

## Book Review

### **The History and Future of Bioethics: A Sociological View <sup>1</sup>**

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Bioethics plays a prominent role in ensuring human respect for human dignity and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms from the application of modern biotechnologies. Bioethics, which evolved as a profession since 1960s covers ethical, legal, social and cultural dimensions of the medical and life sciences, as well as technologies associated with them. European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine adopted in 1996 also seeks to protect the dignity and identity of human beings from the applications of biology and medicine.

The author makes an attempt to bring out the ethical challenges faced by the modern day society by scientific innovations.

The book is divided into three parts apart from its introductory chapter. The first part having two chapters focuses on the emergence of bioethical debate and the struggle between science and theology in assuming jurisdiction over bioethics. The author has given lucid picture of how theology withdrew allowing the rise of bioethics as a profession. He also points out the social forces responsible for the emergence of bioethics profession. Tracing the historical evolution of bioethics, the author has divided the book

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN H. EVANS, THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF BIOETHICS: A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW (Oxford University Press 2012).

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into three era beginning from 1960. In the first era, the book deals with the factors that show how scientists had unquestioned jurisdiction over health-care ethics consultation and research bioethics. When science tried to enter theological jurisdiction, theology fought back using the theological discourse and methods with its abstract knowledge. In the second era, theologians rely on secular arguments to defend their jurisdiction. In the second era, theologians gain upper hand over ethical issues in science and medicine making the public to appeal to government for their protection. In the third era, the author highlights the rise of government as a jurisdiction giver in providing ethical advice on biomedical policy matters.

The second section of the book examines the emergence of jurisdictional crisis of the bioethics profession. Chapter 3 describes the changing views of the jurisdiction-givers in public policy bioethics jurisdiction. The influence of religious institutions and social activists demonstrated that public policy bioethics jurisdiction were not neutral and posed a serious problem to the legitimate claims of bioethics profession.

In the last part of the book, the author advocates for a fourth era of bioethical debate that he claims has more secure jurisdiction for the bioethics profession. His recommendations are for solidifying jurisdiction over public policy bioethics by modifying the methods used in the system of abstract knowledge of the bioethics profession to make them more legitimate in the determination of jurisdiction. This retains the democratic legitimacy of the system of abstract knowledge used by bioethicists and retains the structural features that make it appealing to policy makers, while increasing the likelihood that provider of jurisdiction will really see it as representing common morality.

The book is well written and structured. The contribution of the author to the field of bioethics is commendable as he brings in a sociological perspective. His views on the future of bioethics profession and his proposal for a social science based bioethics for preserving human values is truly interesting.