

Narrowness” and “Broadness” of Bioethics: on some Middle-European and Mediterranean Initiatives

Muzur, Amir; Rinčić, Iva

Source / Izvornik: **Darulfunun ilahiyat, 2018, 29, 409 - 415**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:184:248095>

Rights / Prava: [Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International](#)/[Imenovanje-Nekomercijalno 4.0 međunarodna](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-02-11**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Medicine - FMRI Repository](#)





RESEARCH NOTE

“Narrowness” and “Broadness” of Bioethics: on some Middle-European and Mediterranean Initiatives*

Amir Muzur¹

Iva Rinčić²

Today, we know who came to the idea in the 1970s in the United States that numerous contemporary issues, particularly provoked by the progress of medicine and technology, be unified by the notion of “bioethics”. Coining the new term by shortening “biological science” and “ethics”, Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001) certainly achieved this as the first American, without the knowledge of German and without having the slightest surmise that he had been outrun by a humble theologian and teacher from Halle, Fritz Jahr (1895-1953), whose work would be discovered at the very end of the 20th century. How the word “bioethics” first appeared in Potter’s paper from 1970,³ and eventually the book from 1971,⁴ and how it got incomparably larger publicity thanks to the April 19, 1971 edition of *Time* magazine, was studied and described by Warren Reich in his two papers.⁵ Although he resorts to the *bilocated birth* theory, Reich, actually, clearly reveals that Potter’s word was taken over by a group working at that time on the foundation of a biomedical

* Parts of this article previously have been published in Croatian, within the book: Amir Muzur and Iva Rinčić, *Europska Bioetika Našeg Doba: Struje, Kormilari, Sidrišta* (Zagreb: Pergamena, 2018).

1 **Correspondence to:** Amir Muzur, MD, MA, PhD, Full Professor and Head, Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities, University of Rijeka – Faculty of Medicine, B. Branchetta 20, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia. Email: amir.muzur@medri.uniri.hr; Vice-Dean for Business Affairs and Quality, University of Rijeka – Faculty of Health Studies, Rijeka, Croatia.

2 Iva Rinčić, BA, MSc, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities, University of Rijeka – Faculty of Medicine, B. Branchetta 20, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia, Email: iva.rincic@medri.uniri.hr; Department of Public Health, University of Rijeka – Faculty of Health Studies, Rijeka, Croatia.

3 Van Rensselaer Potter, “Bioethics: the Science of Survival,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 14 (1970): 127-153.

4 Van Rensselaer Potter, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971).

5 Warren Thomas Reich, “The Word ‘Bioethics’: its Birth and the Legacies who Shaped it,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 4, no. 4 (1994): 319-335; Warren Thomas Reich, “The Word ‘Bioethics’: the Struggle over its Earliest Meanings,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 5, no. 1 (1995): 409-415.

institute at Georgetown. Robert Sargent-Sarge Shriver Jr. (1915-2011) and his wife Eunice Kennedy (1921-2009), as the financing party, and the head of their project, André Hellegers (1926-1979), the Dutch obstetrician and fetal physiologist, on October 1, 1971, opened *Joseph and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Institute of Ethics* at Georgetown University in Washington, D. C. Claiming they had arrived to the notion of “bioethics” by themselves, the Kennedys skillfully exploited the new word to attract public attention, media, scientists, and money. Without a deeper study of Potter’s work, nevertheless, it is impossible to understand his intention to embrace a much broader field by his bioethics – thematically, including all issues related to environment, human health, and research, but also methodologically, insisting upon the combination of knowledge and resources from natural and social sciences and humanities.

Ignoring Potter and his ideas,⁶ however, the Kennedy Institute has imposed itself a global authority in bioethics, identifying it with «biomedical ethics». The Institute’s most prominent scholars, Tom Beauchamp, James Childress, Robert Veatch, and others, namely, launched the idea that ethical attitudes (in clinical practice and medical research) can be reduced to four universal principles obliging, uniforming, and proscribing the acts of physicians and experimenters, monitored by the allegedly objective ethical committee. That such an idea was conceived within American culture, pressed to action at any price, seems logical. However, the problem appeared when the Institute’s teachings started to be propagated (very aggressively, by publications and courses) to other continents and cultures,⁷ exalting American values (not only pragmatism, but also individual autonomy⁸), jeopardising global ethical diversity, and narrowing down the otherwise broad horizons onto the problems of human biomedical practice. Like a bear in a cage,

6 See more in: Amir Muzur and Iva Rinčić, *Van Rensselaer Potter I Njegovo Mjesto u Povijesti Bioetike* [Van Rensselaer Potter and his Place in the History of Bioethics] (Zagreb: Pergamena, 2015), 155-160.

7 An important role in spreading the American bioethical “standards” has had also UNESCO, which, lead by Henk ten Have, in the 1990s started with a systematic institutionalisation of bioethics worldwide, publishing declarations, establishing bioethical committees, and creating global programme of bioethical education. Cf. Gabriela Irrazábal, “Acerca de la Emergencia y Consolidación de la Bioética Como Disciplina Desde una Perspectiva Sociológica,” *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* (Rio de Janeiro) 22, no. 4 (2015): 1126 (1121-1140).

8 In some parts of the world – Far East or Africa – more important is the autonomy of the family than of the individual. In Europe or Latin America, on the other hand, the principle of solidarity is more important than autonomy. Cf. Daniel Callahan and Xavier Symons, “Interview: Daniel Callahan on Communitarian Ethics,” *BioEdge* 2015 (<http://www.bioedge.org/bioethics/interview-with-daniel-callahan/11626>); Antonio Puca, “Bioetiche a Confronto: Comparazione tra Bioetica Anglo-Americana, Europea, Latino-Americana, Africana e Asiatica,” *Bioethikos* 7, no. 4 (2013): 406.

bioethics learned to dance to the four bars and the entire world started to applaud to it believing that, presumably, this is all what can be derived out of bioethics.

The Catholic Church reacted particularly well to the Georgetown initiative. Feeling ideological closeness to the Kennedy family and the (Jesuit) Georgetown University, as well as the dominance of a theistic, primarily Christian, perspective at the Institute, the Catholic Church skillfully «caught» the idea of bioethics and, accepting it as a new medium of its own action, by the end of the 20th century, launched a new wave of «Counter-Reformation».

To ban Van Rensselaer Potter from the history of bioethics, however, was not an easy task: moreover, as the truth on his contribution was reaching the rest of the world, outside the United States, Potter was becoming increasingly famous. Even if with certain bitterness, by the end of his life, he found the way to conceive a kind of Renaissance of his own bioethics, this time called «global bioethics». The «Global Bioethics Network» was born, encompassing 38 individuals from Canada, USA, China, Japan, New Zealand, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Ukraine, Poland, and Croatia.⁹ Those were mostly Potter's personal friends and persons who, probably from various reasons, had demonstrated their interest in the development of a bioethics different from its Georgetown narrowed-down version. And thus, at least in some of those countries – primarily in the United States, Italy, Spain, and Croatia – Potter's bioethics has continued to live on, even experiencing occasional international rises, «withstanding» the up-to-then only known Georgetown mainstream bioethics.

European «acceptance» of the Georgetown bioethics in the 1980s was motivated by very different ambitions: the Jesuits were seizing the debate on life and trying to re-evangelise it, the philosophers and doctors wanted to become European pioneers of an American novelty, and North-Western Europe did not see anything wrong in keeping with the close Trans-Atlantic culture. Of course, this fashion did not make everyone in the Old Continent happy. In France and Germanophone countries, for instance, there was a significant opposition to the very name of «bioethics», particularly when it came to the names of institutes and centres faithful to «medical ethics». At the same time, flirtation with the global trend has sometimes resulted in confusing formulations. So is the function of German Council for Ethics (*Deutscher Ethikrat*) to be a “bioethical advisory body” (*bioethisches Beratungsgremium*), and the headline that a centre of Bonn

9 Cf. Van Rensselaer Potter, “The Intellectual ‘Last Will’ of the First Global Bioethicist,” in *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics: the Future of Integrative Bioethics*, edited by Amir Muzur and Hans-Martin Sass (Münster: Lit, 2012), 157 (149-157).

University succeeded in 2003 to renew the title of German Referral Centre for Ethics in Biomedicine (DRZE) run like “Bonn remains the center for bioethics.”¹⁰

No wonder that some scholars, dissatisfied with the American ‘‘recipes’’ for biomedical issues, tried to Europeanise the Georgetown directives. So Diego Gracia Guill n from Complutense University, the pioneer of the ‘‘Mediterranean Bioethics’’ – formally educated both in medicine and philosophy – started with a ‘‘re-philosophying’’ of bioethics, abandoning applied bioethics for the theoretical one. Believing in differences between the three ethical traditions – Anglo-Saxon, North-European (or Middle-European), and Mediterranean,¹¹ Gracia has advocated the values of amity and compassion, as well as the method of dialogue between the North-European ethics of duty, securing ‘‘solutions’’ form, procedures, and principles on the one side, and the South-European ethics of values far more based upon the Ancient and Catholic traditions.¹² The Danes Jakob Dahl Rendtorff and Peter Kemp, again, by the end of the 1990s, suggested the use of a ‘‘set’’ of principles which, instead of the Georgetown autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice, would include autonomy, dignity, integrity, and vulnerability.¹³ Others have advocated the principles of dignity, solidarity, and caution, allegedly preferring wisdom over hedonism, co-operation over individualism, and moral sense over pragmatism, respectively.¹⁴ The success, expectedly, had to be missed, since all those attempts still preserve the American pragmatic logics of reduction to principles, even if some principles try to introduce ‘‘more European’’ values. Like Gracia, only a few years later, Ante  ovi  from Zagreb launched the concept and project of ‘‘Integrative Bioethics,’’ appealing for a ‘‘philosophisation’’ and ‘‘Europeanisation’’ of bioethics:¹⁶ and the Integrative Bioethics opened indeed to all, even to cultural,

10 Cf. <https://www.uni-bonn.de/die-universitaet/informationsquellen/presseinformationen/2003/436>

11 Cf. Diego Gracia, ‘‘The Intellectual Basis of Bioethics in Southern European Countries,’’ *Bioethics* 7, no. 2-3 (1993): 97-107.

12 Sandro Spinsanti, *La Bioetica: Biografie per una Disciplina* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1995), 100-110.

13 Jakob Dahl Rendtorff and Peter Kemp, *Basic Ethical Principles in European Bioethics and Biolaw*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen/Barcelona: Centre for Ethics and Law/Borja de Bio tica, 2000).

14 Matti H yry, ‘‘European Values in Bioethics: Why, What, and How to be Used?’’ *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 24, no. 3 (2003): 199-214.

15 Born in 1949 in Split, schooled in Zagreb. A philosopher-ethicist. As a fellow of Alexander von Humboldt Foundation,  ovi  worked in Augsburg (Germany). Minister of science, technology, and informatics of the Republic of Croatia in 1991/2, Vice-Rector of University of Zagreb since 2014.

16 Cf. Ante  ovi , ‘‘Der Aufbau eines Referenzzentrums f r Bioethik in S dosteuropa: ein weiterer Schritt zur Institutionalisierung des Bioethischen Pluriperspektivismus,’’ in *Integrative Bioethik: Beitr ge des 1. S dosteurop ischen Bioethik-Forums, Mali Lo inj 2005 / Integrative Bioethics: Proceedings of the 1. Southeast European Bioethics Forum, Mali Lo inj 2005*, edited by Ante  ovi  and Thomas S ren Hoffmann (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2007), 261-274.

non-scientific perspectives, promoting "orientation knowledge" as a result of the dialogue, close to the idea of Jürgen Mittelstraß on the knowledge based on values as opposed to informative knowledge based on facts.¹⁷

All those ideas, nevertheless, could not have matched the Georgetown bioethics: launched from Europe, with their only common denominator being opposition to the global mainstream, without any political, financial, and related scientific capital, those attempts had the destiny to persist – in the best case – like islands of regional immunity against the narrowed-down simplified principlism. And then, at the moment when it had looked like the Georgetown doctrine shall prevail absolutely, the work of Fritz Jahr was discovered. Jahr exposed his idea of a new discipline, *Bio-Ethik*, for the first time in December 1926, in an article published in the *Mittelschule* journal,¹⁸ and eventually, only fifteen days later, in the far more broadly read *Kosmos*.¹⁹ Among several ideas worthy of re-examination, Jahr's major intellectual contribution certainly is his "Bioethical Imperative," a kind of broadening up of Kant's Categorical Imperative, suggesting: „Respect every living being as an end in itself, and treat it, if possible, as such“ (*Achte jedes Lebewesen grundsätzlich als einen Selbstzweck, und behandle es nach Möglichkeit als solchen!*). During twenty-five years, 1924-1948, Fritz Jahr published altogether only 22 short papers, out of which 10 deal with bioethical issues,²⁰ and his modest, sesile life certainly did not help increase Jahr's public reputation. No wonder that Jahr's contemporaries do not quote him, as well as that the Berlin Humboldt University Professor Rolf Löther discovered Jahr's work in 1927 almost accidentally, 70 years later (Löther was irritated by the claim that bioethics allegedly be discovered only in the 1970s, and in America).²¹ In the 10-12 years following Löther's discovery, nevertheless, mostly thanks to Eve-

17 Cf. Jürgen Mittelstraß, "The Loss of Knowledge in the Information Age," in *From Information to Knowledge, from Knowledge to Wisdom: Challenges and Changes Facing Higher Education in the Digital Age*, edited by Erik de Corte et al. (London: Portland Press, 2010), 19-23.

18 Fritz Jahr, "Wissenschaft vom Leben und Sittenlehre," *Mittelschule* 40, no. 45 (1926): 604-605.

19 Fritz Jahr, "Bio-Ethik: eine Umschau über die ethischen Beziehungen des Menschen zu Tier und Pflanze," *Kosmos* 24, no. 1 (1927): 2-4.

20 Cf. Amir Muzur and Iva Rinčić, "Fritz Jahr (1895-1953): the Man who Invented Bioethics," *Synthesis philosophica* 26, no. 1 (2011): 133-139; Iva Rinčić and Amir Muzur, "Fritz Jahr: the Invention of Bioethics and Beyond," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 54, no. 4 (2011): 550-556; Iva Rinčić and Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i Rađanje Europske Bioetike* [Fritz Jahr and the Emergence of European Bioethics] (Zagreb: Pergamena, 2012).

21 Rolf Löther, "Evolution der Biosphäre und Ethik," in *Ethik der Biowissenschaften: Geschichte und Theorie – Beiträge zur 6. Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie (DGGTB) in Tübingen 1997*, edited by Eve-Marie Engels, Thomas Junker, and Michael Weingarten (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1998), 61-68.

Marie Engels (Tübingen),²² José-Roberto Goldim (Porto Alegre),²³ and primarily Hans-Martin Sass (Bochum/Washington),²⁴ the ideas of Fritz Jahr have found the way to spread all over the world.²⁵

It is not difficult to imagine what the discovery of Fritz Jahr's work meant for all those advocating a more European-based bioethics: projects, books, papers, dissertations, centres, journals, conferences, even an international award named after Jahr, started to sprout mostly in Croatia and Germany, but also elsewhere in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Discovering in Fritz Jahr its own genealogy and returning to its own intellectual tradition (not only to Jahr's sources, no matter how abundant), European Bioethics has become reality and an incomparably stronger alternative to the Georgetown one than it had been perceived up to that moment. Overlapping with and partly amending to Potter's Global Bioethics (which, typically for Potter, deals also with the non-living environment and thus actually should not insist upon the term "bios" representing a new wave of environmental ethics), sharing with it the ambition of a contentual and methodological broadening and flexibilising, European Bioethics is still characterised by its own formal, terminological, and ideological (self) defining. Its theoretical footholds are to be searched for and found in the intellectual legacy of entire Europe (even broader: let us not forget that Fritz Jahr incorporated certain Far-Eastern doctrines into his concept, and later, the same will be done by the Italian biologist Menico Torchio, 1932-2001, who was the first to introduce Potter's work to Europe in 1973²⁶), while the practical ones, up to this moment, mostly are concentrated in the North-Western Mediterranean and Eastern/South-Eastern Europe. In Spain, the path of the "broader bioethics" is followed by Diego Gracia Guillén in Madrid and, at a minor scale, by Marcelo Palacios in Gijón; in Italy, after the departure of Menico Torchio and Salvatore Privitera (1945-2004, the Sicilian priest and poet, the promoter of Mediterranean "narrative" bioethics), those are Luisella Battaglia with

22 Cf. Eve-Marie Engels, "Bioethik," in *Metzler Lexicon Religion*, edited by Christoph Auffarth, Jutta Bernard, and Hubert Mohr, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1999), 159-164.

23 Cf. José Roberto Goldim, "Revisiting the Beginning of Bioethics: the Contribution of Fritz Jahr (1927)," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 52 (2009): 377-380.

24 The far most influential paper is: Hans-Martin Sass, "Fritz Jahr's 1927 Concept of Bioethics," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 17 (2007): 279-295.

25 Cf. Amir Muzur and Hans-Martin Sass, eds., *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics: the Future of Integrative Bioethics* (Münster: Lit, 2012); Amir Muzur and Iva Rinčić, "Epistemological, Political and Cultural Implications of the Discovery of Fritz Jahr's Work: the Concept and Project of European Bioethics," in *1926 – Die Geburt der Bioethik in Halle (Saale) durch den Protestantischen Theologen Fritz Jahr (1895-1953)*, edited by Florian Steger, Jan C. Joerden, and Maximilian Schochow (Frankfurt a/M: Peter Lang, 2014), 45-56.

26 Cf. Amir Muzur and Iva Rinčić, *Bioetička Europa Našeg Doba: Struje, Kormilari, Sidrišta* [Bioethical Europe of our Time: Streams, Steerers, Anchorages] (Zagreb: Pergamena, 2018), 47-54.

her centre in Genoa, Gilberto Marzano in Udine, and, to a certain extent, Giovanni Russo in Messina; in the Czech Republic, this is Petr Jemelka in Brno; in Bulgaria, Vasil Prodanov from Sofia; in Romania, Ioan Marcus in Cluj-Napoca and Sorin Hostiuc in Bucharest; in Ukraine, Svitlana Pustovit in Kiyev and Hanna Hubenko in Sumy; in Greece, Stavroula Tsinorema from the Crete and Eleni Kalokairinou from Thessaloniki, etc. If we add to this list two centres in Denmark and a few chairs in Germany, as well as, of course, all the individual and infrastructural power resulting from the Integrative Bioethics network from Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia, we roughly get the map of eurobioethical initiatives from the entire Continent.

Where does that leave Turkey? The invitation to contribute to this journal's special issue, lists only one topic falling outside the realm of human medical ethics: animal ethics. This is in accordance with recent reviews of the development of bioethics in Turkey, revealing the presence of an absolutely dominant "Georgetown view".²⁷ Indeed, the future is not (so) dark after all: *Turkish Journal of Bioethics*, established in 2014 and published by Turkish Bioethics Association, declares to "adopt the broadest definition of the concept of bioethics, which is the study of the value issues that arise during the entire human endeavors" (publishing still mostly on medical-ethical topics, but expanding toward food, agriculture, biocentrism, and other broader issues), and the Istanbul professor İlhan İlkılıç, who had introduced many important medical-ethical topics from Germany to Turkey (and back), published the first comment on the translation into Turkish of Jahr's 1926 pioneering article.²⁸ It seems that once again, Fritz Jahr has served a good "bridge" to a broader bioethics.

27 Berna Arda and Serap Sahinoglu Pelin, "Bioethics in Turkey in 1995," *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics* 5 (1995): 64-65; Erdem Aydın, "Bioethics Regulations in Turkey," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25 (1999): 404-407; Cemal Huseyin Guvercin and Kerim M. Munir, "A Comparative Analysis of Bioethical Issues from View Points of Religious Affairs Administration in Turkey, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodox Judaism," *Acta Bioethica* 23, no. 2 (2017): 327-339.

28 İlhan İlkılıç, Hakan Ertin, and Rainer Brömer, "Fritz Jahr's Term Bioethics: an Evaluation from the Perspective of Islamic Tradition," in *1926-2016 Fritz Jahr's Bioethics: A Global Discourse*, edited by Amir Muzur and Hans-Martin Sass (Zürich: LIT, 2017), 73-75.