

# At the origins of bioethics: from Potter's bioethical creed to Fritz Jahr's bioethical imperative

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## Abstract

This article presents the historical origins of bioethics from the work of Van Rensselaer Potter and Fritz Jahr who coined into two distinct moments the expression Bioethics. This article displays the brief history of the latter author and analyzes the concept of bioethics formulation for each of them, considering their impact in the context of today's environmental debates. At the end concludes by emphasizing the importance of deepening bioethical reflection as proposed by these authors, especially considering the points of intersection of their theoretical proposals that could prove crucial to the understanding of a new ecological paradigm.

**Keywords:** Bioethics - History. Bioethics - Trends. Bioethical issues. Philosophy. Europe. United States.

## Resumo

### As origens da bioética: do credo bioético de Potter ao imperativo bioético de Fritz Jahr

Este artigo apresenta as origens históricas da bioética a partir dos trabalhos de Van Rensselaer Potter e de Fritz Jahr, que em dois momentos distintos cunharam a expressão *bioética*. Traz breve histórico deste último autor e analisa a formulação de cada um deles para o conceito de bioética, considerando seu impacto no contexto das discussões ambientais hodiernas. Conclui apontando a importância de aprofundar a reflexão bioética nos moldes propostos por estes autores, considerando, especialmente, os pontos de intersecção de suas propostas teóricas que podem revelar-se determinantes para a compreensão de um novo paradigma ecológico.

**Palavras-chave:** Bioética - História. Bioética - Tendências. Temas bioéticos. Filosofia. Europa (Continente). Estados Unidos.

## Resumen

### En los orígenes de la bioética: de la creencia bioética de Potter hacia el imperativo bioético de Fritz Jahr

Este artículo presenta los orígenes históricos de la bioética a partir del trabajo de Van Rensselaer Potter y Fritz Jahr que acuñaron, en dos momentos distintos, la expresión Bioética. Presenta un breve historial de este último autor y analiza la creación del concepto de bioética a cada uno de ellos, teniendo en cuenta su impacto en el contexto de las discusiones ambientales de hoy. Concluye poniendo de relieve el profundizar la reflexión bioética en los modelos propuestos por dichos autores, considerando especialmente los puntos de intersección de sus propuestas teóricas que pueden revelarse determinantes a la comprensión de un nuevo paradigma ecológico.

**Palabras-clave:** Bioética - Historia. Bioética - Tendencias. Discusiones bioéticas. Filosofía. Europa (Continente). Estados Unidos.

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*What I ask of you is to think bioethics as a new scientific ethics that combines modesty, responsibility, and competence in an interdisciplinary and intercultural perspective and that reinforces the humanity sense.*

**Van Rensselaer Potter**

*Respect every living being on principle as a goal in itself and treat it, if possible, as such.*

**Fritz Jahr**

Bioethics, considered from the American biochemist perspective, Van Rensselaer Potter, and the publication date of his first article<sup>1</sup> (1970), completed 43 years of existence since the term was coined in the United States of America (USA). Recent studies dislocate this date to 1927, in Germany, and find Fritz Jahr. A historic fact, therein, was the release of his book *Fritz Jahr and the foundations of global bioethics: the future of integrative bioethics*<sup>2</sup>, publicized in the 8th International Conference on Clinical Ethics and Consultation, in Sao Paulo (May, 16-19, 2012). Not without a hint of irony, its folder had the following assertion:

*Do you know who invented 'bioethics'? No, not the Americans. It was Fritz Jahr, a minister from Halle an der Saale. In 1927, he critically opposed to the categorical imperative of Kant with his bioethical imperative: 'respect every living being on principle as a goal in itself and treat it, if possible, as such'<sup>2</sup>.*

Thus, our reflective journey searching for the roots of the neologism "bioethics" happens in two fundamental moments. We start with Potter in the USA, with his "bioethical creed", and then we go back in history to the 20<sup>th</sup> decade, with Fritz Jahr. We conclude our thinking with an approximation between both pioneer protagonists in bioethical agenda, in the urgent rescue of Earth care, in order to have the guaranty of life's future. This work, therefore, aims the historical rescue of the contribution of Van Rensselaer Potter and Fritz Jahr in the creation of the term bioethics. The bibliography contemplates original works of the authors, as well as references that orientate the construction of ecologic discussion and its possible interface with bioethics.

### The intellectual legacy of Potter

Potter, who called bioethics the "science of human survival"<sup>1</sup>, traced a work agenda that starts with the intuition of neologism creation and goes up to the

possibility of being faced as a systemic or deep discipline, in 1988. Some more important information of this itinerary is interesting to recall, beginning with the question of how the word *bioethics* was created.

In 1970-71, Potter coined the word "*bioethics*", using it in two writings. Firstly, in the article "Bioethics, science of survival", published in *Persp Biol Med* (1970)<sup>3</sup>; then, in the work *Bioethics: bridge to the future* (1971)<sup>1</sup> – dedicated to Aldo Leopold, renowned professor in the University of Wisconsin, who in a pioneer way started to discuss an "earth ethics". This neologism came up in the media on April, 19<sup>th</sup>, 1971, when the magazine *Time* published a long article titled "Man into superman: the promise and peril of the new genetics", in which Potter's book was cited and in whose back cover it is possible to read:

*Polluted air and water, population explosion, ecology, conservation – many voices speak, many definitions are given. Who is right? The ideas interchange and there are conflictive arguments that confuse the questions and delay the action. What is the answer? Is man really putting his environment at risk? Wouldn't it be necessary to improve the conditions he created? Is the threat to survival real or is it all pure advertising of some hysterical theorists? (...) This new science, bioethics, combines the work of humanists and scientists, whose objectives are wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is defined as the knowhow to use knowledge for social well-being. The pursuit of wisdom has a new orientation, because human's survival is at issue. Ethical values must be testes in terms of future and cannot be divorced from biological facts. Actions that reduce the chances of human survival are immoral and must be judged in terms of available knowledge and monitoring of "survival parameters" chosen by scientists and humanists<sup>4</sup>.*

Potter shows bioethics as a link between biological science and ethics. His intuition consisted of thinking that the survival of a great part of human species, in a decent and sustainable civilization, depended on development and maintenance of an ethic system. In 1998, when looking back to this first moment of reflection, he affirmed:

*What interested me that moment, when I was 51 years old, was the questioning of progress and to where western culture was leading all the materialist advances belonging to science and technology. I expressed my ideas of what, from my point of view, had turned into a bioethical mission: a trial of answering the question facing humanity: what kind of future will we have? And do we have a choice?*

Consequently, bioethics changed to a vision that demanded a discipline to guide humanity as a 'bridge to the future'(...)<sup>5</sup>.

On *Bioethics: bridge to the future* introduction, he affirmed: *If there are two cultures that seem incapable of dialogue – sciences and humanities – and if it appears as a reason for a doubtful future, then, possibly, we could build a bridge to the future, creating bioethics as the bridge between two cultures*<sup>6</sup>. Both margins connected by this bridge are Greek terms “*bios*” (life) and “*ethos*” (ethics); “*bios*” representing biological knowledge, the science of living systems, and “*ethics*” the knowledge of human values. Potter aspired to create a discipline that promoted dynamic and interaction between the human being and the environment. He chased the intuition of Aldo Leopold and, under such optics, he anticipated what currently became a worldwide worry: ecology.

It is important to register that there is another researcher to whom the paternity of the term bioethics is attributed. He is the Dutch obstetrician André Hellegers, from Georgetown University, who, six months after the release of Potter's book, names with the term *bioethics* a new center of studies – Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics – nowadays known as Kennedy Institute of Ethics. Hellegers cheered up a discussion group of physicians and theologians (Protestants and Catholics) who saw the medical technological progress as a critical worry, which showed huge and complex challenges to the ethical systems of the western world<sup>7</sup>. To Reich, historian of bioethics and organizer of the first two Encyclopedia of bioethics editions (2003, 1995)<sup>8,9</sup>, “the legacy of Hellegers” is in the fact that he understood his mission in relation to bioethics as the one of someone who made *the bridge between medicine, philosophy, and ethics* – a legacy that ended up conquering hegemony and becoming a field of *revitalizing study of medical ethics*<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, in his cradle, bioethics has a double paternity and approach – on one side, macro bioethics problems, inspired on Potter's perspective, on the other side, micro bioethics or clinical bioethics problems, with clear sustentation on Hellegers' legacy. Even though, in the present days, the importance of both perspectives is acknowledged by academics of field, Potter did not forget to express his disappointment in relation to the course that bioethics took, even though he recognized the importance of Georgetown's perspective: *my own vision of bioethics demands a much wider vision*. With the combination of scientific and philosophic knowledge (later

called Global Bioethics)<sup>11</sup>, he intended to consolidate an approach that went beyond applied ethics – as bioethics was understood in relation to medicine.

In 1988, Potter enlarges bioethics in relation to other disciplines, not only as a bridge between biology and ethics, but also a dimension of a global ethics: *The original theory of bioethics was the intuition of human survival, in a decent and sustainable way of civilization, demanding development and maintenance of an ethic system. Such system (the implementation of the bridge bioethics) is the global bioethics, found in intuition and thinking based on empiric knowledge from all sciences, however, specially, from biological knowledge... Nowadays, this ethical system keeps being the center of the bridge bioethics as an extension for global bioethics, what demanded the encounter of medical ethics with environmental ethics in a worldwide scale to preserve human survival*<sup>11</sup>.

Potter, in his video presentation for the 4th World Congress of Bioethics (Tokyo, 1998)<sup>5</sup>, recalls that Hans Kung<sup>12</sup> directed attention to a global ethics related to politics and economy, in relation to the ones that all other nations and people from the most different cultural traditions and beliefs must be responsible for. He emphasized that the heart of Kung's global ethics is in the human, which sounds plausible to him, even though he considers that this perspective is not enough to characterize bioethics, because to do so it would be necessary to explain the respect for nature in different cultures, beyond to the perspective pointed to the Jewish and Christian culture.

In 1998, Potter exposed the idea of deep bioethics, retaking the thought of Whitehouse, from the Cleveland University. Whitehouse took the idea of evolutionary biology advances, specially the systemic and complex thought that includes biological systems. The deep bioethics tries to understand the planet as big entwined and interdependent biological systems, in which the center does not correspond to man, as in times before, but to the own life; the human being is only a small link in the huge life net, situated in the trail opened by the thought of the philosopher Arne Naess, in the beginning of 70's, last century<sup>13</sup>.

### Science and religion and the challenge to guarantee the future of life on Earth

In an article published in the magazine *The Scientist* with the suggestive title “Science, religion must share quest for global survival”<sup>14</sup>, Potter said that we

can no longer be comfortable with the idea that, in the future, if things get worse, science will have the answers. The moment to act and prove our ethical competence, as well as technical, is today: *And central to our efforts must be the promotion of dialogue between science and religion concerning human and biosphere survival. For centuries, the subject of human values has been regarded as beyond the realm of science, the exclusive property of theologians and secular philosophers. Now we must assert not only that scientists have transcendent values, too, but also that the values embedded in the scientific ethos need to be integrated with those of religion and philosophy in order to facilitate political processes beneficial to the global environment's health*<sup>15</sup>.

Searching for friends to support his cause, Potter registered that many books and articles approached environmental and human health problems, but relatively a few authors focused the question on human survival in the future. Among them, Hans Jonas – *The imperative of responsibility: in search of an ethic for the technological age* (University of Chicago Press; 1993); Manfred Stanley – *The technological conscience: survival and dignity in an age of expertise* (University of Chicago Press; 1981); and Hans Kung – mentor and writer of the *Global Ethic Declaration*, final document of the Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago, 1993)<sup>16</sup>.

It is on this last author that Potter will comment and this will interest the perspective of building a bridge between science and religion. Potter has a critical appreciation in relation to the perspective of Kung's global ethics. He affirms that in the core of the religious moral defended by Kung, the worry with the fast population growth is not incorporated. He highlights that among the most famous religions, in particular Catholicism and Islamism, are the ones that contribute most to the *current and frightening population growth rate*.

Still, according to Potter, only science has the techniques to analyze population changes and its impact. As he noticed, when formulating a *global ethics*, Kung pointed that human survival was a key question, idea that no other theologian had mentioned before. Even though other religious leaders had proclaimed that life is sacred and defended human rights, only Kung put human survival in the agenda of ethical reflection. Scientists, on the other hand, had long before embraced in the heart of their efforts the challenge of human well-being and, implicitly, human survival, being credited to collaborate in the cause for human survival and survival of the biosphere<sup>16</sup>.

Potter goes beyond when he says that not only theologians, but also secular philosophers, failed in thinking on human survival and on the survival of biosphere as an ethical matter. This thinking was restricted to interpersonal or social relations among human beings, therefore, excluding behavior matters related to population growth and ecological problems. Potter highlights as important in the *Global Ethic Declaration*<sup>14</sup> that survival cannot exist without a global ethic, which world peace will not exist without peace among religions. An alliance between believers and non-believers (atheist, agnostics, and others), with mutual respect, might also be necessary to concretize a common global ethics to all human beings:

*Scientists should applaud the efforts of Hans Kung in urging reconciliation between "believers" and those who are not essentially characterized as religious; included among these, I believe, are the great majority of scientists. And we need to join forces with his drive toward global responsibility for survival and his call for the "mutual respect" necessary for "a common world ethic"*<sup>17</sup>.

In several writings, Potter manifested deep worry with the fast global population growth, reminding that demographers project that it will double in the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century. The approach of this issue reveals a militant side obsessed with the population issue, which has a rather alarmist bias. Today, the demographic issue has a series of new crucial factors that worry, which Potter not even perceived. His preaching that the population growth should be discontinued is ironically visible in the plate of his old car, in the inscription of the letters YES ZPG (*Zero Population Growth*)<sup>18</sup>. In his bioethical creed – in its entirety at the end of this work – he describes that the compromise in relation to personal and familiar health is expressed in *limiting reproductive powers according to national and international purposes*. Potter thinks the problem of overpopulation will not be solved while most religions are opposed to any attempt of limiting fertility.

The dialogue between science and religion is certainly not easy, and the author wonders how to build consensus and political acceptance by governments. Could the search for a global ethics, shared by religion and science, not be expressed in concrete principles for action? The inquietude of this search remains, but without the certainty of finding satisfactory answers in this historical moment. In the dialogue between science and reli-

gion, summing up the key questions, it is worth to highlight what Potter says about the *Global Ethic Declaration*:

*We are aware that religions cannot solve Earth's economic, politic and social problems. However, they can provide what we cannot achieve through economic plans, politic programs, and legal regulations. Religions can cause changes in the interior orientation, mentality, and people's hearts and take them to a "conversion" of a "false path" to a new life orientation (...) Religions, however, are capable of giving people a horizon of sense to their lives and a spiritual home. Certainly, religions can act with credibility only when they eliminate conflicts that come up among themselves and tear down hostile images and prejudices, fears, and mutual distrusts<sup>19</sup>.*

Finally, science and religion engage in a long and historic battle for truth hegemony<sup>20</sup>. In the enthusiasm of achieving such hegemony, they try to deny each other, and now they must walk together, hand in hand, due to a greater objective, a cause that matters to the whole humanity: guarantee the future of life (human and cosmic-ecologic) in the planet Earth. One of the most revealing documents on Potter personality, which made bioethics his life's cause and acclaims his followers to do the same if they want to be called bioethicist, is expressed in his bioethical creed<sup>21</sup>. Also, Potter's final words, in the video showed in the 4th World Congress of Bioethics, constituted in an agenda of future challenge to bioethics. We rescued this declaration, whose present is unquestionable, when concluding the topic on his person, work, and legacy to bioethics:

*As I come to the cessation of my experience, I feel that bridge bioethics, deep bioethics, and global bioethics reached the column of a new day that was far beyond what I had ever imagined. Undoubtedly, we need to remember a message of the year of 1975 that emphasizes humility with responsibility as a basic bioethics that logically follows the acceptance that probabilistic facts, or in part luck, has consequences on human beings and living systems. Humility is the consequent characteristic that assumes 'I might be mistaken' and demands responsibility to learn from experience and available knowledge. To conclude, what I ask of you is to think bioethics as a new scientific ethics that combines modesty, responsibility, and competence in an interdisciplinary and intercultural perspective and that reinforces the humanity sense<sup>5</sup>.*

## Finding the figure and original intuition of Fritz Jahr

Until very recently, the American biochemist Van Rensselaer Potter was known as the first person who used the neologism "*bioethics*". In 1997, however, Professor Rolf Lothar, from the Humboldt University in Berlin, in a conference in Tübingen, mentions Fritz Jahr, to whom he credits the word *Bio-Ethik* in 1927. According to his narration, Lothar heard the term "bioethics" for the first time in the beginning of the 90's of the last century. Once the term sounded familiar to him, he started to look for it in the published editions of the famous periodical *Kosmos*, left by his grandfather, in which he found the editorial of the 1927 volume and the Jahr's historic article titled "Bio-Ethics: a review of the ethical relationships of humans to animals and plants"<sup>22</sup>.

The finding of this work was diffused by Eve-Marie Engels, from the University of Tübingen, who organized and edited the annals of the conference Lothar had participated. Engels mentioned Lothar's discovery in the article "Bioethik", in the *Metzler Lexicon*, in 1999, translated to Portuguese and republished in 2004 in the Brazilian magazine *Veritas*, from Porto Alegre<sup>23</sup>. This text called the attention of the biologist José Roberto Goldim, who wrote two articles<sup>24,25</sup> revisiting the beginning of bioethics and Fritz Jahr's contribution. A more detailed analysis of Jahr's ideas was elaborated by Hans-Martin Sass, his fellow citizen and who worked for years in the Kennedy Institute of Ethics<sup>2</sup>.

While Fritz Jahr's thought starts to be investigated, his life is still a mystery. A preliminary research in files from his home contributed with many interesting facts. Paul Max Fritz Jahr was born on January, 18<sup>th</sup>, 1895, in Halle, Central Germany, where he spent all his life. Today, this city has approximately 234 thousand inhabitants. His parents, Gustav Maximilian and Auguste Marie Langrock, were Protestants, but Fritz was baptized in a Catholic ritual. His first studies were done in the Francke Foundation, linked to the Protestant Pietism of his idealizers (August Hermann Francke and Phillipp Jakob Spener). In university, Jahr studied Philosophy, Music, History, National Economy, and Theology. During the summer of 1915, he worked as a war volunteer and in 1921 he received the holy orders, as a minister.

Jahr started to teach in 1917 and until 1925 he worked as a teacher in 11 different elementary schools. From 1925 on, he became active in Church. During the first four years, he was a curate in St. John's Church, in Dieskau (near Halle); and between

1930 and 1933, he became minister in Kanena. It must have been a little bit harsh to him, because before going to the pulpit to preach he felt a dizziness that obliged him to take a medicine called "bromide".

On April, 26<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Jahr married Berta Elise Neuholz, but they did not have children. They lived at Albert-Schmidt-Strasse 8, Halle, address where he lived since 1923, when he was 18 years old. In this place, he lived firstly with his parents and, later, until 1930, only with his father, who was a manic depressive. In 1932, turbulent time for Germany, Fritz retired from the Church services due to a "nervous exhaustion". On March, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1922, he was 38 years old, and retired completely from service; only a month after Hitler had assumed power in the country. During this war, his family faced financial difficulties, aggravated by his wife's sufferings, who suffered from vertebral sclerosis. She constantly used a wheelchair and died on June, 1947. Fritz Jahr spent his last days working as a Music teacher. His pedagogic skills were deeply appreciated. He died on October, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1953, at 58 years old, in his house in Halle<sup>26</sup>.

The 20's of the last century were a troubled moment in politics, economics and cultural terms all over Europe and mainly in Germany. The Great Depression was starting and the Nazis were in the process to take politics, society and public opinion. According to Sass, in that time, 85 years ago: *Jahr makes it clear that the concept, culture, and mission of bioethics are with humanity, maybe, since pre-historic times, and it was not a heritage from a culture or from only one continent: the respect to the world of life, to human beings, plants, animals, to the natural and social environment, and earth, the Taoist reverence to nature, the Buddhist compassion, with all forms of life suffering, the Francisco de Assis call to fraternity with plants and animals, Albert Schweitzer's philosophy of respect to all life forms, are primordial examples of deep human compassion to inanimate life and human compromise in respecting other life forms*<sup>27</sup>.

### The birth of "integrative" bioethics

In the past years, some publications on Fritz Jahr started to come up, as well as scientific events, among which is highlighted the 1st International Conference on Fritz Jahr and his European roots of bioethics, held in the city of Rijeka (Croatia) on March, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011. In the same port city of the Adriatic Sea, the 8th World Congress of Bioeth-

ics was held, in 2008, organized by the International Association of Bioethics. The *Rijeka Declaration*<sup>28</sup> was elapsed in the Congress on Fritz Jahr, in which it is affirmed: *Fritz Jahr used the term 'bioethics' ('Bio-Ethik') as early as 1927. His "bioethical imperative" should guide personal, professional, cultural, social, and political life, as well as the development and application of science and technology.*

The signatories of the Declaration affirm that contemporary bioethics, sometimes, was reduced to the ambit of medical ethic issues (informed consensus, principles, doctor-patient relation, patient's rights, etc.) and that it was necessary to enlarge bioethics with the formulation of *integrative bioethics: It is necessary that bioethics be substantially broadened and conceptually and methodologically transformed so that it may consider different cultural, scientific, philosophical, and ethical perspectives (pluriperspective approach), integrating those perspectives into orientational knowledge and practical action (integrative approach)*<sup>28</sup>.

The document goes on affirming: *Such Integrative Bioethics will have to harmonize, respect, and learn from the rich plurality of individual and communal perspectives and cultures of the global community. It is longed for that bioethics becomes a truly open field of meeting and dialogue of various sciences and professions, visions and worldviews, that have been gathered to articulate, to discuss, and to solve ethical issues related to life as a whole and each of its parts, life in all its forms, shapes, stages, and manifestations, as well as to life conditions in general*<sup>28</sup>.

Believing in the acknowledgement and growth of bioethics, it was considered that *it will become a 'bridge to the future', a 'science of survival', and wisdom as 'knowledge of how to use knowledge' of modern medicine and technology, as Potter defined in 1970*<sup>28</sup>.

### Fritz Jahr: the bioethical imperative – in the origins of bioethics

In the quoted article of *Kosmos* – "Bio-Ethics: a review of the ethical relationships of humans to animals and plants" – Jahr proposed the bioethical imperative that enlarged to all forms of life the moral imperative of Kant: *act in such a way that you treat Humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another as an end in itself and never merely as a means*. This proposal can be translated, then, to: *Respect every living being essentially as an end in*

*itself and treat it as such if possible!* The concept of Jahr's bioethics is wider than the one from American pioneers, including all forms of life.

Jahr, thinking on the crescent progress of physiology in his time and on the moral challenges related to the development of society, always more secular and pluralist, redefines moral obligations in relation to all forms of life, humans and non-humans, creating a concept of bioethics as academic discipline, principle and virtue. Even though he did not influence history, as expected, once he lived in a politically and morally troubled time, his vision and ethical arguments are enlightening contributions to the bioethical field that, by conciliating science and technology, demands ethical-philosophical reflection (and solution), including understanding its "geo-ethical" dimensions<sup>27</sup>.

Jahr's thinking in relation to bioethical imperative is spread in several of his writings, even though he had not systematized it. So, Sass attempt to elaborate coherent reading and interpretation of bioethical imperative is extremely useful. Sass identifies at least six aspects that expand the theoretical proposal of Jahr in relation to Kant's imperative:

- 1) *The Bioethical Imperative guides ethical and cultural attitudes and responsibilities in the life sciences and towards all forms of life (...);*
- 2) *The Bioethical Imperative is based on historical and other evidence that 'compassion is an empirical established phenomenon of the human soul' (...);*
- 3) *The Bioethical Imperative strengthens and complements moral recognition and duties towards fellow humans in the Kantian context and should be followed in respect of human culture and mutual moral obligations among humans (...);*
- 4) *The Bioethical Imperative has to recognize, to steward, and to cultivate the struggle for life among forms of life and natural and cultural living environments (...);*
- 5) *The Bioethical Imperative implements compassion, love, and solidarity with all forms of life as a content-based principle and virtue into the 'golden rule' and into the Kant's Categorical imperative, which are reciprocal and formal only;*
- 6) *The Bioethical Imperative includes obligations towards one's own body and soul as a living being<sup>29</sup>.*

It is important to register that the concept of bioethics was not readily and easily accepted in Germany. It was considered excessively controversial and labeled as "American product". Only since 1986 the term was officially introduced and used more frequently. And it was Sass, his compatriot, who rescued

from the silence of history the figure of Fritz Jahr, as well as his audacious and advanced concept of bioethics, which enlarged the ethical duties associated to human beings by including animals and plants to the imperative. Regarding this, it should be considered that Jahr does not include ethical duties to all beings considering its utility, as is the currently approach, but for recognizing its intrinsic value. It is, therefore, about a horizontal perspective. Potter, on the other hand, follows the tradition of Aldo Leopold, doing a longitudinal cutting of human duties to the future, in the perspective of the own human survival<sup>30</sup>.

### Final considerations

Ending this reflection, it is possible to formulate two questions, one related to the origins and another to the future: *Oh, bioethics, where do you come from?* In Fritz Jahr and Potter, we found indications of its origins. *But, where are you going?* The future goes in the perspective of both analyzed protagonists, who anticipated prophetically all current ecological problematic and are tuned with the United Nations ecological cause, and with the cause of honorable activists in the area, among others, Mikhail Gorbachev<sup>31</sup>.

This last one identifies three big challenges to be faced in our time. The first one is the need to keep world peace. The international community has to be united in the fight against terrorism, which cannot be justified under any political or moral consideration. The second one is the fight against poverty. How is it possible that a "golden million" of people favored by luck remain indifferent in front of the misery spectacle in which about half the population is inserted, reduced to live with one or two dollars a day, starving daily, with no access to potable water and without decent conditions of hygiene? The third challenge identified is related to the environment. We are in a serious conflict with our own habitat – with Mother Nature.

These three challenges are interdependent. If poverty is not contested, all other ecological measures will be useless, but if we do not worry about ecology, all our efforts to build a fairer world will be faded to failure and our descendants will have to pay for our foolish and depredator behavior to nature. Earth's own life is at risk of disappearing, becoming only an ephemeral episode in the universe history<sup>32</sup>.

The three proposed challenges are not related only to the governments and international organizations, but also to each of us. It is the time for each

citizen of the planet Earth to think about their personal contribution to this simple common task: *We are responsible, in front of the future generations, for the conservation of life on Earth (...)*. Today, humanity needs a new philosophy of life, a new ethics, one that will crystallize fundamental values, common to all religious traditions, an ethics based on consensus among nations and people of the world<sup>31</sup>.

Gorbachev named this project as a process to elaborate a global ethics and concludes saying: *as the example of the great American writer William Faulkner, I refuse to accept the possibility of humanity's end, whatever are the probations they have to face. This is my creed, the one of an incorrigible optimist*<sup>32</sup>. Recalling the *Letters from the Earth*, he confesses to crave that our time is remembered *by the awakening of a new reverence facing life, by a firm compromise to reach sustainability, by the fast fight for justice, by peace and happy celebration of life*<sup>31</sup>.

One of the most important bioethical contemporary documents, elaborated by Unesco in 2005, titled *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights*<sup>33</sup>, points out among the objectives of the Declaration, *to promote respect towards biodiversity and, among its fundamental principles, the protection to environment, biosphere and biodiversity*. To conclude, it is important to retake a bioethical reflection elaborated in a seminar assembled by the Argentine government – realized in Buenos Aires in 2004 – with the intention to contribute for the elaboration of Unesco's declaration:

*Convinced that bioethics is not only about ethical problems originated in the scientific and technological development, but also about the conditions that turn the human environment ecologically balanced in the natural biodiversity and all ethical problems related to the care of life and health, has as its basic presupposition the concept of integral health under-*

*stood from the biological, psychological, social and environmental perspective as the development of essential human capacities that turn viable a long-lived and healthy life that is possible to be reached by everyone, as much as possible. (Text distributed to the members of the Brazilian Society of Bioethics through correspondence on 11/20/2004)*

Considering the perspectives showed in the last global conferences, it is observed that bioethics is advancing globally (geographically), enlarging its epistemological comprehension, as well as its thematic range, facing emergent challenges and signaling priorities afterwards. Jahr, in 1926-27, and Potter, in the beginning of the 70's, are both pioneers that point to the biggest challenges humanity faces in the beginning of the millennium: responsibility to guarantee the future of life on Earth. By answering this challenge, we will be delegating to future generations the results of our scientific and technological conquests as much as a sustainable environment and auspicious to life in its plenitude. As T. S. Eliot says: *We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time!*<sup>16</sup>.

To rescue the intellectual contribution of Potter and Jahr to the field of bioethics, beyond the hegemonic bioethical paradigm, is a question of historic justice. It was, therefore, the purpose of this reflection that raided in the origins of bioethics. As to weight the historic and conceptual differences of these authors, both delineated perspectives that allow an approximation between bioethics and ecology, which currently is revealed to be indispensable. To deepen in this discussion, however, extrapolates our immediate objective and it would be a subject for another article. For now, we are satisfied in presenting this return to the origins, with a respectful salutation to the memory of its precursors.

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## Attachment

### A bioethical creed for individuals

1. Belief: I accept the need for prompt remedial action in a world beset with crises.

*Commitment:* I will work with others to improve the formulation of my beliefs, to evolve additional credos, and to unite in a worldwide movement that will make possible the survival and improved development of the human species in harmony with the natural environment.

2. Belief: I accept the fact that the future survival and development of mankind, both culturally and biologically, is strongly conditioned by man's present activities and plans that affect the environment.

*Commitment:* I will try to live my own life and to influence the lives of others so as to promote the evolution of a better world for future generations of mankind, and I will try to avoid actions that would jeopardize their future, when the environment's role in the food and fibers production is ignored.

3. Belief: I accept the uniqueness of each individual and his instinctive need to contribute to the betterment of some larger unit of society in a way that is compatible with the long-range needs of society.

*Commitment:* I will try to listen to the reasoned viewpoint of others whether from a minority or a majority, and I will recognize the role of emotional commitment in producing effective action.

4. Belief: I accept the inevitability of some human suffering that must result from the natural disorder in biological creatures and in the physical world, but I do not passively accept the suffering that results from man's inhumanity to man.

*Commitment:* I will try to face my own problems with dignity and courage, I will try to assist my fellow men when they are afflicted, and I will work toward the goal of eliminating needless suffering among mankind as a whole.

5. Belief: I accept the finality of death as a necessary part of life. I affirm my veneration for life, my belief in the brotherhood of man, and my belief that I have an obligation to future generations of man.

*Commitment:* I will try to live in a way that will benefit the lives of my fellow men now and in time to come and be remembered favorably by those who survive me.

6. Belief: I accept that society will collapse if the ecosystem is damaged irreparably, unless the human fertility is worldwide controlled, due to the concomitant increase in the competence of its members to comprehend and maintain human health.

*Commitment:* I will try to improve skills or a professional talent that will contribute for society's survival and improvement and the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. I will help others in the development of their potential talents, and at the same time cultivating self-care, self-esteem, and personal value.

7. Belief: I accept that each adult person is responsible for their own health, as well as for the development of this personality dimension in their lineage.

*Commitment:* I will try to put the obligations described as bioethical compromise for personal and familiar health into practice. I will limit my reproductive powers according to national or international purposes." (p. 193-5)<sup>11</sup>.