

A tribute to Edmund Pellegrino

On June 13, 2013, the world renowned North American doctor and bioethicist Edmund Pellegrino died at 92 in Washington D.C. (USA), a few days left to complete 93 years of life. Unfortunately, in Brazil he is still not very known, since none of his 23 books as author, coauthor or publisher and none of his any more than 600 scientific articles, most of them written at dawn, in the first hours of the day in his ancient Olivetti typewriter, in the context of bioethics, the ethics of virtues, philosophy of medicine and medical ethics, have been translated in Portuguese. Fortunately, this silence was broken recently by some Brazilian bioethicists, philosophers and doctors who wrote a few articles commenting and rescuing the importance of the humanism of Pellegrino and his perspective in medical ethics, bioethics and philosophy of medicine and by some doctorate theses, specifically in the context of philosophy, health and bioethics.

In the limits of a publishing note, we present readers a synopsis of some aspects of his life and work that show him to be one of the great pioneers of world bioethics.

Edmund Daniel Pellegrino was born June 22, 1920 in Newark (New Jersey). He graduated at St. John's University (B.S) in 1937, receiving his MD by New York University in 1944. During his professional life as doctor and bioethicist, he received no less than 52 *honoris causa* titles, in addition to several prizes and honors, among them the Abraham Flexner Award, from the Association of American Universities, the Benjamin Rush Award, from the American Medical Association. He was one of the founders and director of the famous Kennedy Institute of Ethics (1983-1989) and the Center for the Advanced Study of Ethics (1989-1994) in Georgetown University (Jesuits). Pellegrino was also Honorary Member or Fellow of nearly 20 scientific or professional societies.

He was a teacher of Medicine and Medical Ethics in the Center for Clinical Bioethics, of Georgetown University, from 2001. There he was nominated President of the Council of Bioethics of the President

of the United States in the period 2005-2009 (*President's Council of Bioethics*) at 85 years old. Asked by a reporter in an interview granted to the Spanish magazine *Diário Médico* as to his advanced age before so high a responsibility, he answered: "Why would I stop thinking from 85 on?". As the President of this prestigious Council of Bioethics, he organized, among other documents, one of unquestionable importance: *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics* (March of 2008), which was published by Notre Dame University Press (Indiana) in 2009.

The Teacher Pellegrino was a member of Pontifical Academy of Life since its institution in 1994b by Pope John Paul II, and in 2000 was nominated emeritus member. In 2004, he was invited to integrate UNESCO's International Committee of Bioethics. He was also cofounder, with H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr, of the prestigious scientific publication *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, published by the *Society for Health and Human Values*, which aims to stimulate philosophical reflection and bioethics in the context of medicine and health in general.

While completing 90 years of life, he said he wanted to write three more books: "I want to finish the second edition of the book *Philosophy of Medicine*, which I predict to be a more definitive work. And then I want to write a book on theory and practice of clinical medicine, which has not been really approached as it must from a theoretical perspective. And then perhaps a third one, on personal experiences, which I want to entitle 'Has Anybody Called the Doctor?' This would be series of small vignettes".

As we may see, age was never a problem or hindrance for Pellegrino to innovate, to create and to produce scientifically. He was a practicing catholic Christian which attended daily mass. As to his catholic faith, he said that it was "the most important unifying element of all his life". The Cardinal of Washington, Donald Wuerl, said about the death of Pellegrino: "In all his multiple activities and services, he always pre-

sented a solid combination of his scientific expertise and a deep catholic faith”.

For Pellegrino, “the well-being of the patient must always be above the interests of the doctor”, since medicine is a “special profession”, due to dealing with persons in state of vulnerability.

We present now some aspects of the patient-doctor relation, in an interview given to the *Revista Ser Médico – Cremesp* (2011 Set;56:4-5). Pellegrino elects the principle of benevolence (to want the good) as being the most important in the context of health. Benevolence (to want the good) is the first virtue of Medical Ethics, and Beneficence is still the first principle of Deontological Ethics. The virtue of benevolence implies protection to the patient, from the observation of the vulnerability brought by the disease, inequality of dependence and asymmetry of power. “Patients must trust the doctor uses his knowledge in a sensible way focused in the good, for this is what he promises while offering his services”.

What would be a virtuous doctor for Pellegrino? “It is the one who will always make an effort to take into account the state of vulnerability of the patient. (...) In practice, to reach the good and the well-being of the patient, the virtuous doctor must demonstrate qualities of character such as moral virtues – benevolence, honesty, reliability, loyalty to the promise (...), compassion and humility; and intellectual virtues – technical competence, skill, care and intuition. For the religious doctor, we might add virtues as faith, hope and charity”.

In the situation of an atheistic doctor and his patient, would the relationship be incomplete as compared to that where the doctor who cultivates some

type of religious faith? Pellegrino says that “Under the technical aspect, I have not doubt the atheistic professional is able to treat a patient so well as the one who has a religion. However, the first one is inclined to ignoring or devaluing the spiritual component implicit in the service, or not being able to appreciating it and, so, failing regarding holism (integrality) present in the context of cure. I think it is not enough to take care of the patient only as a biological or psychological mechanism, since the peculiarity of human beings among creatures of the biosphere is ignored, and then we see denied the possibility of the spiritual life in which a patient believes”.

He was always a prolific author and teacher of great projection and erudition. His academic titles would oblige us to use several pages to show. With this editorial, our *Bioethikos Journal* pays a tribute in the farewell of the oldest member of world bioethics, a pioneer and indisputable leader in his area of professional and intellectual work; one of the rare unanimously venerated of the scientific area, a humble wise man who gained the respect and awe of the leaders of the most different current trends of philosophical thought, bioethics and scientific medicine.

An article of this number entitled “Edmund Pellegrino: an icon of Christian Bioethics”, by Raul Marino Jr., one of his admirers and why not say “disciples” (“we consider Edmund Pellegrino the soul of modern Christian bioethics in the last century”), helps us to understand a little more the important contribution given by Pellegrino.

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