RESUMO - BIOÉTICA

THE MYTH OF NEUTRALITY: IS VALUE-FREE MEDICINE PHILOSOPHICALLY POSSIBLE IN LIGHT OF CATHOLIC BIOETHICS?

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Introduction: Value-free medicine is the notion that political, ethical, and religious values should not influence scientific activity. This concept originates from Positivism and Logical Empiricism, which advocate for the strict use of the scientific method. Values, in light of the Catholic faith, are the ethical and moral principles grounded in Church teachings, reflecting how Catholic physicians perceive the world and, consequently, practice medicine. However, psychology suggests that values form the lens through which individuals perceive and act in the world, and medical practice is no exception. Objective: To analyze whether it is truly possible to practice medicine free of values. Methods: A search was conducted in the PhilPapers database using the terms “catholicism” and “value-free medicine,” yielding 958 results. Open-access articles addressing the role of values in medical practice were selected, while those focusing on other philosophical issues were excluded. Five articles were selected and studied in detail. Results: Value-free medicine is considered a groundless ideal; if it were possible, scientists would be morally irresponsible by ignoring the potential

consequences of uncertainties and errors for society. Authors argue that disregarding values in scientific practice is a form of irresponsibility, given the potential for human activity to generate chaos. Even Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) is inherently value-laden, as it aims to serve the patient's best interest. However, the use of impartial evidence has proven beneficial in protecting patients from medical incompetence and the occasionally exaggerated claims of the pharmaceutical industry. According to psychology, human decisions are inevitably shaped by values, often subconsciously. Despite rational and reflective training, the reflexive side can dominate decision-making. Therefore, values do not make decisions less rational; on the contrary, they endow them with meaning, importance, and moral worth. The only aspect supported by proponents of value-free practice is the principle of impartiality in judging scientific theories, which shields the core of science from bias and distortion. Furthermore, there is the opposite extreme: Values-Based Practice (VBP), which argues that every diagnosis is value-based—often only noticed when conflicts arise—and emphasizes that decision-making should involve those on the front line of treatment, namely the physician and the patient. VBP aims to prevent healthcare paternalism by advocating for shared decision-making. Conclusion: The vast majority of authors state that value-free medicine is an ideal that overlooks the human capacity for error. Medical decisions are inevitably influenced by personal values, which makes them more meaningful. Values-Based Practice promotes humanized medicine, preventing professional authoritarianism by considering the values of both physicians and patients in the decision-making process.

Palavras-chave: catholicism; medicine; value-free.