

Evangelos D. Protopapadakis

From Dawn till Dusk: Bioethical Insights into the Beginning and the End of Life

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Foreword by Stacy Gallin; Introduction + 8 chapters; References; Index; 252 pp.

Since the very beginning of human civilization until today, there is a permanent question of life and death, a permanent question of the mystery on how and when one's life begins and ends. It seems that this question will persist until the last man standing alive. Another aspect which should also be concerned is to whom these most important issues should be addressed? Who could possibly give an answer? The accelerated scientific and technological development of a new age brings many discoveries, unimaginable until now, which can be applied in medicine affecting directly both the right to one's life and the right to one's death. It seems that science, technology, and medicine often avoid ethics and philosophy and do not care enough about what their obvious impact could have on human lives. Moreover, we even do not know what the future will bring, and therefore, there are many reasons for misgiving. As a result, our interest about moral issues should be of the greatest possible importance. Bioethics could be a key to the interdisciplinary solution for the questions most essential to humanity, and hence, it can assure a life worth living, keeping the dignity and autonomy of one's personality at the highest possible value.

The book "From Dawn till Dusk", written by Prof. Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, follows its metaphoric title, very much, presenting the most urgent contemporary bioethical issues concerning one's human life. The title provokes in the best possible way a discussion that we are continuously having at our very dinner table interlinking different scientific fields. Therefore, we decided to write this review together.

The text is extraordinarily organized; the most relevant references from the field were used, ranging from ancient Hellenic authors, such as Pythagoreans, Plato, and Aristotle, up to the most recent ones. In the finding of the right interpretation and argumentation, the most important questions of today were shaded with a light of ancient Hellenic thought and prominent bioethics authorities.

The book begins with bioethical insights into one of the most challenging questions of abortion and infanticide, expressing clearly the argumentation of both ‘prochoice’ and ‘prolife’. It follows with genetic engineering and human reproductive cloning with the special view from the right to a unique identity, and by this is the first part of the book, dealing with the beginning of one’s life, framed and shaped. The second half of the book considers the end of one’s life in the chapters on the fear of death, on rational suicide, on active and passive euthanasia, and, finally, on the right to die. Each chapter ends with the postscript serving as a summary of ideas and thoughts on the topic.

One of the most sensitive and intriguing questions for us humans is on abortion and infanticide. The former is always a dilemma, once it is supposed for one to make a decision, whether to commit it or not, even if it is lawfully legal. There is moral doubt, at least unsureness and hesitancy that overwhelm the person and prevail over their rationality. This specific uncertainty comes from the question when the embryo/fetus/child becomes a person. In this book, there are three different view-points of ensoulment pointed out: the first one established by Pythagoreans stating that a personal identity is dependent on ensoulment which is occurred immediately at conception; the second one following Plato’s and Aristotle’s thoughts favoring that procreation should, to some extent, be controlled and finally, the view-point initiated by Stoics telling that one’s self-awareness should keep a moral concept. By this is the very challenging debate on abortion heated up, giving the ontological roots of standing points. On the other hand, infanticide is in most cases forbidden but still exists as an idea which might be applied in society, leading to possible eugenics.

The second chapter brings a moral dilemma illustrated by a specific imaginary case, given by allegory, on defense of abortion as a woman’s right to self-determination against the fetus’ right to life. The author examines up to which extent is the Thomson’s allegory on “the violinist and the kidnapped women” symmetrical and analogical to the involuntarily impregnated women (e.g. by rape or contraception failure) and if this could, possibly, be applied to any average pregnancy. The result expressed by the author is that the right-based discussion cannot, by far, be sufficient to completely conclude on one’s moral responsibility.

Is it allowed for humanity to manipulate the targeted genes of the further fetus in order to select the genetically ‘right’ offspring? Do we really need to ‘help’ the mankind

through a genetic engineering to 'make' humans with as less as possible inborn 'failures' which would, possibly, build a better and more prosperous society? The third chapter discusses the ethical issues of genetic engineering, already established by some technologies, which bring possible danger, such as a reduction of the human species' gene pool. Justifying genetic engineering by highlighting its possibility to 'correct' a natural injustice may overshadow a very high potential risk of violating the human nature and human rights, as human genome forms are recognized as a heritage of humanity.

A step further from genetic engineering towards 'making' selected humans is the ethical issue of human cloning brought into discussion in the fourth chapter of the book. This topic is one of the most intriguing bioethical issues as human cloning represents a 'Godlike power', giving a birth to a child, not from parents but from the one's somatic tissue resulted in a clone genetically identical to the donor. The author considers the aspects and the magnitude of the influence which human reproductive cloning might have to the genetic uniqueness. Therefore, there is a right to a unique identity put opposite to cloning. However, it is shown that DNA of a clone would be at least 0.5% different from the prototype's DNA, due to a different mitochondrial DNA, and this difference is bigger than by naturally born identical twins. There could be a plenty of room for misuse of human cloning, which cannot be imagined at the moment. What if someone would like to make a clone from preserved part of some famous person's body? Nevertheless, it is impossible for such a clone to gain an identical personality. Finally, the author shows, by strong argumentation, that identical genomes and identical persons are "neither logically possible, nor technically feasible".

The fear of death is a pristine, inborn fear, which can be found at the core of every other fear as it is strongly related to one's existence. The book's fifth chapter discusses different standpoints on fear of death. On the one hand, death can be considered as the 'ultimate evil', and a feeling the fear of it can be a strong survival mechanism. On the other side, the author quotes Epicurus, a representative of hedonism and materialism, where pain, either bodily or mental one, is an 'ultimate evil' which can threaten a pleasure (the absence of pain) considered as the 'ultimate good'. Therefore, death should, actually, mean 'nothing to us', as once we are dead, we cannot feel any more. Not all humans share this viewpoint, besides instinct and emotions, there are rationality and beliefs, but Epicurus' arguments against the fear of death have been used to introduce suicide and euthanasia as topics in the following chapters.

There is a moral debate about the owner of one's life. If this is a human, if this would be the case, then we could understand that a person whose life is considered deserves all the credits for being alive. In other words, one who thinks that his life is in his

hands implies that he was born by his own intention and on his own purpose. Those who commit suicide for a certain 'common good', as protection of their own honor being in danger to be disgraced, or an intention to protect the lives of others by, on purpose, losing their own life, make an act which can be considered as heroism or martyrdom. However, these occasions are very rare. On the other hand, what often occurs is an intimate decision to end the one's own life, not out of the obligation to others, such as country or friends, valuing subjectively something else more than existence. This implies a moral disvalue of suicide as one who commits suicide acts excluding society. The sixth chapter represents a bioethical debate on rational suicide. Prof. Protopapadakis searches for the proper argumentation on the moral issue by questioning when and how suicide can be considered as the rational one. By following that path, he introduces the Stoics' viewpoint of the 'open door' argument for suicide as the "ultimate guarantee of human freedom". In this sense, one could conclude that suicide can be rational, under certain circumstances, for example, when someone suffers intolerable pain, but the moral debate on this issue is still ongoing.

The former chapter gives a basis for a very intriguing moral issue on euthanasia, the topic of the seventh chapter. At its very core, euthanasia is somehow a plea for the suicide, although it appears here in the debate on active and passive euthanasia. Active euthanasia can be seen as assisted suicide, and a passive one could be a call of moral duty for someone watching life fading from a person but not reacting. While active euthanasia is, at the moment, mostly considered as murder, the passive one is manifested through the withdrawal of life-supporting supplies. Euthanasia is an implication of someone's will to be put to death. The reasons for it may be debatable, ranging from hopeless agony to the ones that could hardly be justified. The author recalls the thought of Kantian ethics tradition, respecting a person's autonomy and dignity, in support the one's right to ask for a commitment of euthanasia. On the other side, the very same ethical tradition justifies the action of those who commit it out of empathy and solidarity. After the rich argumentation, stating that, in the case of euthanasia, inaction cannot be more morally justifiable than action, the author remained convinced that both are "equally capable of producing person-affecting consequences". However, if letting someone die should not be morally objectionable as pure murder, then following the utilitarian perspective, only the active euthanasia could fulfill all Kantian duties, both perfect and imperfect, while the passive one being incompatible with humanity. The discussion on euthanasia remained inconclusive, but it has made a very good basis for further moral debates on this topic.

Finally, the last chapter brings the discussion on the right to die, a contemporary moral issue related to artificially sustaining the life of someone who does not want to live anymore. This has been made possible by technological development in medicine, and it would not be the question if there were no technological capabilities. The

right question is, who should make a decision instead of the patient if he is not able to? Mostly, it is a call of one's relatives for passive euthanasia of the "patient in a persistent, irreversible vegetative state", and this decision, as well as the right to die, was morally discussed in the light of Kantian moral duties and moral rights. For the author, the right to die "cannot be accepted as a typical standard moral right", but it "may have a certain appeal even to Kantian ethicists" as denying someone's request for not prolonging agonizing life, "a life extended far beyond its natural limits" violates one's autonomy and disesteems one's dignity.

Terminology on most intriguing bioethical issues, used in this book, has been properly introduced, and the author's style allows the text to be easily followed. With this, a remarkable book, "From Dawn till Dusk", aims to gain a very broad audience, ranging from ordinary people to the experts and researchers on this topic. Prof. Protopapadakis leaves the questions on the specific bioethical issues open and ready for a reader to answer them. This readiness is fulfilled by collecting all necessary pros and contras to it. The author intentionally avoids giving a definitive answer.

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