

33rd Meeting of the National Ethics Councils

16 & 17 May 2024

From Past to Future

How to Foster Justice in a Global World



Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, BRUSSELS

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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From Past to Future

How to Foster Justice in a Global World

More than ever, our world needs justice.

While autonomy and freedom of choice received extraordinary attention in the first decades of the development of bioethics, the resurgence of a world polarized by conflicts and opinions, fragmented by multiple inequalities and looming with the threat of climate disaster, makes us realize that of all the values that bioethics promotes, justice is arguably the most crucial if we are to retain hope for a livable and common world.

The Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics has decided to make *Justice in a Global World* the focus of the NEC Forum organized as part of the Belgian presidency of the European Union.

Fostering justice in a global world is a complex and multifaceted task that requires the cooperation and commitment of individuals, governments, and international organizations. Whether we are talking about science, technology, clinical practice or public health policy, ethical reflection must address the following issues: protecting human rights, addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change, advocate that the benefits of economic growth are shared equitably, promoting participation in democratic processes and inclusive and representative decision-making. Policies need to reflect the needs and concerns of all communities, and equitable access to education and health.

Because it would be illusory to think of tomorrow's world without taking care of the past or meeting today's and future's challenges, the discussion of the principle of justice and its applications will take place from a 3-fold perspective that allows for these different temporalities through a series of concrete, tangible issues.

The need to acknowledge unjust practices "*in the Past*" and to promote restorative justice will be illustrated by the issue of the status and care of human remains; justice "*in the Present*" will be addressed through the ethical challenges involved in managing the crises that are already affecting populations on a global scale, whether they relate to health or the climate ; justice "*in the Future*" will guide our ethical explorations of technologies (AI, organoids) that point to profound changes in scientific research and society.

Justice to heal the past, justice to meet today's global crises, and justice to build our future: Belgium's program for this 33rd edition of the NEC Forum.

DAY 1 • Thursday 16 May 2024

Morning session

THE PAST: Justice and Care for Human Remains

09.00 Registration *and* administrative support

09.30 Opening & Welcome addresses

Jan De Lepeleire (Belgium) - Chair of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

Frank Vandenbroucke (Belgium) - Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health

Bruno Verbergt (Belgium) - State Secretary in charge of Science Policy's representative

Joanna Drake - Deputy Director-General in DG Research and Innovation (R&I) at the European Commission

10.00 Session 1 - Part 1 - Justice and Care for Human Remains

Moderator: Philippe Lardinois (Belgium) - Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

Promoting the principle of Justice means considering and acknowledging certain structurally unjust practices in the past. But taking them into account is not enough; we must also deal with their problematic legacy in a way that is capable, if not of healing the pain and damage caused in the past, of restoring a balance in the present. Science owes a great deal to individual and collective creativity but many scientific collections were also built up from colonial practices. What are the consequences across time and space when these collections contain human remains that belonged to other societies? What sort of care do human remains deserve? How do we pass them on to future generations? And how do we deal with the colonial past of European countries? Can the repatriation or return of such remains help to build a restorative justice and to write a new common story with the Southern countries? The "human remains" session will address these questions.

10.00 Patrick Semal (Belgium) - Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences
The HOME project and the collections of human remains in Belgium.

Florence Caeymaex (Belgium) - Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics
Status of human remains in museums, scientific and private collections.

10.40 Round table discussion – Q & A

11.10 Coffee break

11.40 Session 1 - Part 2 - Justice and Care for Human Remains

Moderator: Philippe Lardinois (Belgium) - Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

11.40 **Marie-Sophie de Clippele** (Belgium) - Saint-Louis Bruxelles, UC Louvain
The turning tide of repatriation of human remains, towards an inclusive heritage justice model?

Charles Mulinda Kabwete (Rwanda) - Department of History and Heritage Studies

12.20 Round table discussion – Q & A

12.50 Lunch Break

DAY 1 • Thursday 16 May 2024

Afternoon session

THE PRESENT: Climate, Health & Crisis management

13.50 Session 2 – Planetary Ethics, Onehealth

Moderator: **Barbara Prainsack** (Austria) – Chair of the European Group on Ethics in Sciences and New Technologies (EGE); Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna

Today's environmental crises and our reactions to them raise a number of ethical questions. They concern the relationship between humans and other entities, including our responsibility vis-à-vis non-human nature, and human action, ongoing and future, to address one of the greatest challenges that humanity has faced.

The panel will discuss how principles such as justice, inclusivity, solidarity, and equity can guide a fair transition to sustainable ways of living, importantly as regards the less affluent regions of the planet that have contributed little to these crises and are strongly affected by them, and as regards our responsibility towards future generations.

Speakers will also address how narrow framings of nature as a public good at humanity's disposal can be overcome by broader understandings of the intrinsic value of nature. In this context, emerging concepts of large-scale geo-engineering will be discussed through the lens of 'the place' of humans in nature, contextual causes, risks, and potential long-term effects.

Bringing these considerations together with the concept of One Health, the panellists will also reflect on how One Health perspectives and actions can help with addressing the environmental crises, and – vice-versa and beyond an anthropocentric focus – how concepts and arguments from environmental ethics can help to further develop One Health approaches.

13.50 **Umberto Agrimi (Italy) – Director of the Department of Food Safety, Nutrition and Veterinary Public Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità**

Michael Bernstein (US) – The University of Tromsø, the Arctic University of Norway; Austrian Institute of Technology GMBH; representative of project [RE4Green](#)
Re-configuring the “do no significant harm” principle for European research and innovation: a situated approach

Speaker to be confirmed

14.50 Round table discussion – Q & A

15.20 Coffee break

15.50 **Session 3 – Facing Scarcity**

Moderator: **Asta Cekanauskaite** (Lithuania) – Lithuanian Bioethics Committee

Public authorities are responsible for guaranteeing the population's health. To fulfil this obligation, public policies must aim at a social organization that provides sufficient health care staff, equipment and medication as well as adapted procedures. This allows society to be prepared for foreseeable events that could pressure the healthcare system and avoid a shortfall in healthcare supply. During the pandemic, many countries (including in Europe) faced shortages not only of drugs and vaccines, but also of intensive care beds and qualified personnel. How were these situations handled from an ethical point of view, and what were the recommendations of National Ethics Committees and their impact?

15.50 **Lotta Eriksson** (Sweden) – Secretary general of the Swedish National Council on Medical Ethics

Priorities in a Pandemic: Ethics, Public Policy, and the Role of the Swedish NEC

Virginie Pirard (Belgium) – Vice-chair of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

Prioritizing Among the “Prioritized” and Protecting Marginal Populations: A Double Ethical Tension in Times of Scarcity

Joshua Kimani (Kenya) – Clinical Research Director and Site Lead, University of Manitoba, field office in Nairobi; representative of project PREPARED

16.50 **Round table discussion – Q & A**

17.20 **Closing remarks**

Jan De Lepeleire (Belgium) – Chair of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

17.30 **NEC Chairs' Meeting**

19.00 **Walking dinner**

DAY 2 • Friday 17 May 2024

Morning session

THE FUTURE: Technologies of the future

08.30 Registration and administrative support

09.00 Session 4 – Experimental modelling of biological functions (organoids)

Moderator: Patrick Cras (Belgium) – Vice-chair of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

Organoids are three-dimensional structures grown from pluripotent stem cells derived from human tissue. They serve as in vitro miniature models of human organs and have the potential to revolutionize biomedical research and clinical care. However, organoids also raise several ethical concerns, including the definition of their moral status. Are organoids simply collections of cells, or do they have some of the same moral status as human beings?

Furthermore, as organoids are grown from human pluripotent stem cells, it is important to obtain informed consent from the person who donated the cells: what is the scope of this consent and how will the donor's privacy be protected?

Neuronal organoids are a specific type of organoids associated with additional concern. For example, the question of whether neuronal organoids can become conscious is a complex one that is still being debated, even if there is no clear consensus on the definition of consciousness.

The development of new technologies has made it possible to modify organoids genetically. In addition, researchers are beginning to explore the possibility of creating human-animal chimaeras, organisms that contain human and animal cells. Organoids could also be misused, for example, to create designer babies. All these (potential) uses require ethics discussion and safeguards to prevent the misuse of organoids as well as their deregulated exploitation.

09.00 **Vincent Pasque** (Belgium) - Department of Development and Regeneration
University of Leuven
Stem-cell based embryo models

Adrian Ranga (Belgium) - Department of Mechanical Engineering University of
Leuven

Organoids mainly consisting of neurons and neural networks and bioethics aspects:

Hervé Chneiweiss (France) - Director of the Neuroscience Paris Seine – IBPS
research centre (CNRS/Inserm/ Sorbonne University); representative of [HYBRIDA](#)
project

Organoids: from ethical issues to operational guidelines, the outputs of the Hybrida project

Renata Veselská (Czech Republic) – Bioethics Commission of the Research and
Development Council; European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies

(EGE)

10.20 Round table discussion – Q & A

10.50 Coffee break

11.20 Session 5 – Artificial intelligence & Ethics

Moderator: Tom Goffin (Belgium) - Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly evolving and has the potential to revolutionize many aspects of our lives, from the way we work to the way we interact with the world around us. However, as with any powerful technology, AI raises several ethical concerns.

One of the most important ethical aspects of AI is transparency. A lack of transparency can lead to discrimination and unfair treatment. Another significant ethical concern is the perpetuation and amplification of existing biases, which leads to increasing discrimination against certain groups of people, such as women, people of colour, or people with disabilities. Bias in AI can also harm democracy by reinforcing stereotypes and creating a more fragmented society. In addition, AI systems could make mistakes that could have serious consequences, especially if made in a critical decision-making context such as health care. Finally, AI systems becoming autonomous, they could be used without human intervention, which could have devastating consequences. It is important to have safeguards to prevent mistakes and deregulated uses as well to develop policies to mitigate the adverse effects of AI on employment, such as investments in education and training for workers at risk of being displaced by AI.

11.20 **Raja Chatila** (France) - Chair of the IEEE Global Initiative for Ethical Considerations in Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems; Robotics and Ethics at Sorbonne University
Generative AI Systems: Ethical and Societal Issues.

Gemma Galdon-Clavell (Spain) – Founder and CEO of Eticas Foundation and Eticas Consulting; Ethics Expert to the European Commission

Antoinette Rouvroy (Belgium) - European University Institute and Centre de Recherche en Information, Droit et Société (CRIDS)
Resisting the mirages of "algorithmic realism", preserving the possibility of a justice to come.

Rui Nunes (Spain) - National Council of Ethics for the Life Sciences
Presentation on the White Book on AI applied to Life Sciences

12.40 Round table discussion – Q & A

13.10 Lunch break

DAY 2 • Friday 17 May 2024

Afternoon session Round table

14.10 Data ethics (a round table)

Johan Busse (Denmark) - Danish Data Ethics Council

Claude Kirchner (France) - National Pilot Committee for Digital Ethics (CNPEN), National Consultative Ethics Council (CCNE), Inria

Speaker 3 – representative of the Spanish Bioethics Committee – *to be confirmed*

Speaker 4 – *to be confirmed*

15.00 Closing remarks and future NEC activities

Jan De Lepeleire (Belgium) - Chair of the Belgian Advisory Committee on Bioethics

Dorian Karatzas - Head of the Ethics and Research Integrity Sector, DG RTD, European Commission

Speaker 3 – Chair of the NEC hosting the 34th Forum – *to be confirmed*

15.15 Cultural visit
