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## Kant, (Bio)Ethics and Morality: Current Concerns and Upcoming Guidelines

It is by no means an insignificant fact that the development of biomedicine, technology, and the emergence of ecological and socio-political instabilities leads to the re-evaluation of numerous principles and concepts previously considered cornerstones of knowledge and thought. Bioethics, as an interdisciplinary science (as defined by e.g., Höffe, *Lexikon der Ethik*, 1997), has been neither devoid of ambivalence nor polyvalence in its approaches, methodology, and conclusions from its inception. It constantly re-examines the foundations and concepts of its own existence, which hold exceptional importance in affirming *life* as a fundamental value embedded in the very name of bioethics.

Although the emergence of bioethics is associated with a later period of civilization, the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), despite not explicitly mentioning it, shares numerous points of intersection with bioethics. Following the universality of moral principles, Kant's philosophy provides fundamental ethical guidelines for decision-making in bioethics (particularly biomedical ethics), respecting the dignity and non-instrumentalization of the persons as *noumenon*, active beings and authors of choices and actions (Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, 1996), while preserving their moral and legal rights, which inherently entail duties. Furthermore, Kant's thought significantly influences the methodological positioning of bioethics (Eterović, *Kant and Bioethics*, 2017), offering it a stable theoretical and conceptual foundation.

However, the evaluation of Kant's philosophy in general and its significance in the context of addressing various contemporary issues is often built on flawed premises. By employing Kantian perspectives, certain proponents of bioethical thought, more out of ignorance of Kant's work, may assume that Kant cannot offer anything illuminating or that his philosophy fails to reflect even the contours of what is "right"

or what should be “right”. Nonetheless, a philosopher’s achievement should be valued based on how much his ideas inspire others to think and open up questions and problems that demand our full attention, without requiring us to ultimately agree with his views. If we approach Kant from this perspective and are unafraid to re-evaluate his normative theory and ethics in the context of contemporary bioethical issues—issues that were not relevant during Kant’s lifetime—there is no doubt that Kant holds a front-row seat on the bioethical stage. Central bioethical concepts like autonomy, beneficence, dignity, personhood, agency, and rights can hardly be examined without reference to Kant’s moral, legal, and political philosophy. In this context, the value of the papers presented in this issue lies in the fact that they are not merely exhibitions of conclusions that serve as apologetics for Kant’s legacy or that strictly adhere to his views in the context of contemporary (bio)ethical debates. Alongside papers that directly reflect Kant’s contributions to understanding key bioethical principles, some articles explore Kantian thought by interpreting it more in the spirit of his philosophy and the context of today’s bioethical challenges. Through a somewhat broader and purposeful interpretation, these papers offer Kant’s notable contribution to ethics and bioethics, using, also, the perspectives emanating from Kant’s political and legal thought.

It is worth mentioning that half of the works in this thematic issue are the result of the international conference “*The Contribution of Immanuel Kant in the Historical Development and the Identity of (Bio)Medical Sciences*”, held during the 26<sup>th</sup> Rijeka Days of Bioethics. The conference was organized by the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Rijeka (Department of Social Sciences and Medical Humanities), the Faculty of Health Studies at the University of Rijeka, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Rijeka, the Center of Excellence for Integrative Bioethics, and the Croatian Bioethics Society.

One of the fundamental challenges of contemporary bioethical discourse in the field of biomedicine concerns the difficulties of distributive justice. How can we fairly allocate a limited amount of resources to those who need them at a given moment? Samuel J. Kerstein, a plenary speaker at the said conference, in his paper “*Kantian Dignity and the Allocation of Scarce, Life-Saving Resources*”, examines how we ought to allocate scarce, life-saving resources such as ventilators or intensive care beds. Using two Kantian accounts of respect for the dignity of persons—one based on an orthodox Kantian interpretation of the Formula of Humanity and the other an unorthodox reconstruction of part of this formula—Kerstein reflects on a contemporary triage scheme developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pittsburgh Framework. He attempts to demonstrate how Kantian reasoning can provide valuable guidance for making difficult decisions regarding the allocation of scarce medical resources.

The discussion on distributive justice in healthcare continues with Lovro Grgić's paper "*Kant and the Right to Healthcare – The Welfare State from a Libertarian Perspective*". The author argues that Kant's approach to healthcare policy aligns with aspects of liberal political thought while avoiding both libertarian and socialist extremes. He suggests that the modern welfare state can be, at least in part, justified by Kantian principles, particularly when healthcare policies are designed to protect individual freedom. With this in mind, the paper discusses voucher-based healthcare systems as an instrument that both ensures fundamental rights and enhances personal freedom within a framework of equal legal protections.

In certain discussions, Kant's contribution to bioethical thought is insufficient if limited solely to his moral philosophy without incorporating other perspectives of his thought, especially his political and legal philosophy or, for instance, his philosophy of nature. With the advancement of modern biotechnologies, strictly literal and restrictive interpretations of Kant's writings are no longer tenable without re-examining them in the broader context of Kant's deontology.

Exploring Kant's theory of ownership and property rights, as well as his concept of personhood and thinghood within deontological ethics, Tomislav Nedić, in his paper "*Exploring Kant's Perspective on (Self-)Ownership and Property Rights in Human Body Parts: A Discussion on the Boundaries Between Personhood and Thinghood*", argues that certain biomedical achievements, such as organ transplantation, necessitate a re-evaluation of Kant's statements regarding the categorical impossibility of disposing of body parts. The categorization of organs as things with restricted tradeability and the possibility of certain and limited property uses, such as donation, form the foundation of contemporary transplantation medicine.

Similarly, through the re-evaluation of Kantian reasoning but in the spirit of Kant's philosophy, Samuel Kahn, in his paper "*Kantian Trolleyology*", seeks to untangle Judith Jarvis Thomson's famous trolley problem. Using and re-evaluating the Kantian approaches of six philosophers, Kahn aims to reconcile Kant's moral framework with the ethical issues raised by the trolley problem. He argues that acknowledging systemic issues is essential for developing a stronger Kantian solution to the trolley problem—one that stays true to Kantian principles while addressing the complexities of moral decision-making in such scenarios.

Applying a Kantian framework to (bio)ethical reasoning, Marcus Knaup, in his work "*Kant and His Significance for Current Bioethical Issues*", utilizes some of Kant's ideas for modern bioethics, showing how they align with contemporary challenges and help develop answers to new types of questions. Guided by the Kantian notion that dignity belongs exclusively to human beings, Knaup problematizes the concept of dignity within the framework of contemporary biomedical research, particularly the

creation of hybrids and chimeras, or the project of creating human-animal mixtures. Knaup's paper perfectly illustrates that biomedical ethics, often closely tied to the concept of bioethics, inherently raises questions emanating from environmental and animal ethics, which are inseparably connected to biomedical ethics (see: *Kuhse, Singer, A Companion to Bioethics*, 2009). This ultimately suggests bioethics as a biocentric discipline not exclusively oriented toward human beings.

In a similar manner, in their paper "Fake News, Digital Technologies and the Erosion of Individual Autonomy in Light of Kantian Ethics", Ivan Cerovac and Helena Drmić apply a Kantian (though not strictly Kant's) notion of autonomy to evaluate the impact of digital technologies powered by AI algorithms. They analyze how algorithm-driven recommender systems, micro-targeting, and large language models pollute the contemporary epistemic environment by spreading disinformation, enabling manipulation, and undermining individuals' confidence in their ability to recognize the truth, thereby hindering them from exercising their autonomy. The authors also explore potential regulatory frameworks that could mitigate these risks and safeguard individual autonomy in the digital age.

As technological development drives significant and structural changes in various medical, social, economic, and political practices, the interdisciplinary field of bioethics faces new and complex challenges. Kant's moral, political, and legal thought continues to play a significant role in shaping these discussions, shedding light on intricate ethical dilemmas even centuries after his death. Kant-inspired approaches to distributive justice in healthcare, organ transplantation, digital technologies, and principle-based practical decision-making, along with his enduring ideas of freedom, autonomy, and dignity—many of which are discussed in this issue—testify to the ongoing relevance of his philosophy in navigating the evolving ethical landscape. While this special issue does not resolve any of these contemporary and multifaceted debates, it encourages scholars to reinterpret and reexamine these challenges through a Kantian lens, demonstrating that his thought remains a cornerstone for many bioethical discussions.