

V.R. POTTER'S GLOBAL BIOETHICS

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The book *Global Bioethics: Building on the Leopold Legacy* is the latest bioethics title published by Editions Loyola, which is now part of the largest and most qualified catalog of bioethics we have in Portuguese. In addition, the translation of this book of Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001) was already much desired by the Brazilian public, alongside his pioneering work *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*, already translated into Brazilian Portuguese in 2016. At the same time, the book offers to the reader an informed basis for answering personal and practical questions. In this way, *Global Bioethics* brings an excellent approach to the global issues that make bioethics indispensable for our times.

Van Rensselaer Potter was an American biochemist, professor and researcher in the field of oncology at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in the United States of America. His vast experience and years of cancer research have made him propose a new interdisciplinary concept with the goal of uniting ethics and science in a new approach. In this way, he sought to build a dialogue between the science of life (biology: bios, life) and practical wisdom (philosophy, ethics, values), thus creating a neologism, namely, bioethics. Potter's bioethics can be defined as a new ethics that combines humility, responsibility and interdisciplinary and intercultural competence, enhancing the sense of humanity (POTTER, 2016).

In the United States of America, Potter's 1970 original "invention" seems to be seen by some as an irrelevant historical note (REICH, 1994, 1995). Other thinkers, mainly from abroad and in the Asian world, have acknowledged their contributions and promoted a broader view of bioethics, although Potter's legacy has not yet been taught in many ethics programs applied to health. Moreover, it is not adequately included in the important explanations of the history of bioethics.⁴ His concept of bioethics was developed in the context of a prestigious cancer research laboratory at a university center in

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4. Jonsen (1998), for example, mentions only twice Potter's name in his history of bioethics. The first edition of the 1978 *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, written by scholars dedicated to the study and teaching of bioethics at Georgetown University, does not even mention it.

the Midwest of the United States of America, and lost intellectual competition for more dominant formulations that emerged in Washington, D.C., supported for more money and national political power. While Potter, in Madison, WI, formulated his definition of bioethics as an integration between biology and values, Andre Hellegers (1926-1979) and colleagues in Washington, D.C., created *The Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics* (now the *Kennedy Institute of Ethics*) at prestigious Georgetown University with funds donated by the Kennedy family (REICH, 1994; 1995). Potter will dedicate himself and be a bioethics activist when he retires as a researcher at the University of Wisconsin (Madison, WI). Potter's view of bioethics not only deserves to be rescued but we need to promote it and expand it because of its value in relation to the survival and future of life on this planet. It is not just Potter's ideas (influenced by, among others, Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), pioneer of land ethics), but also his values of personal responsibility, humility, wisdom, guidance and spiritual citizenship that deserve recognition.

Potter's first book on the subject, namely, *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future*, originally published in 1971, expanded concerns about medical ethics – such as responsibility and rational action – to other branches of life, such as ecology, for example (see POTTER, 2016). Potter saw the interconnectivity of human life and nature as self-evident, given that we humans are situated in a natural environment and we try to connect not only with health within the hospital but also with holistic living in the world.

In 1988, he published his second and last book on bioethics, only now translated into Brazilian Portuguese, namely, *Global Bioethics: Building on the Leopold Legacy*. Global bioethics has tried to connect the medical industry back to our earthly origins. Although medicine has been made by and for humans, we come to dominate the nature instead of living and living together in a respectful and harmonious way with it. In the opening pages, Potter regrets that “with the focus on medical options, the fact that bioethics had been proposed to combine human values with ecological facts was forgotten by many” (POTTER, 2018a, p. 37-8). Potter considered the continuation of the species to be of paramount importance but acknowledged that there was an “ecological need to limit the exponential increase in the human population” and that “no [conservation or advancement] program can hope to succeed without the acceptance of controlled human fertility as a basic ethical imperative [of survival] for the human species” (POTTER, 2018a, p. 38). Thus, Potter's work located bioethics in bios – life in the world – and established a connection between medicine and conservation. His key writings opened the door to multidirectional progress in environmental bioethics in the years to come.

In *Global Bioethics*, Potter organized his thinking into seven chapters, whose titles are: I – *The Leopold Legacy*; II – *Human Survival*; III – *Dilemmas in Ecological Bioethics*; IV – *Two Kinds of Bioethics*; V – *Dilemmas in Medical Bioethics*; VI – *The Control of Human Fertility*; and, VII – *Global Bioethics Defined*. The content of this work refers to the thought of the one who received the dedication of his first book on the subject. Potter dedicated *Bioethics: Bridge to the Future* to the memory of Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), who was an American ecologist and environmentalist, very influential in the development of modern environmental ethics and the movement for the conservation of wild nature.

Leopold's ethics about the preservation of nature and wildlife had a profound impact on the environmental movement, with an ecocentric or holistic land-related view. Leopold emphasized biodiversity and ecology and was one of the founders of the science of wildlife management (LEOPOLD, 1949). It is this tradition of thought that Potter wants to recapture in his second book on bioethics, after having seen the great interest that his "creation" – bioethics – had in the American academic milieu. Potter saw bioethics be restricted to the medical field, specifically to an updated biomedical ethics, since the creation of the *Kennedy Institute of Ethics* (REICH, 1994, 1995). We remember that in this institute was born the well-known principlialist paradigm of bioethics, which was the hegemonic paradigm of bioethics practically in the first 30 years, in a half-century history of its existence, considering the facts of 1970/71 as the birthplace of bioethics that really made history.⁵ This restriction was never Potter's wish and the non-recognition of a broader concept of bioethics deeply frustrated him. "With the focus on medical options, the fact that bioethics had been proposed to combine human values with ecological facts was forgotten by many: the ethics of how far to exercise technological options in the exploitation of the environment was not associated with the term bioethics" (POTTER, 2018a, p. 37-8).

This made him propose again the analogy of the first book, an alarming concern that defines his bioethical thinking. His goal with such an analogy – "the thought that the human species is to the planet Earth what a cancer is to the individual human being" (POTTER, 2018a, p. 61) – is to retake the tradition of Leopold's thought as an alternative to ensure human survival. And in this sense, bioethics acquires guiding characteristics of the future. Moreover, Potter's vision of global bioethics is an idea that today could be explained by the concept of sustainable development (although it is still too narrow to encompass Potter's original idea), and has become more relevant than never today with the UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Therefore, it is reasonable and important to remember him here, especially through his own thoughts expressed in a video sent to the 1998 World Congress of Bioethics, which says: "The original theory of bioethics was the intuition of the survival of the human species, in a decent and sustainable form of civilization, requiring the development and maintenance of an ethical system. Such a system is global bioethics, based on intuitions and reflection circumscribed by the empirical knowledge of all sciences, but especially of biological knowledge [...]. This proposed ethical system remains the heart of the bioethics bridge, with its extension in global bioethics, in which the function of "bridge" requires the approximation of medical ethics and environmental ethics, on a world scale, to preserve human survival" (POTTER, 2018b, p. 244).

Finding a basis in the legacy of Aldo Leopold, who advocated an Earth Ethics (LEOPOLD, 1949), alerting to the impending environmental crisis and looking upon it as a failure, Potter developed the concept of environmental ethics. Inspired by Leopold's thesis, Potter wrote his *Global Bioethics*, in which he proposed a definition of global bioethics as a "biology combined with a diverse humanistic knowledge forging a science

5. Whenever one approaches the question of the beginnings of bioethics, we know that from the European world we have already in 1926, Fritz Jahr, in Germany, who coined for the first time in history the term "bioethics".

that sets a system of medical and environmental priorities for acceptable survival” (POTTER, 2018b). Here too, as a guiding thread, he exposed a vision of bioethics as a bridge between the natural and human sciences serving the health of people around the world and environmental protection. Since 1970, Potter has advocated a bioethics bridge, the vision that seeks to connect the two cultures – human and natural sciences – or, more precisely, biological knowledge and ethics, believing that in this way a bridge to the future must be built (ZANELLA, 2018). “The word bridge is used because bioethics was seen as a new discipline that would build a bridge between the sciences and the humanities, or more simply a bridge between biological science and ethics, hence bioethics” (POTTER, 2018b, p. 244). However, as we enter the 21st century and the third millennium, bridge bioethics is needed to deal not only with both cultures, but also with a number of ethical branches. “Today, after six decades of observation, I proclaim that global bioethics, as a new ethical science, is necessary for long-term human survival” (POTTER, 2018b, p. 243). Today, in times of exclusionary globalization, we are experiencing critical moments in terms of building bridges that could be a factor of peaceful coexistence and solidarity. In reality, walls of separation and exclusion are emerging with much suffering for the world’s poorest populations.

When we return to Potter’s speech from the video sent to the 1998 World Congress of Bioethics, we can see how bioethics has developed and how much remains to be done. In that video, he said: “As I enter the twilight of my life, I feel that bridge bioethics, deep bioethics⁶ and global bioethics have come to the brink of a new day that goes far beyond anything I could possibly imagine and develop [...]. As we enter the third millennium, we become ever more aware of the dilemma raised by the exponential increase of knowledge, but unfortunately without the growth of wisdom necessary to administer it” (POTTER, 2018b, p. 250). It is worth remembering that Potter has always viewed bioethics as a new discipline, a “new medical ethics” that would combine knowledge and deliberation, a dynamic approach to human search for wisdom, that is, “the knowledge of how to use knowledge for human survival and to improvement in the quality of life” (POTTER, 2016, p. 27).

Bioethics is, therefore, “science” about the use of science. He is the ethical supervisor of science. Without such a supervisor, science can escape human control and become dangerous knowledge. Bioethics must therefore represent a new scientific ethics that connects humility, responsibility and capacity. A science that has as constitutional characteristics, be interdisciplinary, intercultural and global, and that exalts the meaning of humanity. It aims at the well-being of the human being in the context relational harmonious with nature, since it is an integral part of this. In this perspective, Potter’s global bioethics seeks to be a kind of science of survival and guarantee a promising future for all mankind.

6. Bioethics bridge, global bioethics and deep bioethics constitute the three stages of Potter’s bioethical thinking. This third stage represents the planet Earth as great interdependent biological systems, in which the center would not correspond only to human being, but to life as a whole.

Author reviewed: Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001). He was a biologist and biochemist, professor and researcher in oncology, who performed his scientific activity at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research, Faculty of Medicine, University of Wisconsin, Madison. For many years, he was president of the American Association for Cancer Research, a member of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States and an honorary member of the Japanese Cancer Association. He received the American Cancer Society Medal of Honor (1986) and several honorary doctorate degrees were awarded to him. He is the author of more than 400 publications in the field of cancer research and bioethics.

Book reviewed: POTTER, Van Rensselaer. **Bioética global:** construindo a partir do legado de Leopold. Tradução de Cecília Camargo Bartalotti. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2018. 199 p.

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Review

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Abstract: Many discussions related to health, life sciences and biotechnology have led some authors to refer to global bioethics. The present review, however, intends to analyze the concept of global bioethics in the work of the same title by Van Rensselaer Potter. Bioethics was born in the United States and there developed a conception that reduced it to a vision of biomedical ethics. In response to this reductionism, the father of bioethics, V. R. Potter, has taken up its original conception and extended it to a global bioethics, a broader view that encompasses the ecological dimension of life of all living beings at the same time as it treats and relates to the issues of biomedical ethics.

Key-words: Global bioethics; Van Rensselaer Potter; ecology.

A BIOÉTICA GLOBAL DE V. R. POTTER

Resumo: Muitas discussões relacionadas à saúde, às ciências da vida e às biotecnologias tem conduzido alguns autores a referir-se à bioética global. A presente resenha, no entanto, pretende analisar o conceito de bioética global na obra, de mesmo título, de Van Rensselaer Potter. A bioética nasceu nos Estados Unidos e lá se desenvolveu uma concepção que a reduzia à uma visão da ética biomédica. Em reação a esse reducionismo, o pai da bioética, V. R. Potter, retomou sua concepção originária e a ampliou para uma bioética global, uma visão mais abrangente que abarca a dimensão ecológica da vida de todos os seres vivos ao mesmo tempo em que trata e se relaciona com as questões da ética biomédica.

Palavras-chave: Bioética global; Van Rensselaer Potter; ecologia.

LA BIOÉTICA GLOBAL DE V. R. POTTER

Resumen: Muchas discusiones relacionadas con la salud, las ciencias de la vida y las biotecnologías han conducido a algunos autores a referirse a la bioética global. La presente reseña, sin embargo, pretende analizar el concepto de bioética global en la obra, del mismo título, de Van Rensselaer Potter. La bioética nació en los Estados Unidos y allí se desarrolló una

concepción que la reducía a una visión de la ética biomédica. En respuesta a este reduccionismo, el padre de la bioética, V. R. Potter, retomó su concepción originaria y la amplió para una bioética global, una visión más amplia que abarca la dimensión ecológica de la vida de todos los seres vivos al mismo tiempo que trata y se relaciona con las cuestiones de la ética biomédica.

Palabras-clave: Bioética global; Van Rensselaer Potter; ecología.
