Author's response to reviews

Title: Democracy: The Forgotten Challenge for Bioethics in the Developing Countries

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The Biomed Central Editorial Team

Object: Democracy: The Forgotten Challenge for Bioethics in the Developing Countries

Ghaiath M. A. Hussein, MBBS, MHSc. (Bioethics)

Dear Editor,

Thank you for consideration of my manuscript for publication in your journal.

I have reviewed the above manuscript according to your reviewers’ comments and made the necessary changes. Please find them in bolded blue color following each comment.

Reviewer: Derrick Aarons

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:

1. Page 2, 3rd paragraph - The author needs to give some substantive examples of how "Bioethics" and "politics" inter-relate, interact, and influence each other.

   • I have added the examples of Terri Schiavo case in the US [page 3, Para 3], and more examples of the lack of freedom in the developing world [page 2, Para 4], and how these factors do affect the development of the bioethics. ‘A typical example is the case of the 41-year-old brain-injured Florida woman with persistent vegetative state, Terri Schiavo,…’
• As indicated by the reviewer, I have added a paragraph on the inter-relation of bioethics and politics through the effect of political issues on the enforcing factors needed for bioethics [Page 5, Para 2]. It reads as follows, ‘Such political setting affects bioethics enforcement structures at the levels of: 1) existence, by simply labelling ethicists as human rights’ activists, which could be enough to send them to jail; 2) structure, by interfering with the process of members’ selection/election; and 3) functionality, by making the codes and professional bodies overarched by the set of freedom-restricting regulations we previously mentioned, thus literally paralyzing them by depriving them from the power of taking action.’

2. Page 2, 4th paragraph - in the 1st sentence - "..health is a right for people that their governments are striving to set.." - should be re-written to improve clarity, as well as to relate the statement to references stipulating "health as a right" and the WHO statement in regards to health.

• The sentence was re-written as indicated by the reviewer to read as follows, ‘For instance, health is managed and delivered by governments as a human right in the developed countries and they strive to achieve that through organization and allocation of services and resources.’

• I also referred to the WHO constitution supporting the provision of health as a human right, as indicted by the reviewer and it reads as follows, ‘Contrarily, though WHO constitution states that ‘the enjoyment the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being’,[7] there is clear discrepancy between different political regimens in delivering this ‘human right’.’
3. Page 3, 3rd paragraph - "bioethics is away from political coercion as long as it is away from the areas of democracy." What does this mean? Does the author mean that bioethics and its practice will not be subjected to political coercion in states that have democratically elected governments? He needs to re-write/clarify, as well as expand this paragraph to elucidate his conclusion.

• The paragraph was re-written as indicated by the reviewer. Now, it reads as follows, ‘Bioethics’ development and practice is relatively ‘safe’ from the threat of the political power used against it, as long as it is away from the touchy areas of democracy, public engagement and reflections, human rights, and accountability of health professional to the public. These concepts are barely tolerated from totalitarian politicians.’

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

The following suggestions are made to either improve clarity, correct mistakes, or for the author to provide expansion on specific ideas.

Page 1:

1. "Bioethics and politics" - 2nd paragraph: "Firstly, it witnessed.." The author should re-phrase to start the paragraph with a noun, instead of a pronoun ("it").

• Changes made as indicated by the reviewer. The sentence now reads, ‘Firstly, industrialized countries witnessed a huge improvement in the health technologies available for diagnosis and treatment of many diseases.’
2. 2nd paragraph, line 2 - "This led, at one hand.." Correct to "..This led, 'on' one hand..

- **Changed as indicted by the reviewer:** ‘This led, on one hand, to expanded expectation of the population, and, on the other hand,

2. 2nd paragraph, line 3 - insert the word "it" - "it expanded the mandate..

- **Changed as indicted by the reviewer:** ‘... it expanded the mandate of the health care providers’ [page 2, 2nd paragraph]

3. 2nd paragraph, last sentence - The tense used here should all be past tense as the author is describing what took place in previous decades (e.g. ...'was characterized by...which made it..')

- **Changed as indicted by the reviewer:** ‘This also led to a parallel health system development that was characterized by complexity of structures and functions, which made it more prone to ethical problems’[page 2, 2nd paragraph]

Page 2:

1. 2nd paragraph, 2nd line - I suggest change "..is coming.." to ‘..comes..’

- **Changed as suggested by the reviewer.** Now it reads, ‘Most of the western countries have non-totalitarian political regimes where the political power comes from people’ [page 2, last paragraph]
2. 2nd paragraph, line 4 - Change "Moreover," to 'Further, ..'

- **Changed as indicated by the reviewer:** ‘Further, the judicial system provides legal incidents that could give guidance on many ethical issues…’ [page 3, 1st paragraph]

3. 2nd paragraph, line 5 - change "judiciary" to 'judicial'

**Changed as indicated by the reviewer:** ‘Further, the judicial system provides legal incidents…’ [Page 3, 1st paragraph ]

4. 2nd paragraph, line 6 - correct spelling from "resoaning" to "reasoning"

**Corrected as indicated by the reviewer and full spelling check was made for the whole document.** ‘First, at the theoretical level, the main ‘growth factor’ for bioethics is the collective moral reasoning.’ [Page 3, last paragraph ]

5. 2nd paragraph, line 7 - delete "jucidial judgments" and improve the clarity of the sentence by re-writing, perhaps as "..or contrarily can produce ethical guidance through its promotion of moral reasoning and public engagement"

**Changed as indicated by the reviewer and now reads as follows,** ‘Further, the judicial system provides legal incidents that could give guidance on many ethical issues, through its promotion of ethical criticism, moral reasoning and public engagement.’ [Page 3, 1st paragraph]

6. 2nd paragraph, line 7 - correct "graown" to "grown"
Corrected as indicated by the reviewer and full spelling check was made for the whole document. ‘Media has also grown within this political structure as a powerful tool…’

7. 3rd paragraph, line 3 - insert "the" - "Moreover, 'the' practice of bioethics..

Changed as indicated by the reviewer and now reads as follows, ‘Secondly, the practice of bioethics depends on a collective agreement on the sets of limits’

8. 4th paragraph, line 4 - The second half of the sentence "..which stemmed from.." is confusing and should be re-written to improve clarity.

Sentence changed as indicated by the reviewer

9. 4th paragraph, last sentence - The author needs to expand on this sentence to clarify in what ways these factors play differing roles in developed and less developed countries.

10. 5th paragraph - all three sentences here need to be re-written to improve their clarity and cohesion

These paragraphs are now re-written as indicted by the reviewer. More examples were added. Page 4, 1st and 2nd paragraphs, starting as follows:

‘For instance, health is managed and delivered by governments as a human right in the developed countries…’ and ‘...there is clear discrepancy between different political regimens in delivering this ‘human right’.’
The first paragraph of page 5, ‘Moreover, the clinical practice where at least clinical ethics flourishes is highly affected by the political systems in many terms.’ It explains how political settings lead to different practice of bioethics in developing and developed countries.

11. 6th paragraph, line 1 - delete the word "the" (twice) and perhaps re-write as follows: "Moreover, clinical practice is highly affected by political systems in many ways"

Re-written as indicated by the reviewer as follows:

‘Moreover, the clinical practice is highly affected by the political systems in many ways.’

Page 3:

1. 1st paragraph, line 2 - delete "..long list of.." and re-phrase as "..characterized by ..political-like attitudes such as paternalism,.."

Deleted as indicated by the reviewer, and the sentence now is as follows:

‘...much of our clinical practice in the developing world is characterized by ‘political-like’ attitudes such as…’

2. 1st paragraph, line 6 - "..with the least involvement.." - something is missing here - least involvement of whom?

Re-written as indicated by the reviewer and not it is as follows:

‘They have been deciding ‘what is good for us’, taking crucial decisions on our behalf without involving us, and indeed tell lies and hide facts, as much as is needed to accomplish ‘the highest interests of the state’.’
3. 1st paragraph, line 7 - insert "is" - (..as much as 'is' needed..)

Inserted as indicated by the reviewer, and re-written as follows: ‘...as much as is needed to accomplish ‘the highest interests of the state’.

4. 2nd paragraph, line 2 - correct to state "..from 'one' country to another.."

Corrected as indicated by the reviewer, and it is as follows: ‘This safety is relative and varies from one country to another’

5. 2nd paragraph, line 5 - insert the word "any" (..far from 'any' real..)

Inserted as indicated by the reviewer: ‘...generally far from any real public engagement.’

6. 2nd paragraph, line 8 - correct spelling "non-threatening"

Corrected as indicated by the reviewer: ‘...bioethics as a ‘non-threatening’ academic activity…’

7. 3rd paragraph, line 1 - delete "In conclusion" as this is stated at the end of the last page (4).

The whole paragraph omitted. Only the conclusion paragraph was left ‘In conclusion, bioethics should be utilized as a powerful tool to increase the choices of people in areas of the world where the right of free choice is absent or restricted by non-democratic political regimes’

8. 5th paragraph, 2nd sentence - The author needs to re-write and explain what he means by this sentence
9. Page 3 - "The way forward" - 1st sentence - change "..the way we used to practice" to 'the way we practice medicine'.

   Changed as indicated by the reviewer and reads as follows, ‘…we have to change the way we used to practice medicine, at least in terms of dealing with our individual patients.’

10. 2nd sentence - change "no way we can develop.." to 'We cannot develop..'

   Changed as indicated by the reviewer and reads as follows, ‘…We can not develop bioethics without involving patients.’

Page 4:

1. 1st paragraph, line 3 - add 's' to make the word "settings"

   Added as indicated by the reviewer: ‘…developing bioethics in such settings…’

2. 1st paragraph, line 4 - instead of using the pronoun "it", say 'Bioethics is better started..' 

   Changed as indicated by the reviewer: ‘Bioethics is better started…’ [page 7, second paragraph]

3. 2nd paragraph, line 4 - insert 'a' i.e. "..bioethics, etc, as 'a' response to..

   Inserted as indicated by the reviewer: ‘…etc. as a response to…’ [page 7, fourth paragraph]

4. 2nd paragraph, line 5 - delete the words "being" and "with" for the sentence to read ".. by not contradicting religion"
Changed as indicated by the reviewer: ‘Care is needed not to present bioethics as contradicting to religion…’ [page 7, fourth paragraph]

5. 3rd paragraph, line 1 - delete the first "to" - so sentence will read "..care is needed not to present..

   Changed as indicated by the reviewer, and the sentence reads as: ‘Care is needed not to present bioethics …’ [page 7, fourth paragraph]

6. 3rd paragraph, line 2 - delete "with" - so sentence will read "..all those who had degrees..

   Deleted as indicated by the reviewer and the sentence now reads ‘all those who had degrees in ethics’ [page 7, last paragraph]}

7. 4th paragraph, line 2 - delete ".it overlooked.." and insert ".these authors overlooked.." Line 3 - change the words "..on their structure and function" to '..on the structure and function of research ethics in these countries'

   Changed as indicated by the reviewer and now reads “...these authors overlooked the issues related…” [page 8, last paragraph]

References:

1. Reference # 3 - The author needs to write the name of the author who wrote the chapter "Religious and cultural perspectives in bioethics" in the book that was edited by P. Singer and A. Viens

   Added as indicated by the reviewer and now cited as follows:

2. The title and names of persons written in 'capital'/upper case letters should be corrected to lower case letters (references # 4 & 6).

Corrected as indicated by the reviewer and they are now cited as follows:


The following are the changes made as indicated by the second reviewer:

EMILIO MORDINI

Major Compulsory Revisions

Any new arguments should be added. As it stands this paper does not present any original argument and it is not interesting.

The following arguments and examples were added as indicated by the reviewer:

- The comparison of how a case like Terri Schiavo's case would have been handled in a developing country setting in comparison to its implication in the US. [Page 3, 1st paragraph]
- More examples and statistics were given on the situation of human rights situation in some developing countries and its relation to the development of bioethics. [Page 3, 2nd paragraph]
- The human rights' approach to provision of health was added and emphasized [Page 4, 2nd paragraph]
• An additional argument on the relation of bioethics and politics in developing countries setting was added through discussing the enforcement mechanisms required for establishing bioethics. [Page 5, 2nd paragraph]

Minor Essential Revisions

The paper is too generic. Some concrete examples or case studies will greatly improve the quality and readability of the paper.

More examples and statistics were added as indicated by the reviewer:

• The comparative example of Terri Schiavo. [Page 3, 1st paragraph]
• Specific examples were given from the author’s context on the situation in Sudan, and some neighboring countries.
• Detailed example was given on how the non-democratic regimes could impede the development of any enforcing mechanism for bioethics. [Page 5, last paragraph]

Discretionary Revisions

Reference list is rather poor. It would deserve to be updated and enlarged.

More references were added as indicated by the reviewer. More updated textbook and articles were added as indicated by the reviewer. References list now cites 12 references.