

# **A Religio - Philosophical Analysis of the Contemporary Moral Dilemmas in Family Values with Special Reference to Key Bioethical Issues**

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## **Abstract:**

A moral dilemma is a situation of internal conflict when one has to choose between a set of actions and have moral reasons for these actions. Moral dilemma is created when one is in a perplexed situation could find any action to be right and wrong at the same time and have difficulty in choosing the correct action.

The study of moral dilemmas entails a far greater complexity because of its wider and in-depth prevalence in the contemporary society. Everywhere the human beings live lives that are, to an extraordinary extent, caught up with the breakaway of values. The human society has lost the values that were preserved as necessary for a decent human living and the human race seems compelled to concede that there is only a subtle difference between cannibalism and civilization.

In this research, an attempt is made to study the moral dilemmas created by a recent factor which was brought due to the fast growth in science and technology, which is none other than bioethics. A religio-philosophical study is made on the moral dilemmas in family values created by the bioethical ventures in order to analyze the root causes of these issues and to caution their impending dangers to the human race.

The title entails some areas which need to be qualified: contemporary moral dilemmas in family values; the moral dilemmas created by bioethical issues; and a religio-philosophical analysis of them. These areas are to be treated separately in order to bring about the full project of the title.

**Key Words:** *Ethos*; Bioethics; Paradigms; Intervention; Personalistic; Magisterium; Implication; Wholistic;

## **Introduction**

The contemporary human society is in a crisis situation due to the dilemmas created with regard to the moral values. The most impending danger to the current human society all over the world is that the traditional conceptions of moral values have drawn minimal attention in all circles. The present world order with full of conflicts, violence, injustice, discriminations, anti-life concepts and practices, individualism, evil effects of globalization, pervasive environmental challenges, socio-cultural changes, advancement in science and technology, the post-modern ways of thinking and the failure of religions to respond to the need of the time have brought a crisis situation throughout the world. Such a situation has created moral dilemmas in every aspect of human life. Therefore there is an urgent need to study about these moral dilemmas in order to reinstate the values in the human society and to eliminate the social evils of slavery, discriminations, superstitions and other inhuman practices.

In this article, an attempt is made to study the moral dilemmas created by a recent factor which was brought due to the fast growth in science and technology, which is none other than bioethics. A religio-philosophical study is made on the moral dilemmas in family values created by the bioethical ventures in order to analyze the root causes of these issues

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### **What are Moral Dilemmas?**

Generally, the terms ethics and morality are used interchangeably. Nevertheless there is a distinction in the understanding of these 2 terms which needs scrutiny. Both morality and ethics in general distinguish “good and bad” or “right and wrong”. However, ethics refer to rules provided by an external source, by a certain community or social setting (Greek word ‘*ethos*’ meaning ‘character’) whereas morals refer to an individual’s own principles regarding right and wrong (Latin word ‘*mos*’ meaning ‘custom’). In this sense, morality is something that is personal and normative, whereas ethics is the standards of good and bad and the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular group or culture. By such analysis of the terms, it becomes clear that one’s morality could contradict the ethics of a community.

Generally the term morality has a Christian connotation while ethics is the term used in conjunction with philosophy, business, medicine and law. Ethicists today, however, use these terms interchangeably. Here in the title of the article, the word moral is used instead of ethics, since the dilemmas in the family values are not strictly ethical but moral.

After analyzing the word ‘moral’, the word ‘dilemma’ can be taken for a brief analysis. The Oxford dictionary defines it as “a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable.” Etymologically ‘dilemma’ comes from a Latin conjunction ‘*di*’ means two and ‘*lemma*’ means premises. Thus dilemma refers to a form of argument where one has to accept one or the other alternative.

In this background, a moral dilemma is a situation of internal conflict when one has to choose between a set of actions and have moral reasons for these actions. Moral dilemma is created when one is in a perplexed situation could find any action to be right and wrong at the same time and have difficulty in choosing the correct action.

According to the natural law one has to do ‘good’ and avoid ‘evil’ all the time (*bene facendum, male evitandum*). It is not enough to do ‘good’, but at the same time one has to avoid ‘evil’; it is not enough to avoid ‘evil’ but one has to do ‘good’. This is applicable to all regardless of religion, race, color, etc., which creates a dilemma situation.

Dilemmas in the family values are moral because a situation of internal conflict prevails in the families of all societies. With regard to the values in the families, perplexed situations are created today where the choices for actions are right and wrong at the same time and the members have difficulty in choosing the correct action. Here clarity is made that the values are not in conflict but the actions to be chosen have both good and evil within themselves, therefore the dilemmas are created which one to choose and which one to shun.

## **Moral Dilemmas in Family Values**

The present world order with full of conflicts have brought a crisis situation throughout the world. The first victim of such a situation is the family. Beset by these challenges, the family, together with the core values that have sustained over the years, is being tested, re-evaluated and redesigned. The most impending danger to the current human society is that the traditional family values have lost their grounds.

In the **moral** sense, family is the cell of society because it is there that the behavior and personality of the individuals to act as human beings are formed. It is from the family that citizens are born and it is in the family that they find the first school of virtues. In the family, human beings learn to respect others as persons with the same human nature and equal rights. The family is, from the moral point of view of education for social life, irreplaceable.

In the **biological** sense, family is the vital cell of society because without families there will be no members for the society or for an ethnic group.

In the **cultural** sense, family is the vital cell of society because culture is reinforced in the families and the individuals who come from the families contribute to the making of the culture of a nation.

Mutual love, interpersonal relationship, stability, parenthood, education and formation are some of the values which were harboured in family life, are shattered in the present world order beset by the above mentioned problems. These dilemmas in the family values are created due to many factors both theoretical and practical. While dealing with these in a general way, this article deals in detail with some of the specific dilemmas created in the family values by bioethical issues.

## **Moral Dilemmas in Family Values Created by Bioethical Issues**

Bioethics seems to be only a few decades old. Even though the term is very new, the history of cultures and peoples shows that many bioethical elements and ideas are found in rudiment level among the human groups and civilizations. They contain the ideas of life in general and human life in particular and the ways of relating and interacting among them. Such consideration is in a broader sense bioethical, because the term bioethics is formed by two different words, 'Biology' and 'Ethics' which means the scientific study of organisms and their conducts. This is referred by some scholars as paleo-bioethics.

Presently in bioethics, extremely diverse models or paradigms coexist that are applied to the study of various problems of medicine and of other forms of human behavior that has to be classified with more or less precision. There are several authors who simultaneously utilize two or more models in virtue of their identical applications and elements.

## **Definition of Bioethics**

Bioethics is a regulatory model used by scientists to analyze the ethical imperatives of biotechnology or genetic engineering. Bioethics is defined as the study of the ethical implications of new biological discoveries and biomedical advances mostly in the fields of

bio / genetic engineering and drug research. In medicine, it can be found in Hippocratic Oath which was first mentioned in ancient Greece.<sup>1</sup> The etymology of Bioethics is, in Greek, ‘bios’ life and ‘ethos’ character or behavior.

Though the word Bioethics was first used by a German Pastor Fritz Jaar in 1927, Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001) an Oncologist who was teaching at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) is considered as the father/pioneer of Bioethics.

Before considering the bioethical issues, it is vital to consider the influence exerted by science and technology on human life. Bioethical issues are the results of such undue intervention of science and technology on nature and life.

From 1950 onwards biomedical researches have proved victorious and are in practice.

1. 1950 - 70 development in the researches of genetics
2. 1960 - 70 development of psychiatry
3. 1960 abortion debates
4. 1961 practice of dialysis
5. 1966 denouncing abuses in experimentation on humans
6. 1967 first successful heart transplantation (Dr. Cristian Barnard, South Africa).
7. 1968 debates about euthanasia and definition of death (Harvard ad hoc Committee)
8. 1968 *Humanae vitae* on the use of contraception and abortion (Paul VI)

### **Technology - Biotechnology - Bioethical Concerns**

Human being is found puzzled in front of new the possibilities of today which are offered by science and technology. The progress of the modern science has empowered humans to control nature and to do whatever they like through the development of techne. In the pre modern age, technique was subordinate to nature because its assignment was to imitate the nature and not to break its equilibrium. But in the modern age the relationship is turned upside-down: it is not the nature which is anymore the model to be imitated. But as Heidegger sustained, the technique has become the ‘destiny’: it tends to ascertain itself as an end and true destiny of humanity.

The close relationship between science and technology in the field of biology has unleashed experimentation, not only therapeutic, on the structures of organic life. This is obviously an artificial and curious intervention on life. As a result, there are possibilities of manipulation on life even from the initial phase: the possibility to produce zygotes and embryos through in vitro fertilization; to modify and engineer the genetic patrimony of somatic and germinal cells of the organisms and to produce new genetic characters or to alter (amplify or suppress) the existing characters (generation of freaks). Further, the techniques of Medically Assisted procreation (MAP) which confirms the maneuvering of embryos, the practice of surrogate motherhood, the possibility of inter species fertilization to produce interbreeds, that is to produce man-animal hybrids with the purpose to have subjects for subhuman functions, forming organ banks to reserve organs for transplantation, promoting eugenics to create best organisms with pragmatic views, artificially prolonging life and

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<sup>1</sup> In the 4th century BC, Hippocrates, a physician-philosopher, directed physicians “to help and do no harm” in their profession. (*Epidemics*, 1780).

postponing natural biological death are some other possibilities opened up by such artificial and curious intervention into life by human agents with the help of science and technology.

At the same time there are also possibilities, with all the ambiguities related to the biotechnological issues, to prevent, through the prenatal genetic diagnosis, the pathologies which are hereditary. With these diverse possibilities at hand we can ask whether everything which technically and scientifically possible and feasible are good, moral and legal? Can life be created, modified or destroyed by science and technology at its own will? Is there any limit for the interference of science and technology on life and particularly on humans?

### **Current Bioethical Issues which create Moral Dilemmas in Family Values**

There are many bioethical issues under concern which are created by biotechnology and genetic studies. This article highlights the bioethical issues which favour the development of moral dilemmas in reference to family values.

- Deviant Sexual Behaviours (LGBT: New Definition of 4 Genders: Lesbians-Gay-Bisexual-Transsexual)
- Cloning
- Medically Assisted Procreation
- Abortion
- Stem Cell Researches (Genetically Engineering the Organisms)
- Biomedical Research on Human Being (Human Enhancement - Eugenics)
- Marital Infidelity (Adultery, Pre-Marital Sex, etc)
- Parenthood (Surrogate Motherhood)
- Knowing and Choosing the Offspring's Gender, Genes and Characteristics

### **A Religio - Philosophical Analysis of the Moral Dilemmas**

There is no doubt that religion and philosophy have to be applied to practical affairs when the issues are worth addressing and credibly addressed. This makes a realm where these become applied disciplines. The article speculates on the values of the family which are in a state of dilemma due to the biotechnological intervention. The religio - philosophical study of it includes various fields in it: bio ethical concerns which also include the traditional medical ethics, ontological views on human being and anthropology. Family strengthens social existence which cannot be subject to construction and destruction by fragile and volatile choices.

Religio - philosophical basis for the need to study about the relationship between moral dilemmas and family values takes a wholistic and integral approach about the human person, which is a part of anthropological studies, because family is a home where persons live knit by mutual love and as dignified individuals. "For it is only in keeping with his true nature that the human person can achieve self-realization as a 'unified totality' and this nature is at the same time corporeal and spiritual. By virtue of its substantial union with a spiritual soul, the human body cannot be considered as a mere complex tissues, organs and functions,

nor can it be evaluated in the same way as the body of animals; rather, it is a constitutive part of the person who manifests and expresses himself through it.”<sup>2</sup>

In the age of anthropo-centrism one has to think about the importance of the man centered technology; in other words one has to think whether technocizing the humanity or humanizing the technology. Here the personalistic model of bioethics proposed by Elio Sgreccia with the ontological foundation has to be taken into consideration.

### **Teaching of the Magisterium**

The teaching of the Magisterium affirms the integral human approach in many of its documents. Here are some of them.

- *Humanae vitae* (Paul VI, The Encyclical Letter, 1968)
- *Veritatis splendor* (John Paul II, The Encyclical Letter, 1993, no.4.)
- *Medicine and Law: For or Against Life?*, Address of John Paul II to the members of Pontifical Academy for Life, 1998, 162.)
- *Donum vitae* (Congregation for the Doctrine and Faith (CDF), *Respect for Human Life*, (The English Translation of *Donum Vitae*), Pauline Book & Media, Boston, 2004, n. 1550, 543.
- *Amoris Lætitia*, Holy Father Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Nos. 37, 42, 178.)

### **Conclusion**

The study of moral dilemmas in family values entails a far greater complexity because of its wider and in-depth prevalence in the contemporary society. Everywhere the human beings live lives that are, to an extraordinary extent, caught up with the breakaway of values. The human society has lost the values that were preserved as necessary for a decent human living and the human race seems compelled to concede that there is only a subtle difference between cannibalism and civilization.

The religious and philosophical traditions preserved the values in the human society from the primitive times. The advent of science and technology has brought drastic changes with regard to the outlook on values. The ends and means of modern science and technology have extended the power of human action beyond his ability to restrain it, which, as a consequence, can lead to a future where all preserved human values will be lost and human beings become considered valueless machines. This would endanger the future of the human being, destroy the dignity of life and shatter the environment of living organisms.

More than other factors that created the moral dilemmas in family values, bioethical factors are recent and have woven into the very fabric of society so quickly since it is closely associated with science and technology. Bioethical issues are the results of such undue intervention of science and technology on nature and life. The ethical tools provided by religion and philosophy reaffirm the integrality of the human being.

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<sup>2</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE AND FAITH (CDF), *Respect for Human Life*, (The English Translation of *Donum Vitae*), Pauline Book & Media, Boston 2004, n. 1550, 543.

This religio-philosophical assessment of the loss of family values envisages an orientation to understand the impacts of moral dilemmas created by bioethical issues and to evaluate their implications to the human society.