

The new edition (4th) of the Encyclopedia of Bioethics

Leo Pessini*
William Saad Hossne**

“If it is not critical, bioethics can become apologetic and ideological”.

Bruce Jennings, Chief Editor of the Encyclopedia

Bioethics will soon complete half a century of existence, if we consider the year 1970 as being its appearance, in the USA, with Van Rensselaer Potter's intimations (Wisconsin University, Madison, WI) and Kennedy Institute (Georgetown University) in Washington, D.C. And it already had, in its coming to life, in the year 1978, an important referential system. We have in mind here the publication of the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, in two huge volumes, under the publishing responsibility of Warren Thomas Reich, an investigator of Kennedy Institute of Ethics, in Georgetown University. Reich was also the publishing chief of the 2nd edition of this work, revised and updated, published in 1995 by Simon and Schuster Macmillan (New York). The 3rd edition was published in 2004, by Macmillan Reference USA (Thomson & Gale), had a new responsible publisher, Stephen G. Post (Case Western Reserve University), who had been associate publisher, working with Reich in the preparation of the 2nd edition of this work.

With its starting publication in 1978 (1st edition), the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* became the first reference book to focus exclusively on the new and promising field of bioethics, helping to define the discipline. In that moment, the then flourishing field of bioethics still was

not quite definite or recognized. Both the first and the second edition (1995) still are a fundamental reference for bioethics, both for teachers and for students and all those who work in the areas of health care, philosophy, environment, law and the study of religions.

The newest edition of this monumental, a completely revised and updated work (4th edition) launched this year 2014, have a new Chief-Editor, Bruce Jennings (Yale University), and it presents a deep revision and updating of subjects as compared to the previous editions. This 4th edition was expanded to include perspectives from other countries and nations, beyond the North American principalist view of its origins, over questions such as abortion, a hinduist view, medical triage, social responsibility, access to health care, stem-cell research, among other subjects very relevant in the current stage of the evolution of bioethics.

In the introduction of the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, the publishing chief Warren T. Reich defined bioethics as “the systematic study of human conduct in the area of the sciences of life and health, as this conduct is examined in the light of moral values and principles”. This definition was part of the foundations of the first three editions of this work (1978, 1995 and 2004), and constitutes the starting point for this new publication, complement revised and updated. The objective of this new reformulation depends on what is included in the “sciences of life”, definition and determinants of health, and ethics methods. These questions

DOI: 10.15343/1981-8254.20140804359364

* Post-doctorate at the Edinboro University – James F. Drane Bioethics Institute, Pennsylvania, USA. Ph.D., Theology/Bioethics. He has done studies in Clinical Pastoral Education and Bioethics at St Luke's Medical Center. Professor of the *Stricto sensu* Programme in Bioethics (Master Degree and Ph.D.), São Camilo University Center-SP, Brazil. E-mail: pessini@saocamilo-sp.br

** Physician. Emeritus Professor (Surgery) of State University of São Paulo – UNESP, Medical School, campus Botucatu-SP, Brazil. Ex-President of the National Commission of Ethics in Research – CONEP. Member of the International Committee of Bioethics – UNESCO. Coordinator of the *Stricto sensu* Programme in Bioethics (Master Degree and Ph.D.), São Camilo University Center-SP, Brazil. E-mail: posbioetica@saocamilo-sp.br

are approached, as happened in the previous editions, from a very inclusive and broad attitude.

Perhaps echoing the VI World Congress of Bioethics, carried out in Brasília, in 2002, which had as central subject “Bioethics: power and injustice”, Bruce Jennings says in the Introduction of this 4th edition that: “This edition of Bioethics does not despise the questions of power in the context of science, technology and health. The ethical dilemmas are frequently indicative of structural, institutional inequalities and injustice. These subjects are explored in numerous articles concerning public health, inequality and exploration, racism, and subjects that have to do with children’s wellness, gender and sexuality”. The Chief Editor of this 4th edition also declares that “In 2014, the field of bioethics changed and it is still changing. One may identify three developments that are pointed out in the broad variety of articles of this publication, namely: professionalization, disciplinary rigor and international expansion, with the recognition of a global perspective”¹. It is said that bioethics became global. The questions of power, justice, science, technology and health, research in human beings – with which bioethics copes today – have not rigid geographical limits as happened formerly.

From this 4th edition on, the formerly titled *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, maintained in the three previous publications, begins to be called simply *Bioethics*. There are now six volumes, containing 569 articles, 221 of which are original and published for the first time. From these latter, a total of 108 new articles approach questions that were not included in the previous editions. It contains new articles on topics such as: abortion, a perspective from Hinduism; health professionals’ abuses; Biodiversity; cognitive Deficiency / traumatic brain injury; Hospitals: ethical questions of governance; humane help; nuclear weapons and pedagogy of bioethics, among others.

Countless topics have acquired a more emphatic instance in this publication. We observe a broader attention to public health, discussions on ethical questions and public health policies and bioethics, infectious diseases, epidemics and environmental health. In a con-

text of innovation, the reform of the systems of health that are in crisis in the entire world, both in the USA and in other countries, is the object of many articles in this publication and the same applies to the improvement of health care, quality of health care, economical sustainability and justice, both the domestic and the global levels. The questions on aging, chronic diseases and degenerative diseases, as well as long permanence care also receive an innovative perspective. The change of attitudes and public policies regarding abortion in the international perspective is exhaustively analyzed. A greater emphasis is given to the new developments of biotechnology, genetics and human reproduction, as well as end of life care, with a broader approach of palliative cares.

Finally, in this 4th edition of this monumental work on Bioethics, a greater emphasis is given to environmental ethics, its philosophies and theories (biocentrism and ecocentrism), scientific fields (ecology, and conservationist and evolutionary biology), and problems of public policies (climatic changes, loss biodiversity, dangers that threaten environmental health, drinkable water and the technological effects connected to ecology and health, organization and agricultural practices), among other subjects. Questions as post-humanism and trans-humanism, advancements in neuroscience, nanotechnology, and synthetic biology are topics in which a creative commitment between bioethics and environmental ethics seems to be quite interesting and promising.

According to Bruce Jennings, a way to consider an academic Encyclopedia of any field is to see it not as a repository of the state of the art of knowledge and academic discussion of a certain area of human knowledge. This is the idea of *the Encyclopedia as a mirror*. A reference work such as this has no doubt a great usefulness and value. Another way of seeing an encyclopedia is to consider it not only as a repository of knowledge but also as a publication that expands and develops a certain area of knowledge for supplanting its current position. This view of the Encyclopedia reflects what is behind, in terms of historical course, but also it illuminates what

is beyond. This is the idea of *the Encyclopedia as a lamp*. In this perspective, this Encyclopedia may be a creative intellectual force in the dynamic field of the evolution of bioethical knowledge, inspiring new lines of research, considering new questions and theoretical perspectives that still did not deserve an adequate attention and consideration in the current stage of bioethics evolution.

The Encyclopedia as a mirror and at the same time as a light brings a message to the community of bioethicists. As a mirror it makes opportune to revise what has been built, to learn in humility and to grow with auto-criticism. As a light it is indicating the necessity of analyzing and predicting the advanced topics, the challenges and the future of Bioethics.

REFERÊNCIA

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