# Foreword

As the Founding Director of the Maimonides Institute for Medicine, Ethics, and the Holocaust, I spend a lot of time emphasizing the importance of reflecting on the past in order to protect the future. What can seem like opposite ends of the spectrum – the past and the future – are inherently intertwined by the life that we lead in the present. Therefore, using the Holocaust, the sole example of medically sanctioned genocide, as the historical framework for exploring current issues and anticipating future challenges in ethics offers a valuable educational perspective, one that underscores respect for the dignity of the human being above all else. The Holocaust serves as a tangible example of what can happen when we place the possibility of societal progress above the human dignity of the individual. This is a concept that transcends time – it's relevance in the past, present and future remains equally essential to humanity.

The field of bioethics presents a similar challenge. Science and medicine are often thought of as being in direct conflict with ethics and philosophy; the former being more objective and practical in nature, while the latter is viewed as subjective and theoretical. Yet, while these two fields may seem vastly different – they, too, are intrinsically connected by their application to our daily lives and to the very definition of what it means to be human. Bioethics is the link that unites all of these ideas, bringing the past, present and future together and ensuring that the progression of scientific and medical technology never overshadows the ethics and philosophy essential to humanity.

In this very important work, Professor Protopapadakis embraces the conceptual challenges often associated with bioethics by taking the reader along on a journey that embodies the circle of life and what it means to be human. *From Dawn till Dusk: Bioethical Insights into the Beginning and the End of Life* encourages us to examine difficult, but necessary, questions: How do we define personhood? What rights do we have regarding the beginning and end of life? What responsibilities do we have, if any, to future generations? At what point can technology permanently alter what it means to be "human?" Who gets to make these decisions? These are questions that transcend time and educational silos. We must consider the past, present and future while also utilizing scientific, medical, technological, philosophical, and ethical knowledge. Professor Protopapadakis is unique in his ability to do just that. His capacity to incorporate the many varied components of bioethics provides different insights into beginning and end of life issues. More importantly, it provides an opportunity for the reader to learn to see the world and all those who inhabit it from different perspectives, a transcendent gift that remains long after the completion of the book.

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# Introduction

The beginning and the end of life have always been an impossible riddle to humans, and probably the best – if not the only – explanation for our species' persistent commitment to philosophical meditation and religious faith: the lack of this kind of desperately needed *existential* knowledge has expectedly initiated a quest that has taken several paths, all of them leading to the same destination and with the same prize at the end of the road. Bioethics has no aspirations as high as to unveil utter truths regarding our origin, purpose and destination; on the contrary, its humble task is to settle controversial issues that arise within this finite, very fragile and vulnerable life, yet a life *we still have to live*, even though we may only speculate about its actual meaning and purpose. Nonetheless, the issues that concern the beginning and the end of life are still of pivotal importance also for Bioethics.

Bioethics emerged as a field of Applied Ethics over the past few decades – in any case during the second half of the previous century. Especially during the first decades after its emergence it was often assumed that Bioethics was either purposed to replace Medical Ethics as an updated, advanced version, or tasked with covering its back against the rapid advances in the field of medical technology; in any case, Bioethics was considered to be absolutely dependent on Medical Ethics or complementary to it at best. And while the last view is by no means unsubstantiated, since Bioethics and Medical Ethics indeed cross paths quite often, as it is for instance with regard to abortion and euthanasia, the former has long been

abandoned: now it is commonly acknowledged that unlike Medical Ethics, that is tasked with resolving conflicts of duties, rights and interests that emerge in relation to the medical profession, Bioethics' mission is to address controversial moral issues that arise from the immense and rapid advances in the fields of biosciences and biotechnology, such as human reproductive cloning, targeted gene editing, euthanasia, surrogate motherhood, abortion, sex selection etc.

In my view Bioethics emerged as a – typical for our species – defensive reaction towards the overwhelmingly immense potential of the biosciences: as much as we are attracted by the unseen and the unthinkable, we are equally hesitant, reserved and offish towards it – probably it is the same twofold adaptive psychological mechanism that has provided our species with the perfect survival advantage over the ages. Next to this, of course, we have good reasons to be somewhat reluctant to unconditionally open ourselves up to this brave new world: on the one hand our species has already experienced the disastrous effects of unreservedly giving in to challenges as such, and on the other this time the brave new world that is coming towards us is *more brave* and *more new* than any time before, definitely more than we can handle. Although the wheel, the gunpowder, the steam and the various applications of electricity have already dramatically affected our lives, compared to the miracles and the promises of modern science they look like childish drawings displayed next to Rembrandt van Rijn's *Night Watch*. Biotechnology, medical technology and genetic engineering seem to have entered the stage not to have *just some effect* on the life of humans, but to create *a brand new life* literally from scratch – arrogantly meshing even with the greatest of mysteries, the emergence and the eventide of life. Bioethics' task is to pave an as comfortable and secure road as

there can possibly be towards this bright, but unsafe future; to this purpose Bioethics needs to regulate research, safeguard interests, set and prioritize principles, and define boundaries, always keeping one eye fixed on progress, and the other on the lines of Goethe's *Wizard's Apprentice*, so as to eliminate the gloomy possibility of a second Holocaust, or a sequel of Hiroshima. If you ask me, the omens that Bioethics will succeed in this are as good as possible; the fact alone that mankind has decided to assign Bioethics the task of balancing benefits and risks in advance, is by itself a sufficient reason to entertain the best hopes. In a sense, Bioethics is a novelty in itself: to the best of my knowledge this is the only time that instead of the good services of Epimetheus, mankind first seeks the advice of Prometheus; indeed, it is the first time we are patient enough to engage in long, exhaustive debates, and not just rush headlong into the flashy new playgrounds we have created. In that sense, Bioethics next to anything else is also a sign of maturity for our species, the most convincing evidence that after all we may not be that much unfit for the future.[1]

This book comprises of eight chapters, all discussing life and death related issues from a philosophical perspective: abortion and infanticide, genetic engineering, human reproductive cloning, the fear of death, suicide, euthanasia, and the right to die. What all these issues have in common, apart from their obvious connection with the most preposterous of scandals, that of existence, is also that they nourish the most controversial, heated and challenging moral debates: destroy-

[1] While the deep anguish Julian Savulescu and Ingmar Person express in their book *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) is neither unsubstantiated nor erroneous, there are also bright sides that allow for an optimistic view; the establishment of Bioethics is a good proof for this.

ing life just before it emerges or right after, reprogramming the human genome, creating – better, duplicating – life from scratch, and deliberately putting an end to one's own life seem to constitute insoluble conundrums not only for ethics, but also for the human intellect in general. Impossible conundrums, this is what this book is about; its material has been selected with the purpose to provide the reader with philosophical insight into the most challenging and demanding debates in the field of Bioethics.

The first chapter sets out to reconnect the heated debate on abortion and the equally challenging one on infanticide with their philosophical background. To this purpose I decided to structure the material of this chapter around three viewpoints that are not the only key ones as far as abortion and infanticide are concerned, but still are probably the most dominant in the discussion, with the aspiration to trace these viewpoints back to their philosophical – that is, ontological and metaphysical – origins. The Pythagorean doctrine of 'ensoulment-at-conception' as connected with their teaching on the transmigration of the souls, Plato's and Aristotle's all pervasive view that procreation should be controlled, at least to some extent, and that the sustainability of the state should outweigh any other concern, as well as the emphasis the Stoics put on self-awareness as indicative of personhood and agency, have paved the ground for some of the most influential arguments against – as well as in favor of – abortion and infanticide.

The second chapter discusses Judith Jarvis Thomson's arguments in defense of abortion as a women's right to self-determination. Next to its other merits, what mostly makes Thomson's discussion engaging and inspiring is on the one hand the triumphant return of the *analogy* in moral argumen-

tation, and on the other the outstanding and out-of-the-box point of view Thomson adopts. As to the first, Thomson uses a set of sparkling analogies to make her case, which drives one's thought back to the 'ring of Gyges' narrative, by means of which Plato discusses justice; as to the second, Thomson's thesis that, even if we assume that the fetus has a right to life indeed, it still has no claim against the pregnant woman's body, and that the woman's right to self-determination outweighs the fetus' right to life, brought an invigorating breath of fresh air into the debate.

The third chapter sheds light on some ethical issues that arise from the magnificent advances in genetic engineering, especially in the light of the establishment of the CRISPR\Cas-9 technology that has already ignited a revolution in genetic engineering, and is expected to have immense impact on the future of our species. CRISPR\Cas-9, the most advanced tool available in the field of targeted gene editing, promises to make up for the most abhorrent, inevitable and invincible manifestations of natural injustice, the fact that some people are being born with genetic mutations responsible for burdensome or even fatal phenotypic expressions. But the gifts of technology, admirable as they are, are never throughout benign; the most obvious peril related to CRISPR\Cas-9 concerns the depletion of the human species' gene pool.

When it comes to human reproductive cloning we can only admit that it stands as probably the most iconic advancement in the field of the biosciences. After the successful creation of Dolly the sheep, the creation of human clones by means of somatic nuclear transfer seems to be only one step away. The prospect is equally challenging as it is alarming, since it seems that the uniqueness of the 'prototype' as well as of the 'clone' will necessarily be compromised. The fourth

chapter discusses on the one hand the effect that human reproductive cloning might have on our genetic uniqueness, and on the other the soundness and the consistency of a putative moral or human right to a unique identity.

The fear of death is definitely the most persistent and deeply-rooted in the human soul. Is it rationally justifiable, though? The fifth chapter examines Epicurus' seminal and innovative arguments against the fear of death, as well as the influence his line of reasoning had on the discussion ever since. Epicurus' argumentation against the fear of death, next to its undoubted philosophical merits, can also provide ethicists and bioethicists with invaluable insight into intentionally-choosing-death related issues; in this respect the Epicurean views are of great significance for the debates on suicide, euthanasia and the right to die.

The most controversial issue in regard to suicide is whether the decision that results to it could be considered as rational, at least under specific circumstances. What makes rational suicide a seemingly impossible oxymoron is that suicide brings about death, and death is considered to be *not just* an evil, but *the ultimate* evil. From this point of view the decision for suicide can never be rational. There is also much controversy, however, concerning whether the view that asserts that death is an evil anyway – let alone the ultimate evil – is grounded on reason, or it is just 'gut feeling,' an instinctive, affective aversion towards something that will have no effect on us whatsoever, as Epicurus argues. The sixth chapter discusses the Stoic views concerning the 'rational removal from life,' especially Epictetus' recurring 'open door' allegory.

The fact that a constantly increasing number of patients request either to be put to death or be left to die is not by itself a sufficient reason to accept euthanasia and assistant suicide as

morally permissible; nonetheless, it is a quite good reason to engage into exhaustive debates concerning both issues. While still highly controversial, both euthanasia and assisted suicide undoubtedly seem to have some quite strong arguments on their side. The seventh chapter of this book examines the ethics of active and passive euthanasia particularly focusing on the moral relevance that is often attributed to the distinction between *action* and *inaction* – or, active and passive euthanasia respectively – with the aspiration to provide an insightful discussion to the reader.

The putative right to die is the most controversial among all rights, because it necessarily implies that life may on occasion be not worth living, or that death may be preferable to life under specific circumstances; while the first implication most of the times is being severely challenged as inconsistent, counter-intuitive and potentially dangerous, the latter is typically rejected as a common logical fallacy, since there is no common scale on which life and death could be compared: while we are aware of what it is to be alive, non-existence is simply inaccessible to human experience. This final chapter discusses the newly-coined right to die and whether it could be included within standard accounts of typical moral rights.

I am aware of the fact that the point of view of this book could strike some among the readers as unfamiliar, since there is a widespread tendency to assume that Bioethics is only remotely related to Ethics, while it is much more closely connected with the sciences and the law instead. To me this is a philosophically unhappy view, and I couldn't disagree more; it stands as a typical case of judging from the outcome, exactly as assuming that poetry is closely connected to typography, since at the end of the day typography next to anything else produces also poetic volumes. It is true that what is expect-

ed from Bioethics is to come up with solutions to the riddles posed by technology; it is also true that the issues that are debated in the field of Bioethics are intrinsically connected with the sciences. But one doesn't need to scratch very deep below the surface to understand why any bioethical debate is in the core an ethical one. In short, there is not even a single debate in Bioethics that couldn't be reduced to the simple question: "What we ought to do?" Bioethics is about choosing among potential future realities, and this can only be done on the basis of *good reasons*, to wit by showing that *this* option – unlike every other available or possible – is supported by solid ethical justification. In light of the above, this book is also an effort to exhibit that, no matter how dependent on the sciences and the law is, Bioethics is before and above all accountable to Ethics.

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