



# BIOETHICS

**A Comparative Study of its  
Concepts, Issues and Approaches**

**ABDUREZAK A. HASHI**



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# BIOETHICS

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*This work is dedicated  
to*

*my mother*

*Acknowledgment*

*Introduction*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since antiquity, ethical discussions on medical practices have occurred in the field of medicine and health care. Under the umbrella of physician and healing morality, medical practitioners of early Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek and Chinese civilizations were aware of the moral duties of their profession. Though medical ethics is as old as the medical profession, bioethics did not appear as an independent field until modern times. Bioethics has emerged as an imperative field which has its subject in the stock of knowledge. Besides traditional ethical concerns of healing practices, bioethics includes a variety of issues ranging from enhancing body appearance, such as cosmetic surgery, to issues of environmental protection. As an academic discipline, bioethics primarily covers three fields; medical ethics, animal ethics and environmental ethics. Medical ethics addresses moral issues related to the doctor-patient relationship, while animal ethics focuses on measures of life preservation, whilst the main concern of environmental ethics is to protect the natural environment and its resources. Each of these fields has its own scope and subject; however the issues, concepts and approaches, as well as, moral considerations of these three fields are significantly overlapping. It is true that, traditionally, medical ethics was mainly dominated by issues related to the doctor-patient relationship; however, the moral problems of modern biomedical, as well as, biotechnological practices such as abortion, birth control, xenotransplantation, cloning, cosmetic surgery, stem cell research, genetically modified food, animal experimentation, have required new moral solutions which fall beyond the boundaries of traditional medical ethics. Thus, besides addressing traditional concerns of health and therapeutic treatments, bioethics is also concerned about the moral questions on human life, death, dignity and creativity, as well



as, the role of religious beliefs in human innovations and moral values, liability, justice, standards and professional practices of modern scientific breakthroughs.

Thus, bioethics functions as an intersection of biology, ecology, medicine and moral values, and addresses moral issues of scientific researches and practices in the fields of biomedicine and biotechnology. The rationale of bioethics is that, with the observable advances in the application of technology in biology and life sciences, there are genuine concerns about the relationship between life sciences, technology, medicine, law, moral values and philosophy. Among the basic questions of bioethics are, whether or not breakthroughs in science and technology should be led by the mode of maximizing the achievements of what we 'can', or breakthroughs in science and technology should be led by the attitude of doing only what 'ought' to be achieved, rather than what 'can' be achieved? In other words balancing between what 'ought' to be done and what 'can' be done in life sciences, particularly in biosciences, form the basic subject of bioethics. This is so because, while scientific research is characterized by the motive of expanding man's scientific knowledge, there are genuine concerns about the implications of science and technology in life, particularly in the fields of biomedicine and biotechnology. To address these concerns, there are those among the scientific community who hold the view that regardless of the implications of science and technology, we ought to let the scientists do their job and thus expand our scope of knowledge. In contrast there are scientists and ethicists who argue that in the face of scientific expansion the 'sanctity' of life should be protected, in such a way that man of science ought to discover the sciences that benefit the sanctity of life. Human life is sacred, says this group, therefore, we ought to handle it within ethical premises. Hence, pro-scientific scholars argue that scientific progress and technological advances should be left to the scientists; in the sense that what 'can' be done scientifically should not be limited by what 'ought' to be done. In contrast, pro-ethical opinion states that, scientific advances in

biomedicine and biotechnology are leading humanity to an evil end, and according to this group, in order to protect humanity from the looming danger posed by modern practices of biomedicine and biotechnology, scientific progress in the field of biology should not only be placed under strict observation, but certain techniques in biomedical practices should also be prevented.

This book uses the comparative method and addresses the above mentioned moral concerns, and other related moral issues of the biomedical and biotechnological practices. It also addresses the history and approaches, as well as, the scope of bioethics. The subject of this book is divided into volumes; the first volume, which is the current volume, focuses on the moral foundations, concepts approaches of bioethics, as well as moral implications and issues of biomedical practices, such as organ transplantation, contraception, abortion euthanasia, and artificial insemination and test tube babies. The second volume emphasizes on moral and legal issues of biotechnology, food technology, plant sciences and moral issues of conservation and environmental protection. Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the current volume consists of 11 chapters; the first chapter offers an introductory discussion on the understanding of Islamic ethics, while the second chapter is closely related to the first chapter and addresses distinguishing features of the Islamic moral philosophy, based on which biomedical issues are evaluated from the Islamic perspective. Chapter three provides a comparative analysis on the definition, history and approaches of bioethics. Chapter four puts forth the Islamic understanding of bioethics. In addition, chapter five highlights the relationship between the objectives of the *sharī'ah* (the Islamic Divine Law) and bioethics; in this chapter the role of *fiqh* maxims to determine bioethical issues are unveiled. Chapter six focuses on organ transplantation and lifesaving issues, while chapter seven addresses contraception and the morality of the preservation of life. Moral issues of life-taking such as abortion and euthanasia are illustrated in chapter eight and nine, while chapter ten and chapter eleven offer an overview about the morality of life initiation, such as artificial insemination and test tube



babies, as well as moral discussions about human cloning and genetic engineering. The second volume of this book, which is expected to be completed soon, also consists of similar number of chapters, the details of which are outlined in the said volume.

With this comparative analysis of bioethics, the writer hopes that this book will form an introduction to this rapidly growing field; a gateway for the beginners and students of this field, to enter the detailed discussions and analysis that are found in the immense books and other academic works of bioethics.

May the Almighty, Allah (*s. w. t.*), accept this work as a humble contribution to the field of knowledge, and forgive me for all my shortcomings.

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