

Preface: Life's Complexity, Complexity of Ethics

This Special Section of EBEM was launched under the title of this editorial. Our aim was both to address larger categories of readers of the journal and to approach a wider variety of opinions, by gathering authors in the field of moral philosophy and applied ethics. Whether we have succeeded in accomplishing these tasks, the readers will decide.

Definitely, life in the current world has become extremely complicated as a consequence of the exponential increase of our knowledge about it. We might say that our existence became very complex, and, at the same time, extremely challenging. We tried to collect, for this Special Issue, contributions proving the complexity of ethics in the current society, having the source in the complexity of our life at the beginning of the third millennium.

The first article, by Kei Sasaki, is a plea for the diversity of arguing and understanding life in various contexts, with impact on the ethical discourse related to human life. Sasaki tried to conclude by “What I would like to emphasize as a conclusion is that discourses which aim to go ‘beyond’ the ‘context’ of the special nature of human ‘life’ should also be the goals of ethics concerning ‘life.’ I think I have shown that this conclusion is based on biology, while at the same time, going ‘beyond’ it.”

The need for ethics in our daily and professional life seems to be a truism. The current medical practice and biomedical research are clear examples raising many concerns and large debates in the field of ethics. Some of them belong to the field of genetics. The contribution by Julian Savulescu and Chris Gyngell approaches a topic in medical genetics asking moral questions and formulating ethical opinions about gene editing (GE), in a utilitarian perspective. They tried to argue in a persuasive manner that “there is a strong medical case for pursuing gene editing technologies.” They conclude that: “While some believe that GE is not medically justified because it cannot provide any benefits that selection cannot, we have shown this is false. GE will allow couples to avoid single gene disorders in cases where selection is not possible. Even in cases where selection is possible, some couples will prefer GE to selection as it will allow them to avoid genetic disease without destroying embryos. There is also a strong medical case for GE in avoiding polygenetic and age-related disorders. As these conditions are influenced by multiple genes, IVF and PGD are ineffective against them.

Disease and aging are clear scourges of human lives and gene editing is a promising avenue of combating these evils. There is a moral imperative to pursue GE research and manage the risks ethically.

Another concern on medical ethics is discussed in the paper by Jörg Löschke and Bert Heinrichs. It is about research without direct medical benefits for the participants with emphasis on research with minor participants without capacity to give informed consent. They analyze, by discussing pros and cons, this ethical concern in relationships with the concept of solidarity.

The article by Sylwia Maria Olejarz is a research related to laypersons' involvement in the deliberation process on organ donation, in Japan, moving us in a special culture where Western influences are not yet largely accommodated. The paper is a deep analysis that tries to understand why "[o]rgan donation is a very tense and at the same time very delicate issue in Japan," and how the public opinion changes, but gives us also a message to take it home: "It is important to remember that: 'Something (which I can do for others) might come back (to me) someday,' as emphasized by one of the participants."

The scientific research in any field has proved to be useful for the progress of humankind, but also dangerous for its possible misuse. In her paper, Simona Gheorghiu assesses ethical concerns of biomedical research with dual use. She advocates the necessity of educating the scientists to become precautious and take responsibilities for their research, as those in a case mentioned in the article did. She concludes that: "Doing biomedical research has a risk dimension of which scientists need to be aware and for which they have to be properly trained. Dual-use dilemmas will continue to emerge and the threat they contain cannot be easily neglected. Nonetheless, this threat can be managed within an appropriate framework and I believe that self-governance at an institutional level through ethics committees can provide such a framework, as long as there is an adequate level of expertise concerning dual use."

Considering the complexity of our social life and the complications it creates, we can't ignore the threat of terrorism. In his contribution, Shunzo Majima addresses the moral issues of hostage taking. Approaching and philosophically analyzing some recent cases, he concluded that "hostage taking is morally wrong, killing innocent people is morally wrong, killing hostages is morally wrong, and broadcasting scenes of hostage executions is morally wrong."

Two of the papers in this Special Issue address the ethics of intellectual property, another complex and challenging topic of current professional life. In the first one, Emanuel-Mihail Socaciu and Radu Uszkai try to connect the intellectual property rights, in terms of drug development, to the idea of moral bioenhancement. They argued that "intellectual property rights provide noticeable disincentives for individual and voluntary moral bioenhancement."

The second article, by Constantin Vică, fits to the debate related to patent granting or any other ownership rights registering upon various methods, procedures, or technologies of manipulating and engineering life, with emphasis related to genes and synthetic biology. He tries to argue that in the age of biotechnologies, inducing huge expectations in the population, "...the current patent system and intellectual property ideology, it imposes unfair duties on many and questions the profound origin of our moral rights, i.e., self-ownership."

The paper by Valentin Mureșan ends the Special Issue by analyzing how organizations can enable the moral cleaning and effective management of their ethical life. The author suggests a way to measure the efficiency of moral programs needed to train professionals in ethics and the management of ethics.

Therefore, the Special Issue guested by EBEM includes contributions addressing

various areas of life complexity resulting in many ethical debates. We, as Guest Editors, do hope the readers will be aware that the solutions for ethical concerns and dilemmas, in our current world, are context relative and we have to keep ourselves open minded and permanently increase our sensitivity to professional ethics. This will make us able to identify, assess, and overcome the complex ethical issues raised by the complexity of our life.

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