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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Pastor Fritz Jahr used the term bioethics as early as 1927 when he published an ethical study on human relationships with animals and plants: *Bio-Ethik. Eine Umschau über die ethischen Beziehungen des Menschen zu Tier und Pflanze*.¹ However, it was not until the early 1970s that the term “bioethics” was rediscovered in the United States. Since then, the academic discipline of bioethics has permanently gained more international relevance due to groundbreaking scientific discoveries, medical innovations, and biotechnological inventions. The book *Bioethics. Bridge To The Future* by R. van Potter was of central relevance in the development of bioethics as a separate academic discipline, which is less than 50 years old. Herein, the need of “a new field to combine biological knowledge with the knowledge of the human value system” was stressed.² In this context, bioethics took shape as a new research area striving to give answers, from an ethical perspective, to new environmental and biomedical challenges, such as human reproduction technologies, organ transplantation, stem cell therapy, and so on. Furthermore, bioethics discusses issues of human genetics, genetic information ownership and usage, genetic modifications, patient confidentiality, human enhancement. An essential characteristic of bioethics is its interdisciplinary approach, including distinctive fields such as medicine, law, sociology, philosophy, psychology, and theology. Although mostly materialized in Western Europe and North America, the field of bioethics now has a global and highly-topical dimension which stresses the need of knowledge on new ethical issues produced by the progress in medicine, bioengineering, pharmacology, genetics, but also by changes in society.

This volume is composed of selected papers from the First International

¹ Fritz Jahr (1927): *Bio-Ethik. Eine Umschau über die ethischen Beziehungen des Menschen zu Tier und Pflanze*. In: Kosmos. Handweiser für Naturfreunde 24, 1, 2–4.

² Van Rensselaer Potter, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971.

Conference on Bioethics in the New Age of Science (BNAS), which took place on the 4th and 5th of May 2017 at the “Vasile Goldis” West University of Arad, Romania. The papers were extended into chapter-length contributions. Furthermore, the volume includes contributions from additional scholars with expertise in the multi-faceted field of bioethics. The volume is divided in six parts which go through subjects ranging from enhancement technologies, to medical and legal issues in bioethics, as well as aspects concerning bioethics education.

The first part is an introduction on the ethical challenges of emerging (bio)technologies and the authors of the three chapters leap into discussions on gene ethics, CRISPR/Cas9, posthumans (Stefan Lorenz Sorgner summarizes the most relevant ethical challenges of these issues, both present and future), on philosophical issues of techno-science (where Corrado Viafora discusses the topical issue of the ethical capacity to govern technology), and the moral relationship between human and non-human animals (where Alexander Krémer argues through a Kantian perspective that although animals cannot be moral agents, humans must be moral towards them in order to maintain human dignity).

The second part is a continuation of the first one as its two chapters put into perspective specific aspects of enhancement technologies. Maria Sinaci thus brings forwards a thought-provoking subject, that of moral enhancement through direct interventions, in her chapter titled *Neuroethics and Moral Enhancement: The Path to Moral World?*, while Ivan Mladenović discusses the role of public deliberation on bioethical issues – specifically, the author refers to public deliberation with regard to human biomedical improvements.

The third part dives into specific cases of medical bioethics. G. Tari and G. Braunitzer highlight the conflict between the principles of *beneficence* and *patient autonomy*, referring to bilateral mastectomy in their chapter titled *On the ethical issues of bilateral and contralateral risk-reducing mastectomy*. The second contribution to this part focuses on patient quality of life hematological patients – the research of Alciona Sasu et al. concluded that the most important factors which can change the quality of life in an onco-hematological patient are biological, psychological, and social.

Part four, related in certain aspects to part three, debates on end of life issues. Assya Pascalev analyses here the role of metaphors in biomedical ethics, using as case study the dominant metaphors of death and dying employed by critical care physicians, while Florin Lobont and Ionut Mladin brings into attention the importance of philosophical and ethical counselling for both terminally-ill patients and medical personnel.

The penultimate part focuses on bioethics education with two regional case studies. Thus Antoanela Naaji presents her research study on the perception of the usage and relevance of bioethics courses in specialised academic

programmes in Western Romania; while Dejan Donev outlines the introduction and evolution process of (bio)ethical education in Macedonia, starting with 1998, as well as the awareness and interest it generates among young people.

The last part of the volume is a mixture of legal, political, and social bioethical issues. Miroslav Radenković et al. approach the problematic of mandatory vaccination of healthcare personnel – an action which, as the authors argue, can be justified from an ethical point of view when the harm to patients and the overall population is considered to outweigh the autonomy of the individual healthcare practitioner. Further on, Jakub Berezowski discusses the regulating process of the Polish medical legislation. The author highlights the importance of the medical procedure application growth as this would increase the safety of both patients and medical personnel. In *A New Pro-Natalist Tool: Parenthood as a Form of Public Employment*, János I. Tóth marks the problem of low demographics and fertility rates in Europe and Eastern Asia. The author proposes a possible radical pro-natalist institution which would consider parenthood as form of public employment. The last chapter is authored by Maria Ancuța Gurza, *Cultural and Ethical aspects of social desirability in psychological research*, and investigates the child-parent relationship from the perspective of the attachment theory and parenting style, with reference to both foster and biological parents.

The relevance of bioethics as an academic discipline can hardly be underestimated. The age of biotechnological and medical innovations has only just begun, and enormous progress can be expected in various areas relevant to bioethical discourses in the coming decades and centuries, which is why the intensity of the discussions is likely to increase. In particular, questions that fall under the term enhancement will probably become significantly more relevant, such as: 1. Genetic enhancement (CRISPR/Cas9); 2. Pharmacological enhancement (Ritalin, Modafinil); 3. Morphological enhancement (plastic surgery); 4. Cyborg enhancement (brain-computer interfaces) where Cyborgs are cybernetic organisms, i. e. complexes consisting of living organisms and digital or non-digital machines. Increased further technological developments could pose new and fundamental challenges that may call into question our self-understanding as human beings. If cognitive abilities were to be significantly improved, if the human health-span widened and if new emotional states were to be developed, could we still speak of human beings, or would this be linked to the emergence of the transhuman? What ethical challenges would there be, if it were possible to create individuals of a new species, i. e. posthumans, with the help of biotechnologies? Is there a danger of establishing new, self-contained classes, as described in the novel *Brave New World* or the film *Gattaca*? Are we obliged to attribute post-personhood to trans- and posthumans? These perspectives are of enormous urgency and

relevance, since they go beyond the narrow realm of bioethics and confront people with fundamental philosophical, biological, anthropological, theological, and political challenges. These and other topics which are related to emerging technologies will keep us occupied for many years to come.