Disaster Bioethics

Macro-triage in disaster planning

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What is Disaster Bioethics?

Disaster ethics

Military ethics

Emergency medicine

Humanitarian intervention

Humanitarian aid
Title: “Macro-triage in disaster planning”

MACRO

In engineering ethics: micro-ethics – macro-ethics

Pellegrino: philosophy in medicine – philosophy of medicine

In bioethics: ethics in – ethics of

‘macro’ perspective:
- How are disasters approached at a global level?
- Which disasters will have what kind of response?
- Short-term and long-term goals of international assistance?
Title: “Macro-triage in disaster planning”

TRIAGE

Baron Larrey in Napoleon’s army
- Ordinary triage: order of treatment
- Extraordinary triage: who will be treated

Triage in disasters:
- Micro-ethics: prioritisation of victims
- Macro-ethics
  - introduction of military discourse: not focus on individual interest; ‘salvage value’; saving lives not important as such
  - paternalistic discourse
Title: “Macro-triage in disaster planning”

DISASTER PLANNING

Disaster response planning:

“preparedness” instead of “prevention”

‘macro’ perspective:

- catastrophic threats regarded as security threats, no longer as primarily public health problems (emerging diseases → bioterrorism → disasters)

- politics of security:

  protecting - national territory

    - population

    - vital systems (essential for social and economic life)

- particular logic of action: global living conditions of populations (poverty) outside scope of preparedness
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The moral geography of disasters

Identifying an event as a ‘disaster’ already introduces us into a particular moral framework
What is a disaster?

“humanitarian disasters” or “emergencies”

Complex: man made

human violence, conflict

Natural

wide spread public sympathy and generosity

Different moral category:
- no human responsibility, no human causation, nobody to blame
- pure, innocent victims, no human evil
- unqualified call for sympathy and solidarity
What is a disaster?

- natural
- man-made

- traditional philosophical discourse of nature versus human beings
- introduction of a moral geography that only emphasizes the origin:
  - reduced vision of cause and responsibility
  - ethics is only apparent in the response

what makes a disaster a disaster is not its origin but its impact on human beings

January 2010: Haiti: magnitude 7.0: 316,000 people killed
February 2010: Chile: magnitude 8.8: 500 persons killed
March 2011: Japan: magnitude 9.0: 25,000 persons killed?
A natural disaster?

2010 earthquake in Haiti

- Poorest country in western hemisphere
- 80% of population below poverty line

1492: Columbus; Spanish colony (gold)
1697: Richest French colony (sugar, coffee)
1804: First black-led republic

Until 1947: indemnities paid to France (80% of national budget)
1915-1934: US occupation: introduction of forced labor

Country ruined: no infrastructure, land deforested, overall poverty
A natural disaster?

2005 Hurricane Katrina


Many failures in Hurricane Protection System

Complex interplay between natural processes and human activity: disaster was built into human engineering and political decision-making
Mississippi river delta: ‘delta-switching’ every 1,000 years
Bruges, capital of West Flanders, ‘Venice of the North’

‘brugge’

= ‘landing stage’,
  ‘port’

Until 1050 seaport
Bruges: now 10 miles from the sea
The Netherlands in the 16th century
The Netherlands in the 21st century
Drowned villages (117 villages disappeared; 14-16th century)
1530: St Felix storm
Natural disasters?

Netherlands’
“the low countries”

Most of the country below sea level

Lowest city 7 meters/ 23 ft below sea level
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The moral geography of humanitarian relief

Self-evident ethics: paradigm of the good Samaritan, disinterested and purely philanthropic

Humanitarian aid ———— Humanitarian intervention
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Primordial ethics of humanitarian aid became problematic

- International aid as instrument of foreign policy
  
  1918 Fourteen Points (President Woodrow Wilson)
  
  1949 Four Points (President Truman)

  more developed countries have a moral obligation to help less developed countries

- End of the Cold War: military interventions justified with humanitarian arguments

  Basic notion: rescue of the innocent and helpless

Distinction between humanitarian aid and humanitarian intervention is disappearing
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Disasters and conflicts are now included in the same logic of humanitarian relief

Emergence of global norms of human rights and human dignity

States are subject to a higher normative order:
underlying conception of global moral community
or shared humanity

- Bioethics → Global bioethics
- Common humanity/ cosmopolitanism
- Global/universal principles
- Moral imperative to assist and intervene

New language of humanitarianism
Rony Brauman: “mission civilisatrice”
Bernard Kouchner: “emergency ethics”
change from aid to action: ethics in action
‘humanitarianism’ = ‘doing good’

- Fundamental value of this discourse: human life
  * politics sacrifices; humanitarianism saves
- Combines solidarity and compassion; the rational and the emotional
  humanitas, humanité
- humankind: ethical category including all human beings
  basis for solidarity (no distinction)
- humaneness: concern for other human beings
  basis for compassion (no distance)
Critical analysis of humanitarian discourse

- Humanitarianism as ‘politics of life’
  - radical inequality of lives: differences made ‘bare life’ to be assisted and the ‘political life’ that is freely risked (zoe of populations vs bios of citizens of the world). Not all lives have the same value
  - specific attitude towards the other: vulnerable, traumatized: creation of victimhood
  - humanitarian testimony: the witness who testifies vs the victims whose suffering is testified:
    - the logic of compassion is replacing the demand for justice
    - focus on individual assistance; the social and historical context is irrelevant
New debate on humanitarianism

Value of saving human lives

- We can never challenge the politics that permits war, famine, and suffering

human rights

- Instead of the language of needs and compassion we should use the language of human rights and dignity

- Humanitarianism will be more than just a moral endeavor but will be integrated into a moral-legal framework and anchored in institutions

- Rights dignify rather than victimize; human rights make people equal and more powerful

- It generates policy imperatives as expression of international responsibility

- It provides a focus on structural, long-term aid (common humanity beyond extreme events)