

Is the truth important for bioethics today?

Para la bioética, ¿La verdad es importante en la actualidad?

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Hurtado G., *Biografía de la verdad: ¿Cuándo dejó de importarnos la verdad y por qué deberíamos recuperarla?*, Siglo XXI Editores, 2024, 142 pp.

The book *Biografía de la verdad: ¿Cuándo dejó de importarnos la verdad y por qué deberíamos recuperarla?* by philosopher Guillermo Hurtado seeks to show that the traditional theories on truth; coherentists, pragmatist, deflationist, nihilist have been insufficient. In response, the author offers a perspective that makes explicit the relationship between truth and life. In the face of any definition the author offers a genealogical narrative, and in the face of theories he offers the possibility of a moral pedagogy that seeks to guide understanding and practical application to the great questions “what is truth, what makes the true true?”. These questions are fundamental, for example, in the field of Bioethics the search for truth is fundamental to making informed

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decisions about the health or welfare of people and Guillermo Hurtado's text suggests that truth is not just an abstract concept but is linked to life. By considering the relationship between truth and life, the possibility of thinking of this relationship as co-principles is brought into play, that is, that one is not understood without the other. This is relevant in Bioethics because it seeks to promote an understanding of human experience based on communication and charity in medical contexts.

1. Definitions, theories and intuitions about truth

The first mandatory aspect that should be mentioned is the title of the work; "Biography of truth". I consider this to be a particularly accurate title as it encompasses the feeling and tone of the work. Guillermo Hurtado expresses in Unamuno's words that his text is oriented towards that phrase that says, "to seek truth in life and life in truth" and it is that a book thus titled undertakes a quite important and necessary task; to answer the question about that forgotten relationship between truth and life.

One element that highlights the particularities of this very special title are the distinctions between intuition, definition and theory. These distinctions are important because Guillermo Hurtado, it seems to me, is not only interested in telling us what truth is, but he seeks to put on the table the importance of reencountering it in life. And it seems that the pretensions of the definition and theories about truth have placed us in too abstract theoretical twists and turns, leaving the urgent and necessary relationship between life and truth unlinked.

In the book, intuitions are very important, for example, the Aristotelian and Platonic intuition, with the intention that these are used neither as definitions nor as theories. In this regard, I think it is important to mention that the author considers that "truth is indefinable and undefinable in the way it has been attempted to be defined or theorized in the philosophical tradition". And then he sets out to

explore the subject in a way that I personally find exciting because we commonly find ourselves with the pretension of being conclusive, or of offering a last word, or a definition. And then Guillermo asks us in the text, what if we explore other ways that are beyond the demands of definition and theories? What if we better stop again at the great intuitions of the history of thought and speak of them as intuitions and not as definitions?

And so, the historical and sophistic theories of truth can be supplanted, debated, supported, overthrown, adjusted because they are indeed theories. For the real and daily problem of truth, the intuitions found in life itself and from life itself are important. It is undoubtedly important to do philosophy from a position based on life. I would even say it is revolutionary, in the sense of returning to the philosophical problems that arise from life itself. And for the specific case of Bioethics, Hurtado advocates the use of intuitions and experiences instead of rigid and inflexible theories, this would always imply the vital and personal context of patients when dealing with ethical dilemmas, allowing an approach where truth is privileged and in equality charity and good. As is well known, there are various currents of thought in bioethics, as well as different methodologies for approaching clinical cases, one of which is casuistry, which is based on specific cases that have been paradigmatic throughout history, from which the most important bioethical principles have been derived, such as beneficence, justice, responsible autonomy, the therapeutic principle, etcetera.

2. A narrative about truth

Of the many relevant aspects of the text, there is one that stands out for me. It has to do with the possibility of exploring the path of intuition. Guillermo's book is rich in images and metaphors. The list of images could be very suggestive, for example, he takes up the myth of the cave in a very particular way to explain the relationship between good and truth. In addition, he elaborates ideas about truth

with images such as the key and the lock. To distinguish truth from lies, he uses the image of a rubber duck floating and a sinking lead duckling. And to speak of errors he brings up a poem about a fly that bumps into the window. All these images speak seriously of truth. They are relevant because, as I mentioned, the aim of the text is not to make a new theory but to offer a narrative about truth.

I consider equally relevant what the author calls the negative genealogy of truth. There the author leads the reader in the creation of new images, for example, of error, lies, secrecy, confusion, alienation. We have all definitely had a common experience of non-truth, we know pre-theoretically what truth is by a negative way of non-truth. But at the same time, we have experienced the rightness, the accuracy of someone who knows how to give a direction, many times we have benefited with the sincerity of a friendship, or we have experienced having the feeling of floating after a good confession or simply telling the truth.

The objective of this narration or story includes a moral pedagogy of truth in the form of teaching that allows us, with my help or with the help of others, to come out of the cave. In this moral pedagogy of truth, a fundamental aspect for our society is pointed out, that truth emerges as a component of the dialogical reality of the person and that truth not only dwells in judgment but above all in the totality of human life. In bioethics this translates, for example, into the need to educate health professionals about the importance of truth in the communication between physicians and patients, which has taken on the specific name of informed consent, where the elements that make up such communication are indeed the truth that benefits both the physician in the fulfillment of his duty and his adherence to the Hippocratic oath and the patient in terms of strengthening his responsible freedom.

In this regard, the author finds that in Thomas Aquinas the gap between truth and life was prolonged until witnessing a “secularization” and “dehumanization” of the concept of truth, since the distance between one concept and the other consists in the subordination of good to truth, “But according to reality, the order is different, in the first place, there is the good and in second place the truth”. I consider

that this is not a minor reflection, since it makes possible the consideration of the mutual necessity between truth and good, as if they were co-principles that guide life. This aspect is important because in bioethics this secularization or dehumanization of the concept of truth can be reflected when the human dimensions are ignored in the face of ethical dilemmas or when ethical judgment is obscured by the manipulation of facts or blind empathy that distorts objective truth to make room for mere sentiment. It is urgent that bioethics always keep in mind the connection between truth and life, ensuring that the decisions taken are not based on abstract principles, but on the lived reality of people. To this end, clinical bioethics brings great light insofar as it falls on the singular patient with specific conditions and concrete circumstances; it is there, in that concreteness that truth appears in its splendor.

3. Philosophy in Spanish

To conclude, I would like to allude to the importance of philosophy written in Spanish. It is not minor to find a text of such lucidity in Spanish, for sometimes arbitrary reasons it has been preferred to write in other languages. And then there are important consequences for the non-specialized general public, who have little access to books of profound quality in their own language. Undoubtedly it is a book that should be read and commented, I truly wish that this book becomes a classic of philosophy in Mexico.

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