acknowledged only when families are regarded as institutions that keep the fabric of society together.

Finally, a glance at these theological traditions points to another aspect of the filial relationship. Their ethical perspective is not backwards oriented, but 'eschatologically' directed, towards the future and the sustainability of intergenerational relationships. This makes clear that the relationship between aged parents and children should be considered retrospectively as the repayment of a personal indebtedness. To the contrary, it should be seen in the broader, prospective framework of the concern for a humane society. In the care for their aged parents, children contribute to a society that shall in turn treat them with dignity, once they have grown old themselves.

In an old story a farmer decides that he has no more room at the table for his old father who lives with the family. So he banishes the old man to the barn where the father must eat out of a wooden trough. One day the farmer comes across his own little son playing in the barnyard with some pieces of wood, and he asks the little boy what he is doing. 'Oh, father,' replies the boy, 'I'm making a trough for you to eat from when you get old.' After that day, the old man is returned to his place at the family table (Moody,[5] p. 229)

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Further reading

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26. Ageing: travelling from ethics to experience based on thought

On dealing with the management of elderly or chronically ill patients in intensive care units: the step-by-step construction of an analytic framework for clinical ethics jointly between professionals and ethics researchers

Dominique Jacquemin, Olivier Nuttens and colleagues

Summary

- Context and methodology
- Research timeline and topics addressed
- Emergence of the notion of a 'disconnect' and joint construction of a framework
- Presentation of the framework
- First evaluation
- Conclusions: a framework to test and evaluate

In this chapter, our aim is to highlight, through a new analysis of an experiment in clinical ethics, the capacity of professionals, supported by a team of researchers in ethics, to adopt a framework for clinical-ethical analysis initially structured around ethical concepts and questions at the contextual level in order to reformulate them, in the light of their own clinical experience, in terms related to their practice. This approach opens up not only a pragmatic understanding of ethics but also questioning based on iterative interaction between professionals and ethics researchers.

Among others, we based ourselves on the pragmatic approach developed by Marc Maesschalck,[1] with the aim of showing how a clinical ethical methodology, initially proposed by a group of researchers in ethics, allowed clinical professionals to transform their work; this was done by taking into account a subjective approach incorporated into their practice, to transform it gradually into a form of collective training in the identification and expression of disconnects lived through in their practice, with the latter becoming a means of ethical understanding of the issues associated with professional practice, expressed in a framework for clinical ethical analysis of 'disconnects'. This contribution is structured in four steps. After sketching the context for the joint work of the clinicians and ethics researchers and the methodology applied, we provide a brief timeline of the approach associated with the themes identified that we go on to consider. In the third part, we consider the concept of a 'disconnect', its emergence, its significance, as well as presenting the framework itself. After a first evaluation of