

Some philosophical remarks on ethics of environmental health



Jiří Šimek

Chair for philosophy and ethics in helping professions

ZSF JU



Medical ethics

- **Philosophers and physicians met together**
- **They speak different languages**
- **Philosophy is speculative**
- **Medicine is very practical discipline**



Medical ethics

- **Toulmin, S.: How Medicine Saved the Life of Ethics.** Perspectives in Biology and Medicine, Vol. 25, , pp. 736-750, 1982.



Ethics of environmental health

- **Different languages**
- **Complexity of what we call environment**
- **Edmund Husserl: Crisis of European Sciences**
- **Science gives no continuous picture but mosaic of detached images.**



Ethics of environmental health

- **All conclusions and recommendations could be at best limited**
- **The only possibility is interpretation of available data**
- **Data have many gaps**



Jürgen Habermas' discursive ethics

- **The best way how to combine more perspectives is discourse**
- **All stakeholders can speak and nobody can be silenced by power**
- **Available data should be at disposal**
- **Data must be respected**



H. G. Gadamer 's hermeneutics

- **We interpret the world**
- **Interpretations from different perspectives can differ**
- **All of them could be legitimate**
- **Dialogue enables shared interpretation**
- **This teaches us humility.**



Levels of discourse

- **Scientific, lay and political discourses differ sometimes essentially**
- **Discourse at one level should respect discourses at other levels**
- **Ethics of environmental health should pay special attention to ongoing discourse**



Consensus

- **Consensus is always only provisional**
- **We are never sure that there is no mistake**
- **Quality of consensus mirrors the quality of discourse**



Contemporary people

- **Human life was never as comfortable and safe as what it is today**
- **Suffering and death does not concern me, it concerns only other people**
- **All that could make explicit human vulnerability is avoided**
- **Fluctuation between denial of danger and unjustified horrors of risks**



Thanks for your attention

