



## HEALTH PROMOTION

# Integrating one health: exploring the global dialogue on bioethics

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One health • Bioethics • Public health • Animal ethics • COVID

## Summary

*Unesco's World Bioethics Day, whose theme this year is the protection of future generations, reveals the centrality of the concept of one-health, as the main way to guarantee a future for the planet seen as the common home of all living beings. The recent pandemic has sufficiently shown how animal health is linked to human health and how only the balance of the entire planet guarantees both. Living on earth as human*

*beings, no longer blinded by the Anthropocene's arrogance, but conscious of having a fundamental responsibility for the health care and well-being of every species is the imperative that should guide scientific research, education and social life. Thus, a renovating of the education system is essential to break down rigid boundaries between disciplines and promote complex and critical thinking.*

## Introduction

This year as well, on October 19th, 2023, the World UNESCO Day will be celebrated as part of commitment of RM Institute of science and technology and World Bioethics Day Department of International Chair in Bioethics, WMA Cooperating Centre, to proliferate the awareness and practice of Bioethical principles documented in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights 2005.

The chosen theme for this year's celebration is "Protecting Future Generations", inspired by Article 16 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. This theme encompasses multiple dimensions, aiming to create an environment that ensures the physical, mental, psychological, social, and moral well-being of future generations.

As highlighted by UNESCO, one of the most urgent risks for future generations is the environmental crisis, which requires strong efforts to reduce carbon emissions, protect biodiversity, conserve natural resources, and develop sustainable technologies.

The worsening of devastating phenomena, such as those caused by uncontrolled urbanization, climate change, global warming, and over-consumption of natural resources (some of which are non-renewable), has long since revealed the fragility of the traditional logic of indiscriminate exploitation of nature. This logic is based on the principle that anything technically possible can be done to maximize productivity and profit [1].

In this context, Heidegger's reflection on technology becomes particularly relevant, as it appears to have betrayed the original meaning of Greek *techné* as the disclosure of being in contemporary society. Instead, it has become a form of "provocation" (*Herausfordern*)

"by which nature is required to provide an energy to be extracted and accumulated" [2].

The consequences of these phenomena have led to a growing recognition that the traditional approach is unsustainable and detrimental to both the environment and human well-being [3]. The idea that natural resources are limitless and can be exploited without consequence has been shattered by resource depletion, loss of biodiversity, and intensity of natural disasters.

The rising awareness has highlighted the necessity of a paradigm shift towards a more sustainable and holistic approach that takes into account the interconnectedness of ecological systems and human activities. Such an approach acknowledges that the health and well-being of both the environment and human beings are intertwined and depend on each other [4].

To address the urgent challenges we face, it is essential to adopt practices that promote conservation, restoration, and responsible use of natural resources. This involves embracing principles of ecological balance, resource efficiency, and the preservation of biodiversity.

The concept of One Health and its relevance in the context of the pandemic.

The recent pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, as well as previous viral emergencies such as HIV, SARS, swine flu, Ebola, and others, have also highlighted the importance of considering health as a "circular" concept, where issues of human, animal, and environmental health are closely interconnected.

This concept is now widely represented by the expression "One Health", on which interest has been growing recently. It clearly shows how our own health depends on ecological balance and the well-being of animals and the environment, prompting us to reflect on the impact of our actions on ecosystem's balance and all species' health [5-7].

Among the different fields where the need for this paradigm is particularly felt, there are food safety, the fight against antibiotic resistance and climate change, as well as the control of zoonoses, considering the devastating impact that zoonotic diseases can have on whole planet's public health [7, 8].

As custodians and wise administrators of this planet, we have the responsibility to consider the long-term effects that our actions have on what Pope Francis emblematically defines as the "common home" and to take care of it and its most vulnerable members, belonging to different species, races, cultures, and religions [9].

This commitment requires expanding the horizon of care beyond the boundaries of a mere anthropocentric view to all living beings depending on the health of our "common" planet.

And it is precisely this approach, able to go beyond a narrow vision of the present, that calls for a new individual and collective responsibility transcending the daily time horizon to take into account the long-term impact that our actions can have. This is a real way of ensuring a healthy and sustain able world for future generations.

One Health ethics is based on fundamental ethical values such as justice, equity, sustainability, and responsibility. The reference to these principles implies that humans belong to a broader community including both other living beings and inanimate things. Furthermore, it considers Earth as a subject and not like a pool of resources for unrestricted and indiscriminate human use. Furthermore, valuing the concept of One Health pushes us to overcome individualistic thinking and to acknowledge the importance of a collective action, since – as Edgar Morin reminds us – our life is inextricably linked to our planet and we cannot but be in solidarity with the Earth [11, 12].

Health is a complex concept that can be interpreted differently depending on cultural, social, and individual contexts. Questioning the true meaning of what it means to be healthy is an important philosophical inquiry that can also lead to a critical reevaluation of our beliefs and value [13].

The traditional definition of health, provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. More recently, health has been defined as the ability to adapt and self-manage in the face of physical, emotional, and social challenges [14]. However, even this new definition, which is more open and dynamic compared to the traditional one, may not fully reflect the complexity and diversity of people's health experiences.

A broader philosophical perspective can lead us to question the social, economic, political, and environmental influences on people's health. We could examine how structural inequalities, limited access to healthcare resources, and social determinants contribute to health disparities among different populations. Additionally, we could challenge our beliefs about the hierarchy of living beings and reconsider our relationship with other human beings and non-human animals [15-17].

A rational view of nature implies a more inclusive

perspective, where health is considered a common good that we should strive to promote for all individuals, regardless of their species.

Aiming to an equitable health requires a collective commitment to address inequalities and create a fair and accessible healthcare system [18].

In this context, it is crucial to reconsider the traditional boundaries between disciplines, sectors, and interests, and work together to address emerging challenges in an interdisciplinary manner and a long-term vision.

By connecting knowledge from different disciplines, ethical reflection can help us in addressing the complex challenges we globally face. In fact, an ethics of responsibility on a global scale invites us to consider the moral implications of our actions and decisions, to recognize our interconnectedness and interdependence, and to urge an awareness of our common destiny and the need to act in ways that promote the well-being of all life [19].

Through interdisciplinary dialogue and ethical reflection, we can develop a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions of our choices and create guidelines that steer us towards sustainable and just practices. This ethical reflection helps us navigate the complexities of our world, addressing urgent issues such as environmental degradation, social inequality and the protection of human rights [20].

## Conclusions

### TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM IN EDUCATION

These considerations prompt reflections on the need for a profound rethinking of current university education, which is still firmly anchored in a clear separation between scientific and humanistic training [21-23]. In this regard, the great mathematician Whitehead's affirmation on the dangers of specialization seems more relevant than ever, as "the training of professionals in the specializations of knowledge increases the sum of knowledge in specific fields, but this success negatively affects the realm of knowledge [24].

Whitehead's insight highlights the potential drawbacks of over-specialization, as it might lead to a fragmented understanding of the world and hinder the development of a holistic perspective. The compartmentalization of knowledge may limit our ability to grasp the interconnectedness and complexity of real-world challenges.

To address the pressing issues that we face as a global community, it is crucial to foster interdisciplinary approaches that bridge the gap between scientific and humanistic disciplines. By integrating different forms of knowledge, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems and explore innovative solutions beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries.

An education system that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration and cultivates a broad range of skills, including critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reasoning, is essential in preparing students to face the complex challenges of the modern world [25]. By nurturing a holistic perspective and promoting a synthesis of knowledge, we can overcome the limitations of specialization and

cultivate a more integrated and interconnected approach to education and problem-solving [26].

The complexity of the issues requires a different organization of knowledge, which, echoing Morin once again, entails a “form of thinking aimed not only at separating for knowing but also at interconnecting what is has been separated by disciplines’ fragmentation: the human beings, the nature, the cosmos, the reality” [11].

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## Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Authors' contributions

All authors conceived the study and contributed to the preparation of the manuscript related to their sections and approved the final version to be submitted.

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