

## 8<sup>th</sup> UNESCO Workshop on Bioethics, Multiculturalism and Religion

# Religious Perspectives on Bioethics: Protecting the environment, the biosphere and biodiversity

*November 8-10, 2021*

*Bangkok, Thailand*

### MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Bioethics, Multiculturalism & Religion Project is to provide a forum in which representatives of diverse religions and traditions can:

- engage one another in a sustained scholarly dialogue about global bioethics;
- cultivate an amicable atmosphere so participants can learn about each other's tradition or religion with discursive empathy;
- promote mutual understanding of global bioethics through respectful discussion and scholarship;
- strive to develop the linguistic and conceptual space in which common ground or convergence can emerge and be mutually recognized and appreciated; and finally
- foster creative cooperation while respecting the dignity and uniqueness of each tradition.

### WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY

1. The following papers will be commissioned:
  - a. Keynote papers:
    - i. Some presentations will be given on the first day of the workshop addressing and framing the issues at stake that are not necessarily pertinent to any particular religious tradition.
    - ii. They could be topics on the current state of science, law, human rights, philosophy and interreligious dialogue.
  - b. Dialogic papers panels
    - i. Author A from one of the traditions or religions will write and present a paper (approx. 10 pages) that should be submitted 3 months before the workshop addressing the leading questions as much as possible. (see guidelines below)
    - ii. Author B will be assigned to respond to the above paper (approx. 10 pages) and submit it 1 month before the workshop. (see guidelines below)
    - iii. Author A may then respond to the critique further with a paper (approx. 4-5 pages) and submit it for publication.
2. During the three-day workshop, the language is English. Physical participants of the workshop include:

- a. Scholars from the various religions who have written and submitted the papers. They are expected to have read the others' papers before attending the workshop. During each workshop session, they will give a 15-minutes summary of their papers followed by ample period of discussion, clarification, and questions from other authors.
  - b. Other academics interested in the workshop may also participate in the sessions, after approval by the organizing committee (send requests to [agarcia@unescochair.org](mailto:agarcia@unescochair.org)). They can raise questions only after the group above has completed its discussions.
  - c. The workshop may be open to Zoom participation depending on the local facilities.
3. Before submission for eventual publication, authors may modify their papers considering the dialogue of our three-day meeting. It is hoped that these discussions will provide a clear and thorough understanding of each tradition's understanding of the topic in the light of human rights.

#### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE AUTHORS

**Author A:** The general idea is that the scholar in a tradition will explain and demonstrate how their tradition would approach the bioethical issues. It is understood that the scholar will have a position on what their tradition says that is not necessarily universally shared by other experts. We do not expect the author to recapitulate all the arguments to support their position in this short paper. That being said, the author must assume the responding Author B may know little about the Author A's native tradition, and that the paper will be a learning moment for the respondent. Author A should adequately footnote their paper, and explain complex positions that otherwise might be summarized in a word or reference that another expert would know.

**Author B:** The responding scholar should approach the main paper as though they are visiting a sacred site with curiosity and respect. They are not expected to do more than try to understand what they are seeing and respond from their position. This may involve asking questions, and thus the two authors are expected to engage in dialogue as the respondent digests and understands what Author A means. It is especially important that Author A be willing to explain basic or advanced things about their tradition to the respondent, and vice versa. Although the main metaphor is an outsider visiting and learning about another tradition, like in all good conversations the host will want to know about the visitor's perspectives and reasons. Some respondents will have significant understanding of the main expert's tradition, and in those situations the authors should still engage each other, but at their respective levels, and write accordingly.

When writing, the authors should

- Use authoritative texts from their religious and/or cultural traditions and beliefs.
- Organize their discourse around the workshop's featured leading questions.

- Frame the issues within the global bioethics paradigm of human rights and duties, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005).
- Engage the issues in accordance with the mission of the Bioethics, Multiculturalism & Religion Project.

#### LEADING QUESTIONS THE DIALOGIC PAPERS SHOULD ADDRESS

1. How does your religion or tradition evaluate/assess the current environmental crisis?
  - a. Where is the locus of control and of responsibility?
  - b. What are traditional teachings about the relationship between nature and humans? How can we nurture vitality of the earth and all its elements and inhabitants?
  - c. How does uncertain human knowledge factor into this consideration in your tradition?
2. How does your tradition understand the proper relationship or order between humans, nature and the Transcendent (God)?
  - a. Is there an emphasis on anthropocentrism or ecologism?
  - b. How does your tradition understand *integral ecology*?
3. How does care for the environment impact the care for our future generation, as applied to Article 16 – Protecting future generations (e.g., epigenetics, gene drives, synthetic biology)?
  - a. What are humanity’s possible obligations / duties to leave future generations with healthy habitats?
  - b. In terms of environmental justice, how should the ecology question impact our political, socio-cultural and economic practices?
  - c. Are their considerations beyond human beings and their future that should be weighed? Animals for example or the cosmos itself?
4. Comment on from the perspective of your tradition on Article 17 – Protection of the environment, the biosphere and biodiversity: “Due regard is to be given to the interconnection between human beings and other forms of life, to the importance of appropriate access and utilization of biological and genetic resources, to respect for traditional knowledge and to the role of human beings in the protection of the environment, the biosphere and biodiversity.”
  - a. What does biodiversity mean within your tradition?
  - b. Are these duties aligned or not aligned within your tradition?