

Jeremy R. Garrett, Fabrice Jotterand,
D. Christopher Ralston, eds.

The Development of Bioethics in the United States

Philosophy of Medicine Series 115

Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer, 2013

279 pp; Author biographies; Index (References after each chapter)

Knowing the dynamics of bioethics as a discipline, to follow and analyse its development means to take on quite a complex job. The editors of the present book – J. R. Garrett from Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, F. Jotterand from University of Basel, and D. Ch. Ralston from Rice University in Houston – sharpened their focus onto the United States.

Already in the Introduction, the three co-editors have revealed the most important premise of the book: that bioethics had emerged in the US, as a kind of a product of American culture. This is only partly true: Van Rensselaer Potter’s concept of bioethics, for instance, appearing in the early 1970s, can really be considered a product of several combined influences, many of which may be related to the traditions of Potter’s Wisconsin.¹ However, today we know that the term „bioethics“ was born as early as 1926, first used by the German theologian and teacher Fritz Jahr (1895-1953). Even if the co-editors might have meant that Jahr’s ideas had not influenced the development of bioethics in the USA, which seems to be true (at least until present), it certainly is very strange that the mention of Fritz Jahr cannot be found in the Introduction.

1 Cf. Amir Muzur, Iva Rinčić, and Stephen Sodeke, „The real Wisconsin idea: the seven pillars of Van Rensselaer Potter’s bioethics,“ *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 29 (2015): 1-10.

Opening „Part I – The birth of bioethics: historical analysis“ is Chapter 2 by Eric J. Cassell, entitled „The beginnings of bioethics.“ Beside the already noted ignoring of any bioethics earlier than Daniel Callahan’s, one can immediately observe the mixing up of terminology, so typical for the anglophone bioethical literature, confusing bioethics with medical ethics. In the tradition of European bioethics, bioethics has been viewed as ethics related to any aspect of life (deducing it from the Greek *bios*), while in the anglophone culture, bioethics has been presented as ethics related to biomedical sciences and practice (explaining the etymology in the Potterian way, that is, as an abbreviation from **biological science + ethics**).

In Howard Brody’s Chapter 3, „Teaching at the University of Texas Medical Branch, 1971-1974: humanities, ethics, or both?“ is discussed, particularly evaluating the contribution of Chauncey Leake and Truman Blocker. In Chapter 4, John Collins Harvey reports on „André Hellegers, the Kennedy Institute, and the development of bioethics: the American-European connection.“ Once again, the birth of bioethics is wrongly ascribed to America, while the naming of bioethics to A. Hellegers. Harvey, namely, does mention both F. Jahr and V. R. Potter, but disconnects their inventions of bioethics from A. Hellegers.² Like in two other occasions within this book, F. Jahr is mentioned as an almost irrelevant curious detail: how wrong this perception is, proves the fact that the work by Jahr started an entire new epoch in the development of bioethics in Europe and Latin America. This ignorance might be a result of the fact that the American authors so rarely follow literature in other languages.³ One more Harvey’s mistake is dating both Potter’s invention of bioethics and his book *Global Bioethics: Building on the Leopold Legacy* in 1949: the term was used by Potter for the first time in 1970, while the book was published in 1988. (A probable reason for this otherwise unexplainable error is that Aldo Leopold’s book *A Sand County Almanac* was published in 1949, which Harvey himself mentions a few lines later.) Harvey’s mistakes, nevertheless, do not stop here: he also claims that Potter was born in 1919 in the Netherlands,⁴ which is both wrong (he was born in South Dakota in 1911). Stressing the influences of A. Hellegers, a European immigrant, and particularly his student, the Jesuit Francesc Abel from Barcelona, Harvey tries to reconstruct the European pathways of bioethics and their close dependence on the Catholic church.

2 John Collins Harvey, „André Hellegers, the Kennedy Institute, and the development of bioethics: the American-European connection,“ in *The Development of Bioethics in the United States*, edited by Jeremy R. Garrett, Fabrice Jotterand, and D. Christopher Ralston (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer, 2013), 38.

3 Cf. Iva Rinčić and Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i radanje europske bioetike* [in Croatian] (Zagreb: Pergamena, 2012); Florian Steger, Jan C. Joerden, and Maximilian Schochow, eds., *1926 – Die Geburt der Bioethik in Halle (Saale) durch den protestantischen Theologen Fritz Jahr (1895-1953)* [in German]. Frankfurt a/M: Peter Lang, 2014. Beside articles in Spanish, Portuguese, and other languages, a few books have been published in English as well: cf. Amir Muzur and Hans-Martin Sass, eds., *Fritz Jahr and Global Bioethics: The Future of Integrative Bioethics* (Münster: Lit, 2012).

4 Harvey, "André Hellegers, the Kennedy Institute, and the development of bioethics," 41.

Tristram Engelhardt is the author of the Chapter 5, „Bioethics as a liberal Roman Catholic heresy: critical reflections on the founding of bioethics.“ As always, Engelhardt produces provokative, bright theses: as always, those theses happen to be extremely disputable and simplifying. Bioethics in America and Europe may well seem a renegade movement of those disappointed by the Roman Catholic doctrine, or of those trying to reinforce the influence of Roman Catholicism within what around the 1970s may have seemed a territory lost to medicine. However, one should not forget that many Protestant thinkers turned toward bioethics (Fritz Jahr!) and, in Croatia, for example, even some ex-Marxist philosophers: this brings us to a far more interesting and encompassing hypothesis – that bioethics, as a new field, attracted followers of various ideologies with a promise of the reentering the (otherwise lost) debate. What Engelhardt stresses very well, nevertheless, is the „heuristic ability of the term bioethics.“ Again, Engelhardt mentions F. Jahr in an endnote, repeating Harvey’s mistake with dating Potter’s *Global Bioethics* in 1949.⁵

Part II presents papers dedicated to „The nature of bioethics: cultural and philosophical analysis.“ In Chapter 6, Warren Reich offers „A corrective for bioethical malaise: revisiting the cultural influences that shaped the identity of bioethics.“ Reich, in a very balanced manner, explains why bioethics has become „boring,“ narrowing down its focus on biomedical topics only. Although Reich’s definition of bioethics in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (1978) suggests much a broader approach, that very definition contributed to the reductionism of later bioethics by (unnecessarily) delimiting the area of the discipline to „the life sciences and health care.“ Otherwise, Reich correctly stresses Jonsen’s misinterpretations and underestimations of Potter’s ideas. According to Reich, bioethics of the second half of the 20th century was a product of the specific momentum of the two cultures – of the sciences and of the humanities.

In „American biopolitics,“ Goerge Annas in a seemingly unrelated or vaguely related Chapter 7 analyses the intersections of law, politics, human rights, and (public) health, actually stressing a broader concept of bioethics than medical ethics. In Chapter 8, „Medicine and philosophy: the coming together of an odd couple,“ Carson Strong depicts the context of modern biomedical ethical problems like research abuse, the rise of patient’s autonomy, issues raised by new medical technologies, etc. The author concludes with a quite simplified definition of bioethics as a crossing point of medicine and philosophy. In Chapter 9 („The growth of bioethics as a second-order discipline“) by Loretta Kopelman, advocated is the thesis that the root of the disagreements and tensions within bioethics originates from the fact that bioethicists

5 H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., „Bioethics as a liberal Roman Catholic heresy: critical reflections on the founding of bioethics,“ in *The Development of Bioethics in the United States*, edited by Jeremy R. Garrett, Fabrice Jotterand, and D. Christopher Ralston (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer, 2013), 71.

usually feel themselves „belonging“ to their own disciplines. In other words, interdisciplinarity sometimes seems to be able to transform into a disadvantage. Beside usual wrong dating of the first mention of bioethics by Fritz Jahr to 1927 (instead of 1926), Kopelman also confused Van Rensselaer Potter with Ralph Potter (the latter one being a Harvard professor of ethics and the inventor of the „Potter Box“), quoting Jonsen (!).⁶

Part III („The practice of bioethics: professional dimensions“) opens with Chapter 10, „The development of bioethics: bringing physician ethics into the moral consensus,“ authored by Robert Veatch. At the very beginning, Veatch correctly (in the Jahrian and Potterian way) defines bioethics as a broader field than medical ethics (bioethics including protection of the environment, animal rights and welfare, concern about species preservation), but then inconsequently turns back to the history of medical ethics. Similarly to W. Reich, Veatch concludes that the emergence of bioethics was a result of two revolutions of the 1960s – the medical-scientific and the socio-cultural. In Chapter 11, Edmund Erde talks about „Professionalism vs. medical ethics in the current era: a battle of giants?“, the entire chapter has nothing to do with bioethics, tackling only the classical medical-ethical issues (successfully avoiding the use of the term bioethics). Better is with Chapter 12 („The role of an ideology of anti-paternalism in the development of American bioethics“), in which Laurence McCullough tries to prove that it was ideology that conditioned the stressing of autonomy as the crucial principle of American „bioethics.“ Even if typical for medical ethics, the issue raised by L. MyCullough is highly important for understanding the differences between American, European, and other sets of „bioethical“ principles.

In the final Part IV („The future of bioethics: looking ahead“), Richard Zaner discusses „Themes and schemes in the development of biomedical ethics“ (Chapter 13), while Edmund Pellegrino „Medical ethics and moral philosophy in an era of bioethics“ (Chapter 14), and Albert Jonsen „Prolegomena to any future bioethics: trying to take a philosophical distance,“ they all basically rethink on how much moral theory should or should not be incorporated into modern bioethics.

Obviously, by the present book, we really have got one more **American** bioethics history: this time, it has at least been named properly, and not concealed by too broad a title, as it had been the case of the earlier study by A. Jonsen⁷ or of the collection of memoirs edited by J. Walter and E. Kline.⁸ There is one more advancement to be

6 Loretta M. Kopelman, „The growth of bioethics as a second-order discipline,“ in *The Development of Bioethics in the United States*, edited by Jeremy R. Garrett, Fabrice Jotterand, and D. Christopher Ralston (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer, 2013), 156.

7 Albert R. Jonsen, *The Birth of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

8 Jennifer K. Walter and Eran P. Klein, eds., *The Story of Bioethics: From Seminal Works to Contemporary Explorations* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

greeted in the present book: a fairly ballanced objectivity. The studies by T. Stevens⁹ or R. Fox and J. Swazey,¹⁰ for instance, demonstrated no particular consideration in favouring either the Hastings Center or the Kennedy Institute, respectively. Finally, the book edited by Garrett, Jotterand, and Ralston does mention V. R. Potter's contribution a few times: no matter how strange it might sound, the pioneer of the bridge- and global bioethics had not been mentioned at all in some earlier books on the same topics, edited by H.-M. Sass (*Bioethik in den USA*),¹¹ T. Stevens, or R. Baker (*Before Bioethics*).¹² Today, we have the right to say that the „American“ bioethics, dictated and propagated mainly (although not exclusively) from and by the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, is just one bioethics prevailing in a part of the world covering USA, Australia, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Denmark. In a few further countries, bioethics has not been developing at all after it had imported principlism and the narrowed-down biomedical orientation. The intriguing fact is, however, that in the 21st century, several promising and original bioethical trends have appeared in other countries than the US: a kind of survey of those activities, even if more taxonomic than analytical, was listed in the recent *Handbook of Global Bioethics*.¹³ Thus it is time for the rest of the world to claim its own study on the development of bioethics.

Amir Muzur

9 M. L. Tina Stevens, *Bioethics in America: Origins and Cultural Politics* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

10 Renée C. Fox and Judith P. Swazey, *Observing Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

11 Hans-Martin Sass, ed., *Bioethik in den USA: Methoden, Themen, Positionen* (Berlin/Heidelberg/New York/London/Paris/Tokyo: Springer-Verlag, 1988).

12 Robert Baker, *Before Bioethics: A History of American Medical Ethics from the Colonial Period to the Bioethics Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

13 Henk A. M. J. ten Have and Bert Godijn, eds., *Handbook of Global Bioethics*, 4 vols. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).