



PREAMBLE

Bioethics is a rather young inter-disciplinary field of inquiry. As an academic specialty, it emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as a consequence of new discoveries and inventions in the biomedical field. Despite its youth, bioethics already has a rich history due to the intensity with which its typical topics have been discussed. For example, topics such as organ transplant, euthanasia, abortion, in vitro fertilization, human experimentation, stem-cell therapies, gene therapies, and vaccines have indeed sparked debate both inside and outside the academic world. It is even truer that bioethics has a rich history if we consider the debates that took place before the word “bioethics” was introduced.

Even if the prevailing temptation is to discuss the above-mentioned issues from a normative point of view, in this special issue of *Orbis Idearum*, specialists of the history of ideas have mainly contributed to the debate from their own, strictly historical, perspective. Readers will learn about the historical trajectory of the main positions in the field, that is, how certain bioethical ideas were born, gained attention, spread, became hegemonic or disappeared, more than learning if according to the contributors and the standards of today they were “good” or “bad” ideas.

In particular, James Hughes writes that, for nearly a hundred years, the artificial womb has been promoted as a way to expand reproductive freedom and gender equality. At the same time, it has also been criticized as a dystopian technology that would encourage totalitarianism and dehumanization. Progress towards the goal of extrauterine gestation between the second and 23rd week after fertilization has been slow. In this century, however, the goal seems close at hand and has already activated bioethical and political discussions on its potential impact.

Sebastiano Serafini’s article outlines the origins of Catholic bioethics. In particular, the author investigates the reason why the theological-moral renewal



induced by the Second Vatican Council was not incorporated into the “official Catholic bioethics,” as demonstrated by the theological and bioethical debate which took place on in vitro artificial fertilization and on the Vatican document *Donum Vitae*.

Gianfilippo Giustozzi’s contribution further explores this issue, reconstructing the bioethical paradigm of Elio Sgreccia in the first phase of its elaboration (1975-1986). The author shows that the handbook *Bioetica: Manuale per medici e biologi*, published by Sgreccia in 1986, already shows the theoretical structure of his bioethical paradigm based on “ontologically founded personalism.” In short, the history of Catholic bioethics could have been different if the line initially traced by the Second Vatican Council had been followed.

The editor of this special issue proposes two articles. In the first, he reconstructs some sensational cases of human vivisection and the ethical debates they triggered. The research covers the long period from Antiquity to the Industrial Revolution. The conclusion of the study is that, paradoxically, the closer we get to our current day, the number of alleged violations of medical ethics increases. In the second contribution, the author reconstructs some of the most sensational cases of abuse in human clinical trials that occurred in the twentieth century, underlining the role that those cases had in stimulating the birth and institutionalization of bioethics as a discipline.

Finally, Dawid Wieczorek offers a historical and critical analysis of Dr. Karol Gutmann’s work. Gutmann was a Polish Jewish scientist and an employee of the Krakow Institute of Forensic Medicine. The author places particular emphasis on Gutmann’s contributions to the euthanasia debate in the 1930s. Although the term “bioethics” did not yet exist, his work can be understood as relevant for the subsequent development of bioethical discourse in Poland.

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