

Abstract Submission – Workshop

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"Putting theories at work? Evaluating the Mainz Model of Reconstructive Clinical Ethics and the art of application"

Clinical ethics is a practice while ethics itself is a theoretical endeavor, a sub-discipline of philosophy. Even though there is a tradition of philosophical pragmatism and ethics is understood as an intrinsic part of applied philosophy, the ways in which ethical theories inform, influence, and guide the normative deliberation of individual (clinical) cases remains largely unclear. Given the very existential dimensions of many decisions supported by clinical ethics and given the clinical impact of clinical ethics - e.g. with regard to duration of intensive care, life expectancy - the practice of clinical ethics has to be vindicable, well founded and must fulfill the criteria of reliability, credibility, process quality as other forms of practices in clinical care have to. This confronts us with more than just a problem of applying the right theoretical model to an individual case or of analyzing a situation with empathy, an ethically inspired attitude or an institutional normative framework. While casuistry certainly is helpful to teach the communicational and cognitive process of clinical ethics counseling and while ethical principles did make us realize the problem of application, both approaches did not - and maybe cannot - resolve the problem of establishing a theoretically founded practice of the clinical application of ethical deliberation in individual cases.

This talk is asking the question, why the practice of clinical ethics would need a theoretical foundation beyond casuistry, empathy, practical skills and ethical principles. A reconstructive approach taking the notion of contextualization serious will be discussed as an evolutionary approach to bridge the gap that is yawning between models of applied ethics and the actual practice of clinical ethics or at least as an approach towards some epistemological musts of clinical ethics.

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