

# "BIOETHICS— MEETINGS AND CONFLICTS WITH A MAN"

**Roberto Gonzalez**

School of Bioethics,  
Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, Rome

## **INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT:**

With my reflections I intend to outline the man as subject and object within Bioethics and to consider him as a point of encounter and collision within the same field. This first synopsis is meant to present the framework of my reflections and within this context two realities can be noted:

### **1. THE ORDER OF CREATION**

Its limits, its harmony and its hierarchical order (the inferior creatures serving the superior ones and interdependence) and theology: the theotropical principle, more easily readable for those illuminated by faith, but also by those who rely only on the light of natural reason, and the anthropical principle, thanks to which anyone can understand scientifically that all creation is aimed at man, on whom everything converges: "all things are yours"... (1. Cor 3,21-23), keeping in mind that man is by nature turned to God, oriented and aimed at God: "everything is yours, but you are of Christ and Christ is of God", therefore genesis points out three responsibilities of the man placed in the Garden of Eden: to DOMINATE, TO CURE AND TO CULTIVATE.

### **2. THE PRECIOUSNESS OF HUMAN LIFE**

"You are worth more than the sparrows". "Your life is worth more than your food and your clothes" (cfr Mt. 6,25-26) and in fact "Man does not live only on bread but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God". (cfr. Mt. 4,4)

Letter written by a little boy to his emigrated father.

"Dear Dad. Mum tells us that you are a bit far from us, that you are working hard in order to bring us bread; I remember the day you left, the house was empty and too big; Dad, I don't even like eating bread that much. Dad, do you know that the wooden crane you made me is not working any more? The wires are all entangled, Mum has difficulties when electricity goes out, you just put your hand on the wires and make it come back. Mum is very happy when she gets your check, she tells us "see, daddy has

sent us our bread". Daddy, come back, we miss you so much, really; come back, it doesn't matter if you don't bring us any bread..." Your midge.

## **VERTICAL ALARM!**

### **SYNOPSIS 2A**

#### **A. The alarm sounds in the attic: it's a call for responsibility:**

- In this second synopsis it is possible to observe that from the inferior spheres some smoke is coming out which activates the vertical alarm.
- We say that the alarm has vertical orientation because it implies an emergency call from the lower spheres to the directional center (ascending direction) where man is situated, who must become aware of his double responsibility: i.e. that he is the subject responsible, at least in a large part, of the caused evil, that he is the only responsible subject who must procure the adequate remedy.

#### **B. In the room of buttons (knobs) man is summoned to deliberate on the emergency:**

- Men gather in the room of buttons in order to deliberate.
- There are three points of discussion:
  - i. To single out and analyse the facts that have activated the alarm
  - ii. To examine the human deeds that provoked these disasters
  - iii. To determine what needs to be saved first of all

#### **FIRST POINT OF DISCUSSION: To single out and analyse the facts that have activated the alarm:**

The problem of waste in general, but particularly the problem of radioactive wastes.<sup>1</sup> industrial pollution, the pollution in the cities caused by vehicles, the pollution of the environment, the water, the soil<sup>2</sup>, the ozone hole<sup>3</sup>, the exploitation and the abuse of the planet's flora and fauna, etc. These and other phenomena have exceeded the security limit and now life on our earth is in danger.

#### **SECOND POINT OF DISCUSSION: To examine the human deeds that provoked these disasters:**

- We use pesticides to defend our food from small or big predators.
- We make atomic experiments, we invent biological weapons in order to create a deterrent in favor of peace and discourage hypothetical enemies.

The participants in the discussion ask themselves:

- Is it enough for the goal to be good: defend food, defend peace, etc. in order to

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1 Cfr. English M.R., 1992. Siting Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Facilities: The Public Policy Dilemma. New York: Geenwood.

2 Cfr. Poole W. 1992. "Gambling with Tomorrow". Sierra. September-October, pp. 50-54 and 89-92.

3 Cfr. Brown P.G., "Climate Change and the Planetary Trust" Energy Policy 20, no. 3:208-222.

make the facts by which we defend our food and peace good as well?

- In other words: is an Ethics of goals (Machiavellian?) enough to qualify ethically human deeds? Are the deeds all right if the goals are good?
- Experience confirms that an **Ethics of goals** is pragmatic and utilitarian, as well as short-sighted inasmuch as it observes only shortterm results, but also counterproductive because it provokes greater evils than the ones it wants to avoid.
- The first question in Ethics does not concern the goal of the doer, but the ethic nature of the deed that is to be done, within itself, according to the basic law of Ethics: "Agere sequitur esse".

In fact, human deeds are not good or bad because they do or do not reach the goal of the doer, or because they reach it in a way that is better or worse, but because it does or does not respond to the rational nature of the doer, because it is or is not a correct realization of the human being, an expressive and perfective gesture by the human being as such, because if that he is not he can achieve all the practical goals he wants but sooner or later this would prove destructive for the man himself and particularly for the good that is at the root of his being:

his LIFE, and if it is bad for him, it will be more radically bad for every living creature.

Thus, in the room of buttons Bioethics is born: that coalition between the cultivators of sciences dealing with LIFE, such as Biology, Medicine, Botany, Veterinary medicine etc. and the cultivators of Ethics, in order to weight and examine the facts that affect LIFE, and the determine whether they are proportionate so as to achieve this or that pragmatic goal, but also whether they are ethically admissible within the noblest and highest space-time value: LIFE, and particularly human life which among LIVES is the "**princeps analogatum**".

THIRD POINT OF DISCUSSION: **To decide what needs to be saved first of all**

In the room of buttons the emergency is understood and therefore the question arises: **What needs to be saved first of all?**

Among the cultivators of Environmental Bioethics three orientations developed, each with its own answer:

Save first of all the Ecosystems: **Ecocentrism.**

Save first of all life: **Biocentrism.**

Save first of all man: **Anthropocentrism.**

### **Environmental ecocentrism**

Environmental Bioethics considers the respect of ecosystems to be its absolute priority: i.e. the biosphere in its totality, the soil, the water, the air, the flora, the fauna. In the opinion of many of the promoters of Environmental Bioethics the most

dangerous being, the unhealthy bearer of all types of pollution, the one that needs to be kept away from hunting, fishing, from the parks, the waters, the flora and fauna of all kinds, is the **man**.

Holmes Rolston<sup>4</sup>, representative of this orientation, makes it clear that the biosphere, the ecosystems, the waters, air, soil etc. are not by themselves realities that have a right to be respected, that the respect we owe these realities is justified by the fact that they are **LIFE conditions** for our planet. In other words, he says that the Ecocentric conception relies on the Biocentric conception.

### **Environmental Biocentrism**

This orientation considers that the environmental reality that needs to be respected with priority is the animal world. Under "animal world" is intended the set of non-human and human animals, all leveled thanks to the common factor of sentience, as Mr. Peter Singer<sup>5</sup>, representative of this orientation, explains it. He warns us not to put too many requisites into the expression "animal" in order to be able to apply it to man with dignity (ex. rational animal), because we risk to exclude from the category not only non-human animals, but also some human beings (mongoloids, those with the Down syndrome etc.)<sup>6</sup>. If, on the other hand, the concept of "animal" is placed low enough as to include "all human beings" (as well as those with some deficiency) then there will be included also the vast and diversified group of non-human animals.

The same author gives furthermore these two concrete examples: the example of the unencephalic girl **Valentina**<sup>7</sup>, who compared to the gorilla Koko is less human

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4 Rolston H. *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press 1988.

5 Cfr. Singer P., *Ripensando la vita*, II Saggiatore Ed. Milano 2000.

6 Cfr. Singer P., "Due to the fact that belonging to the species of homo sapiens is not ethically relevant, every characteristics or combination of characteristics which, in our opinion, gives human beings the right to live or which generally makes it morally wrong to terminate a human life, can be found in non-human animals as well. When this occurs we must give those non-human animals the same right to live that we grant humans and admit that to kill those non-human animals is morally wrong, no more no less than if a human being with the same characteristics or combination of characteristics is killed. In the same way, we cannot justifiably grant more protection to the life of a human being than what we grant a non-human animal, considering that in every possible scale of relevant characteristics the former occupies a lower position than the latter." p. 207.

7 Cfr. Singer P., "The heart of a little unencephalic girl like baby Valentina was indeed the heart of a member of the homo sapiens species, but, given that it could have lived much longer, it would never have been able to accelerate its beating when her mother would have entered the room. In fact, Valentina would have never been able to feel emotions of love or apprehension for anyone. On the contrary, the heart of the gorilla Koko, although not being the heart of a member of the homo sapiens species, is capable of relating to others and showing them love and apprehension... Thus, the heart of the gorilla Koko is more human than Valentina's heart". p. 207."

than the gorilla, and the example of a baby with the Down syndrome<sup>8</sup>.

Here we have a double reductionist biocentric Environmental Bioethics which, on the one hand, reduces the phenomenon LIFE to animal life. and, on the other, reduces the animal phenomenon to the irrational one.

Thus, this is a kind of Bioethics that, on the one hand, prophecies certainly a very high respect for non-human animals, but on the other, lacks respect for humans, giving its rationality as the index of its responsibility but leveling it with the irrational, substituting accidents for the substance.

### **Environmental anthropocentrism**

This orientation which represents the dominant opinion of the western cultural tradition, considers the man to be the central figure to respect and defend with priority.

This orientation sees the man as the "princeps analogatum" of the living creatures, as the ultimate explanation of the respect we owe to everything there is precisely because it constitutes the environment and the LIFE conditions for the man.

Furthermore, this orientation thinks that there is no need to develop any other environmental Ethics due to the fact that within the concept of respecting the well-being of the man the due respect for all things that contribute directly or indirectly to his well-being is already included.

Other orientations criticize anthropocentrism because, as they say, not without reason, that it is research of the well-being of men that has justified projects and individual or group or institutional or class or national activities which have proven to have been and still be complete environmental disasters that we all are paying for.

Concretely, the "Ecofeminist" movement points out that "Androcentrism is the only thing to blame, which by its **right to universal dominion**, has imposed to nature so much degradation."<sup>9</sup>

The accusation is true, although it needs some explanation: man is responsible for the degradation, but not as male, nor simply because man, but because **in some individual or collective cases he is**

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8 Cfr. Singer P., "To have a child with the Down syndrome is a much different experience from having a normal child, it can be warm and lovable, but certainly it implies a lowering of expectations about the abilities of one's child. We cannot expect a child with the Down syndrome to learn to play the guitar, to enjoy SF, to learn a foreign language, to chat with us about Woody Allen's latest movie or to become an athlete or a basketball or tennis player..." p. 214. The author does not finish his thought there but in the "logical" and "perfectly authorized abortion".

9 Cfr. Kheel M. "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology: Reflections on Identity and Difference" in *REweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, pp. 128-137, Ed. by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein. San Francisco 1990. Sierra Club Books.

A NON-SANE BEARER OF POLLUTION:

**due to the fact that exasperated egoism makes a man an absolutist and a tyrant, one who claims that he belongs to a community of equals, but makes it clear that he is more equal than others...**

TO CONCLUDE when facing this vertical alarm:

One can only hope that the human community will not lose its mind, that it will always keep the capacity of self-criticism and be able to reshape its deeds and reduce them to the dictate of "recta ratio", and that, to begin with, every man will understand that he has been put into this paradise in order to take care of it and to cultivate it and therefore, that his is not an absolute sovereignty over creation but a kind of administration: i.e. "that everything is ours, but we are of Christ and Christ is of God". In fact, the Cantico delle creature (Poem of Creatures) by S. Francis of Assisi or the spiritual poem by S. John of the Cross (S. Giovanni della Croce)<sup>10</sup> are a universal testimony of the respect that the holy man, i.e. the man that knows how to take his place within creation, shows every creature even treating it as brother or sister.

## 2. HORIZONTAL ALARM

### SYNOPSIS:

In this third synopsis all creatures are at the windows of the room of buttons waiting for their fate. While man was deliberating about them they were not as worried as they are now, because the possibility of recuperating, of order and health of the ecosystems and the biosphere is always high if there is understanding in the room of buttons.

But if men are divided on the personal and social level, if man himself polluted with egoism gets annoyed not only with creation but also with the man himself, can creation hope to be treated better by the man who mistreats the man?

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10 Cfr. Cantico delle creature di San Francesco:

Laudatu Si, mi Signore, cum tutte le tue creature.  
spezialmente messor lu frate Sole, lu quale iorna  
e allumini noi per lui, ed ellu e bellu e radiante  
cum grande splendore, de Te. Altissimu, porta significazione.  
Laudatu si, mi Signore. per frate Focu.  
per lu quale n'allumini la notte;  
ed ellu e bellu, e iocondu e robustosu e forte.

Cantico spirituale di San Giovanni della Croce:

"Mil gracias derramando.  
paso por estos Sotos con presura,  
y yendolos mirando.  
con solo su figura,  
vestidos los deo de su hermosura"



Therefore, all creation is there like a big questioning hoping that men will get rid of their egoism in order for itself to be freed from a black tyranny and recuperate its order and its serenity.<sup>11</sup>

#### **A. Is there a conspiracy of man against man?**

##### **a) Medical art and man:**

Science and technique have expressed the dominion of man over all of his world, both macrocosmic as well as microcosmic, over the mineral, vegetal and animal world, in short, he has taken possession of every reality.

Medical art in particular, a faithful ally of MAN'S LIFE, as we can read in the Hippocratic oath: "**to defend the ill from every unjust and dangetous thing**", has managed in our days to get its hands and its feet on the domain of HUMAN LIFE, i.e. it has stepped on **holy ground**.

God has not told Moses "**not to enter**" but **to get his sandals off**, which is a way to show respect to the human person who is a direct relationship with God: LIFE IS SACRED

##### **b) Medical art and human life frontiers**

HUMAN LIFE finds its space-time limits in **being born** and **dying**.

It should be perfectly clear that medical art will always be for itself and the its best representatives a bulwark of man's life from preconception till death.

In our days, therefore, some actions of medicine leave us confused about man's birth and death.

The knowledge of the meiotic phenomenon which prepares the gamete for fusion, the knowledge of the unrepeatable originality of the 46 new chromosomes, with its own personalized DNA, with its genomes etc., have made medicine "predictive" about human life, it can predict the color of the eyes, the bone structure, the size of the feet, etc., but also, and most of all the illnesses, the malformations etc. thus being able to prevent...

This knowledge is not always oriented in favor of human life, it has in fact gone against it in a discriminatory manner:

**The DNP** looks like a trisomici detector<sup>12</sup>, a technical device to discover low qualities of life on which the fate of the "thumb-down".

**Abortion**, a service guaranteed by law in many states, as a right to kill human beings, for various reasons, including that of low quality of life, thus denying life and

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<sup>11</sup> "Creation itself waits impatiently for the revelation of the children of God. it has, in fact, been subdued to falling... and it harbors the hope of being freed from the slavery of corruption and enter the freedom of the glory of God's children". (Rom. 8, 19)

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Singer P. Ripensare la vita o.c. pp. 214-216: abortion. the down infanticide...(?)

the person.<sup>13</sup>

### The FIV and FIVET

- which offer many possibilities of homologous and heterologous fecundation, which substitutes either one or both partners with host-uteruses etc.

- which count on flattering institutions such as gamete banks, on excellent offers that can be chosen according to one's tastes and wishes...
- which have managed to transform the making of a child into a purchase with all the commercial characteristics, from following one's taste to getting competitive prices. The FIV and FIVET scientific and technical modules which have managed to
- substitute the human generational paths.
- to grant various types of couples or single people the right to one or more children.
- to grant science, in the afore mentioned embryos, material for investigation, experiments and therapy, with the staminal cells.

**Cloning:** a path a bit esoteric, which offers many possibilities of experimenting with human life, including the possibility of repeating the best ones, the man in series...

**Transplants,** a field in which very generous gestures have developed, but which has inspired also despicable trades such as organ trades and "ad hoc" breeding of children.

**Euthanasia** which, even under the euphemistic name of assisted death, is nothing but assisted suicide.

**Therapeutic perseverance** which wants to demonstrate, it too, a way of possessing human life and death.

### BIG QUESTION:

Considering these facts, which we have all followed and studied, Bioethics wonders: now that man has put his hands and feet on the field of HUMAN LIFE ITSELF. "knowing his growing possibilities of dominating nature in its every sector, what are the limits to his intervention on the very life of men?"<sup>14</sup>

### B. The problem of problems in Human Bioethics is the founding anthropology:

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13 JOHN PAUL II, We all know that this is a highly violent and lethal gesture against human life "as is proved by the fact that there are tendencies to cover up some crimes against new life... with sanitary expressions (eugenic indication, medical indication. Therapeutic indication, psychological indication... or stating it euphemistically "interruption of pregnancy"), which take away the eyes from the fact that the right to existence of a concrete human person is at stake" o.c. n. 11.

14 Bompiani A. Bioetica dalla parte dei deboli. Ed. Dehoniane. Bologna, 1994.



Man watches man is said to be a sentence of suppression because he does not answer the arbitrary predetermined canons<sup>15</sup> in order to be considered a person.

From this fact we deduce that it is not enough to say that Bioethics deals with qualifying ethically man's behavior in relation with man's life, because, as it is logical, everything depends on the concept that man has about man. If man has gone so far as to deny God, can we expect that there is no man who would deny man?

Thus we have Bioethics that go with the man and Bioethics that go against him.

If for example

for the **materialist philosophy** man is only matter. body, has a certain instrumental character, his life is a sprouting phenomenon, which grows and falls within the material of the universe, his life is worth according to his relation with production; therefore we distinguish four types of man and human life:

- Life that does not produce yet (child)
- Life that will never produce (handicapped)
- Life that produces (adult)
- Life that does not produce any more (elderly)

For **existential philosophy** man is pure existence, a being whose life lies between the bracket that opens at birth and closes with death, an opened and closed bracket within a non-existent context, therefore a being without any transcendence, without something before or after... a nonsense reality, a reality condemned to be free.

For **pragmatic - empiric philosophy** the value of man is measured according to the only criterion of the "cost-benefits", according to which some people's life would not be worth a dime... and could be sacrificed in favor of the life of those who bring "more benefits". In this context it is not contradictory to think not of euthanasia as personal choice, but state euthanasia for those who produce only costs...

For **secular philosophy** married tightly with **hedonistic philosophy** there are three fundamental principles:

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15 SINGER P., "As we have seen, the fundamental reason for raising this thesis (every person has a right to life) derives from the concept of person, like being aware of one's existence in time and being capable of having desires and projects for the future..." (Ripensare la vita, Ed. Il Saggiatore. Milano 2000, p. 218) "A being that is not a person has not got the same kind of interest to continue living in the future as a person usually has, but he has, nevertheless, interest not to suffer and to feel the pleasure derived from satisfying his own needs. Due to the fact that neither a newborn baby nor a fish are persons, killing these beings is not morally as negative as killing a person. But this doesn't mean that the needs of a baby, to be fed, to be protected from the cold, to feel comfortable and not to suffer during the time he lives, can be permittedly unexpected. Aside from the cases when life is at stake, these needs must be regarded with the same attention as if they were the needs of an adult. The same thing goes for the fish, obviously keeping in mind the diversity of its needs. Certainly the fish can feel pain. Its pain counts, if such coarse comparisons were possible, no more no less than the same pain felt by a person. To inflict pain to fish and newborns, or to leave them in pain is morally wrong unless this suffering be the only way to prevent greater sufferings" (p. 220).

- God does not exist nor does any other transcendence, therefore the only dimension of man is the space-time dimension.
- Therefore the basic rule of man's life is to minimize every suffering until neutralized and maximize every pleasure according to the epicurean "carpe diem".
- The state's task is to meet these perspectives for all citizens taking them by hand to overall well-being, and helping them to close their lives with a sweet death.

### For Christian personalistic philosophy

The value of man and his life is not measured by the facts, nor by his possibility to communicate or create projects, nor by his health-state in connection with production or the principle of "costs-benefits", it is not measured by anything peripheral connected with his being.

The value of man and his life is rooted simply in his being a man, in his answering this reality of being which he has not given himself, in which the Leading word is in the mouth of Another, in his primordial vocation: to be what he is, that being thought of by Another, created by Another, wanted by Another and brought into existence by Another, to be and to be born in this world with the identity of the gift of Life, and have an objective relation not with the gift itself, (You must not look a gift horse in the mouth) but with the giver. Every child is a "genitus non factus" and being a person, thus a being finalized directly in God, no one can claim rights on him.

Every person in the human society has the right to be helped in order to finish its "normality" The basic quality of a person's life, thanks to which a person is a person, cannot be composed of factors that make merely a "melius esse" and not of the things that make the "simpliciter esse".

## CONCLUSION

The author Singer, quoted earlier, in his effort of saving animals has had to underestimate man reducing the definition of his life to his factuality. He writes: **"It is only our wrongly placed respect for the doctrine of the sacredness of life that prevents us from seeing that what is obviously wrong to do or not to do to a horse is equally wrong to do or not to do to a newborn with malformations"**<sup>16</sup> He probably does not realize that in this way he is not saving the cabbage or the goat, i.e. neither man nor animals.

Man is being saved, and with him all creation, when, in full respect of his dignity as a person, he is asked to get in tune with his responsibility both in relation with creation as well as in relation with the Creator.

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<sup>16</sup> Singer P., *Etica Pratica*, Traduzione italiana di G. Ferranti, Napoli, 1989.

This time the Copernican revolution is set by the Christian thought of the Catholic church, which reminds that the human person is the only absolute within the world of creatures and, at the same time, the first relativity of the created world regarding the Creator, because:

- all creation finds its final reason in the human person and
- the human person is immediately finalized, without interferences and any other interposed person other than Jesus Christ, only in God.

Thus

- not the man for medical science and technique, but medical science and technique for man;
- not the man for economy, progress, the flora and fauna of the planet, but economy, progress, the flora and fauna of the planet for man;
- and in order for everything to keep its order it is necessary that man, on his behalf, does not ever forget that he is only finalized in God and it is to Him that he will answer for his Administration (cfr. Lc 16,2).