

## Why does the Current World Environment need Environmental Bioethics?

MARTA LUCIANE FISCHER

Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil.



### Article History

Published by: 14 April 2021

Bioethics is a recent area of knowledge known as ethics for life. The Neologism was consolidated by Van Rensselaer Potter in the 1970's.<sup>1</sup> Potter was an American biochemist and oncologist in line with the visionary environmental movements that were strengthened in the face of the awareness of the consequences of the sudden and intense technoscientific development. Potter's work, "Bioethics: bridge to the future", it was based on an analogy of the one human being with a cancer cell with the potential to compromise the physical integrity of the planet if mitigating and preventive attitudes were not prioritized. Bioethics was conceived as a bridge to connect the biomedical sciences and the sciences of humanity, promulgating that only through dialogue considering the ethical values and common interests, it would be possible to reach a fair solution for all the actors that make up one conflict.

Although this first moment of bioethics brought a strong environmental component, the full development of capitalism, marked by an industry with growing technology, did not accept Potter's ideas. However, the perspective of bioethics was promptly captured by medical ethics, which faced conflicts mainly related to the beginning and the end of life. The technological innovation in medicine inserted decision dilemmas for which there were no ethical, moral, or legal guidelines. Potter endorsed the application of Bioethics at the level of microbioethics, since it stimulated the body's self-management, patient autonomy in the face of medical decisions and civil and sick rights.

However, Potter spoke after almost 20 years in his work "Global Bioethics"<sup>2</sup> claiming the wider application of bioethics. In fact, there was an expansion of the spectrum of bioethics, but it has not yet reached globality. Call for Potter, started to be applied in the institutional and social field. In the 1980s its breadth shifted from individual to social rights, focusing on the economy, the distribution of resources and health justice. It was at that moment that multidisciplinary research ethics committees were consolidated, who intended to standardize and monitor human and animal participants in scientific research.

**CONTACT** Marta Luciane Fischer ✉ [marta.fischer@pucpr.br](mailto:marta.fischer@pucpr.br) 📍 Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil.



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Enviro Research Publishers.

This is an  Open Access article licensed under a Creative Commons license: Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY).

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12944/CWE.16.1.02>

However, Poter still believes that the fullness of bioethics has not been achieved. In his last publication<sup>3</sup> he proposed "Deep Bioethics" to maintain the comprehensiveness, pluralism, interdisciplinarity, openness and critical incorporation of new knowledge contemplating the synergy between life, health, and environment. Latin America, in particular Brazil, started to play a fundamental role in the expansion and politicization of the international bioethics' agenda encouraged by the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights.<sup>4</sup>

Garrafa<sup>5</sup> related contemporary ethical problems with the economic and socio-political crisis justifying concrete changes in the field of applied ethics through the reflection of conservative conceptions of bioethics. The choice of global bioethics and bioethics/power/justice, for world events stimulated discussions on the globalization of bioethics wisdom in the application of knowledge and respect for environmental issues, moral plurality, health, social and environmental subject.

Environmental issues have become an international concern from the United Nations conference on the human environment, in Stockholm in 1974, understanding that the urgency in minimizing conflicts come from severe crises. The world is mobilized in three major conferences: in Sweden in 1972, in Brazil in 1992 and in South Africa in 2002, resulting in numerous documents, treaties, regulations, agreed by the signatory countries, concomitantly flourishing in social movements, non-governmental organizations, and green parties.<sup>6,7</sup> In 1997, the Brundtland Report marked the commitment to environmental preservation, even promoting economic and social development, aiming to meet the needs of the present without compromising the possibilities of future generations.<sup>8</sup> Recently the United Nations Millennium Summit set eight international development goals for 2015. The continuity of this agenda has been extended whose objectives have been revised and added the sustainability component resulting in 17 goals to be achieved by 2030, covering economic development, the eradication of poverty, misery and hunger, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and good governance at all levels, including peace and security.<sup>9</sup>

During the past 50 years, the environmental ethics has gained a considerable and respectable political and social space. The sustainability and environmental education principles being incorporated into public policies and international and local legal norms.<sup>8</sup> However, even in the face of major advances, limitations in the technical, cultural, economic and ethical area there is a delay in awareness and behaviour change in favour of environmental health. Consequently, the world still witnesses situations of neglect, disrespect for nature, the human population, and the future, as exemplified in the Covid-19 pandemic situation. For Fischer *et al.*,<sup>8</sup> the synergy of the perspectives and foundations of environmental ethics with environmental bioethics is configured as a tool for a feasible future.

Environmental bioethics is understood as a branch of Bioethics<sup>8</sup> whose, dialogical and multidisciplinary nature, proposes to mediate the dialogue between the multiple actors involved in environmental conflicts, resulting directly and indirectly from technoscientific development. To achieve a fair and consensual solution it is necessary to listen to the arguments and to know the values and interests of all the actors. The actors are composed of agents and moral patients, while the former have decision-making power, the latter are subject to the consequences of those decisions. If the moral agent makes his decisions based only on individual values and interests, the patient moral assume a position of vulnerability in the face of the inability to get out of a situation that puts the quality of their survival at risk. Environmental problems are characterized by being highly complex as they involve countless conditions and risk enhancers. In addition, these conflicts bring together multiple actors that intercalate in the role of agent and moral patient, depending on the hierarchical level in which he finds himself. Finally, these problems, although they comprise a high component of local damage, have global consequences, therefore, constituting a collective responsibility.

The current world environment has experienced the dissonance between the availability of technology - that optimizes survival processes - and the consequences on the fundamental foundations for maintaining the life on the planet. The consequences of predatory exploitation of natural resources, the supremacy of the capitalist system, social inequalities and physical and mental illness of people are part of the struggle of

many, including the collaborators and readers of this journal. I invite everyone to look at what Environmental Bioethics can enrich your research, regardless of clipping and coverage area. Bioethics proposes that we broaden our view, to include in our contribution a critical analysis, but devoid of conflicts of interest. That allows mainly to identify the vulnerabilities and contribute to its mitigation. Environmental Bioethics sees that integral health demand for harmony in the interconnection between body/mind/spirit; between the individual/society/environment; and between local/global. Therefore, it allows the insertion of scientific findings in real situations that demand urgent solutions.

Environmental Bioethics is dialoguing, promotes, encourages, and improves communication processes between academic, political, social, and individual levels. Communication is carried out both by a suitable and transparent information system, and a welcoming system that promotes awareness. However, for communication to take place it is essential that the receiver is skilled in understanding and autonomous, critical and protagonist. To this end, it is essential to equip this citizen, to make your decisions consciously, that does not have its freedom stolen by a polarized and manipulative system who sees it only as a piece of a great power game. So, if in each area, we as researchers and citizens of the world, we can plant a seed of welcome and care for each other, be it a person, an animal, an ecosystem, or a planet, we will contribute to the resumption of a symbiotic network that will make this world doable for this and future generations.

### References

1. Potter, V. R. *Bioethics Bridge to the Future*. 1971. Prentice-Hall, Inc, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, USA.
2. Potter, V. R. 1988. *Global Bioethics: building on the Leopold Legacy*. Michigan State: University Press, Michigan, USA.
3. Potter, V. R.; Potter, L. 1995. Global Bioethics: Converting Sustainable Development to Global Survival. *Medicine & Global Survival* 2, 3, 185-191.
4. Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=31058&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31058&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). Retrieved on March 13, 2021.
5. Garrafa V. 2012. Expansion and politicization of the international bioethics concept. *Revista Bioética*, 20(1), 9-20.
6. Cassol, P. B., Quintana, A. M. 2012. A contribuição da bioética na preservação ambiental e na saúde. *Monografias ambiental*, 10, 2235-2240.
7. Brama GM, Grisólia CK. 2012. Environmental Bioethics: strategy to face planetary vulnerability. *Revista Bioética*, 20(1), 41-53.
8. Fischer ML, Cunha T, Renk V, Sganzerla A, Santos JZ. 2017. Da ética ambiental à bioética ambiental: antecedentes, trajetórias e perspectivas. *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*. 24(2), 391-409.
9. Make The Sdgs A Reality. [https://sdgs.un.org/#goal\\_section](https://sdgs.un.org/#goal_section). Retrieved on March 13, 2021.