

# **Bioethics: vulnerability and responsibility at the beginning of life**

# **Bioética: vulnerabilidad y responsabilidad en el comienzo de la vida**

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<https://doi.org/10.36105/mye.2023v34n1.06>

**De la Torre Díaz, Francisco.** *Bioética: vulnerabilidad y responsabilidad en el comienzo de la vida.* Madrid: Dykinson; 2016.

The book *Bioética: vulnerabilidad y responsabilidad en el comienzo de la vida*, was written by Francisco Javier de la Torre Díaz, director of the Chair and Master of Bioethics at Comillas Pontifical University, where the author exposes and invites to dialogue on controversial issues involving the most vulnerable who often have no voice. He makes a journey through time, with a respectful nuance and from an ethical, secular and theological point of view.

It has seven chapters that have as a common axis the structure of a reflective perspective where the following topics are included: the

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Reception: 04/07/2022 Acceptance: 12/07/2022

embryo, abortion, assisted reproduction techniques, genetic manipulation and cloning. It is mainly addressed to master and doctorate students in bioethics, physicians, philosophers and theologians; but it can be of common interest to connoisseurs, as well as beginners in bioethical knowledge, since the author allows the opening to the understanding of topics that involve the dignity of the human being.

The first chapter entitled “Bioethics. History, interdisciplinarity and institutions” (pp.19-84) with a historical account that illustrates the evolution of bioethics over time, contextualizing current events (pp.19-30). This is subject to give rise to change in society that has caused the invasion of technicality and bureaucracy in health institutions, which are born from the fight against the technological, economic and legal limits of medicine (inevitable mediations for the practice of medicine) that, lacking an adequate structure and/or breaking them, cause the abandonment of values and allow the Institutionalization of bioethics.

To orient and establish a position, de la Torre Díaz in the chapter “The human embryo in the preimplantation phase” (pp.85-132) deals with the status of the zygote. He stresses “fertilization is the key moment to speak of human individual and human person” (p.106), since, because of the fusion of maternal and paternal genetic material, an individual genome is created, that is, a new human being or “a new system and not the sum of two subsystems” (p.106).

Among the aspects that attract attention, is the invitation to readers to continue reflecting and rethinking the context of the preimplantation embryo in the “role of genetics, extrazygotic information, the issue of losses, potentiality, individuality, teleology, dependence and fragility” (p.115) and thus make a change in the moral attitude we take regarding these approaches.

In the following chapters, the reflection begins and the arguments that define the work are exposed; in the chapter “Abortion” (pp.133-171), despite focusing on European data, mainly Spain, the exposition of frank data on the reality of it is correct because, although there may be a small variation with respect to the figures from Mexico, the underlying causes are more similar than we think.

Since the problem comes directly from vulnerability, which can be mental or economic, an example of this is violence and social marginalization in communities. The author proposes as an alternative to the so-called “social defeat” (p.135), “the defense of unborn life and protection of all pregnant women” (p.135) in accordance with the Comillas Pontifical University Declaration (June 2014), as well as “family policy measures, housing, employment, migration and adoption” (p.135) reaffirming their position in favor of the protection of life.

In addition, when addressing the position of the magisterium of the church, it does not only show radicalism and prohibition, in the same way, it explains that there is openness to dialogue, acceptance and mercy. Pope John Paul II exposes it in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* 99. “The church knows how many conditions may have influenced your decision and does not doubt that many cases have involved a painful and even dramatic decision” (p.172) and adds, “the father of all mercy awaits you to offer you his forgiveness and his peace in the sacrament of reconciliation” (p.173).

On the other hand, when entering the topics of “Medically assisted reproduction techniques” (pp.181-241), “Genetic manipulation and genetic diagnosis” (pp.243-326) and “Cloning” (pp.327-341), you can see the counterpart of abortion, where couples and people looking to be parents from hope and anguish are observed.

The paradox enunciated in the text by the biologist Lejeune on the exercise of today’s society and the achievements of human fertilization *Sex without babies* and *babies without sex* (p.183) is correct. Despite this situation, it is important to avoid making a moral judgment, rather, it will be necessary to opt for education and guidance to make a more accurate decision, considering the context and including ethical and moral values.

The issue of assisted reproduction techniques represents one of the most controversial causes of debate today, since it shows agreement between legal systems that “life cannot become a lucrative business, since it ends up being an instrument of physical, emotional and economic exploitation.” (p.216). Regarding genetic manipula-

tion and cloning, the dilemma between arguments lies again in wanting to exceed the limits of nature and forgetting to carry out an ethical assessment, causing an attack against human dignity.

Finally, in the last chapter “Birth Control and Contraception” (pp.353-381), the author reflects his position, which leans towards the magisterium of the church, exposing various documents and arguments on contraception, where he mainly shows a certain rejection for its unnatural and selfish character.

Consider that when we find ourselves in a world that is so fragmented and in constant social change, this book provides a look at timeless positions with reasoning that is often overlooked; however, the topic of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOS) could be expanded. On the other hand, it states the need for more accurate limits and regulations in research, and in relation to technological advances within medical practice, as well as providing us with the opportunity to start a respectful dialogue, in which there is no fear of judgment.

In conclusion, the reading and analysis of this work reiterates the importance of reflecting on the vulnerability of unborn individuals and the bioethical issues involved in cloning, genetic manipulation, assisted reproductive techniques and abortion. It is important to minimize the importance of the unborn and promote an open dialogue to understand the relevance they have and will have in society. Adjusting strategies that listen to both positions that always benefit and protect the most vulnerable.

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