Some philosophical remarks on ethics of environmental health

Jiří Šimek
Chair for philosophy and ethics in helping professions
ZSF J U
Medical ethics

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

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