

# opción

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# **opción**

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Portada: Allí estás!

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**EDITORIAL****LOOK AT BIOETHICS FROM THE FOUNDATIONS OF  
PHILOSOPHY****What the Presocratics have to tell us**

Gilbert Hottois, that swordsman of the magic word that transmutes thought into action, has said with stupefying realism that "philosophy came late to bioethics". This expression, said in a decontextualized way, still reflects a world of circumstances that, around the tasks that philosophy has always had as its north since its Greek invention, reveals to us that the world of human life is always blurred by sieves that are incomprehensible from action and reflection. Thus, the relations between theory and praxis have come under the scrutiny of philosophical thinking, especially when science was only concerned with representing reality "as it is". The scientific method promoted the art of representing reality in such a way that it came to be assimilated to the "mirror of nature".

The late arrival of Philosophy to this appointment summoned by the not so new interdisciplinary that is Bioethics, means that this world devised by the Hellenic culture did not imagine the transition from the representation of the world to its transformation through technoscientific interventionism. In simple language, it is not the same thing to represent as to transform the world, a question that has been turning around at great speed since the middle of the 20th century, especially with the advances in molecular biology and quantum physics. We have already commented on this aspect in previous editorials.

In these lines, I want to highlight the problem of temporality in which philosophy is involved as a reflective task on a core issue of the present century, populated as we know by technological devices and creations that are not only the product of the transformation of nature, but of the dynamics of the transformation of matter that they themselves are the protagonists.

From this perspective of the late philosophical reflection, we think contrary to what the Belgian master suggests, but let us be clear that this opposition is only in one aspect. Although the dazzle caused by the techno-scientific advances has meant an exponential increase in the reflections that current philosophy sets itself as a task, it is also true that we can find some significant elements from this philosophical thinking in the Hellenic culture; or, better said, in the pre-Socratic culture, with its

unifying thinking of the Universe, especially if we look at bioethics as an interdisciplinary that assumes its object of study in a different way from the modernizing project of science.

As we have said on other occasions, bioethics is rooted in its work from the fields of ethics, politics, law and science and technology, since it emerges as a bridge "between the sciences and the humanities", as Potter would say, it precisely spreads a mantle of interdisciplinary reflection on the human endeavor. From this perspective, Bioethics is not only a reflection from biomedicine, but also from all those currents of thought and technology capable of transforming the world of human life, especially emphasizing its reflections from the "humanities", as the oncologist expresses it. This is where philosophical reflection enters the arena, as it is at its foundations.

In accordance with the above, it is a matter of looking at reality from the transit that goes from the representation and production of the image of the world, to the reconstruction of a new order of non-existent things, insofar as they are not the "given" of classical philosophy. Therefore, it is not that philosophy has arrived late to the task of reflecting on bioethics; what happens is that the technoscientific action hid from the philosopher the mountain range that would ensue with the transformation of matter that technoscience signifies. Philosophy did not imagine it due to the separation between philosophy and science since modernity, a unity that was present in the pre-Socratic philosophers. Earlier we had also given some criteria regarding the contributions of Heraclitus' philosophy to science, especially to the current social sciences. The ideas of *change* and *movement* are keys to understand not only these reflective aspects of science, but also of the reality they deal with.

The core issue in relation to this argument is that, reality being one and multiple in Heraclitus' conception, this reality is now visualized to the point that his understanding of the whole is just that: to understand that the universe is one and multiple. And when this thinker, together with Anaxagoras, Anaximenes and Anaximander, reveal to us the unity of the Universe, his cosmology embraces from this technoscientific diachronic look to all that is. These are the lessons we are receiving from classical philosophy to understand the ontological and practical issues of the current techno-scientific endeavor. That is to say, that the reflection on life and human "circumstances" that bioethics deals with, reflecting from the theoretical and practical disciplines, is already a subject of philosophy. In this sense, we think that the aforementioned

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Belgian Master could have revised his statement about the timelessness of philosophy in the context of bioethics, although he may have said it in a direct and operative sense; but it has always been so: "Minerva's owl takes flight when the day has been lived".

Hegel's metaphor logically refers to philosophical thought; the owl of Minerva, represented by philosophy, sinks its foundations on what has happened: philosophical thought "operates" on lived life. And this is what we think of when we say that bioethics is a reflection on the current world of technoscience, which is the world of science elevated to the power of its own transformation of the natural and human world (that is, under the relationship of matter and spirit; of soul and body). The philosophy that is assumed as a reflection on bioethics, in the sense of Hottois, refers to the fact that the transformation of the world through technique does not seem to have interested the philosopher. And this is precisely a core issue. Technoscience, understood as the *techné* of these times, did not have much place in philosophical thought, according to this line of thought of the Belgian philosopher.

However, in accordance with the Heraclitean postulates, we see that, from this perspective, philosophy has had much to express regarding the transformation of the world, only that the philosophies that have become followers of the current adverse to movement and change, that is, of that which states that the world does not change, as expressed by Parmenides, took sides, imposing a deterministic conception of reality, with its positivist method: "That which is, is; that which is not, is not and will not be". Everything that exists is already given. Hence, from this conception there is no room for the current transformations of natural and human matter, as occurs from biogenetics (this disrupts the foundations even of the human soul, as the Mexican philosopher Juliana Gonzalez Valenzuela puts it).

Therefore, the discussion through the Presocratics comes to enrich the philosophical task of bioethics, since the conception and image of the ancient world, now comes to coincide with the image and conception of the world brought to us by technoscience, and, consequently, as a task of Bioethics. Regarding the latter, it is worth mentioning the work that philosophy has been doing as a task about the transformation of the world in which the current technique consists. However, it is good to note that none of the classical and modern philosophers referred to bioethics as such discipline, but to the consequences that the world of technology brings to human evolution.

The cases cited by Paulina Rivero Weber (2021) of Nietzsche and Heidegger are eloquent; both philosophers articulated their perspectives of technical reason as a fundamental element to understand the process of transformation; the former referring to instrumental rationalism, and the latter, referring to the humanism of being. In the face of both positions, we must also point out Ortega's reference, with his famous *Meditation on Don Quixote* in which he wielded his also famous definition of "man" and his "circumstances".

The other reference that I want to highlight in these lines, are the approaches about the philosophical work around bioethics that the aforementioned Master Juliana González Valenzuela teaches us. In a very special way, she presents a retrospective about the intervention of philosophy in the world of transformations, starting from the conceptions of the Presocratic Philosophers. Let us highlight just one of the multiple details that the aforementioned philosopher reflects on this enigmatic world of antiquity, a sphere from which we must always think philosophy: let us remember the special look that Heidegger makes when unraveling the "forgotten question", that is, "the question of being"; a question that is precisely what we are dealing with today from this critical idea of the transformed reality that technoscience presents us with.

This idea that we want to highlight is the question about the genomic revolution, since it is setting the guidelines of a new transformed Universe; a world of life in which the relationships between matter and form that make being are no longer seen in the same way: the genomic question is permeating the interstices of reality in the infinite world of DNA and the double helix that represents it. The capacity to transform life through the recombinant technique of the genome leads us to understand that the unity represented by the gene not only becomes plurality by reproducing itself through the reduplication and binary combination of the code that is embedded in its "program", but that this process, which is natural in Nature, introduces elements of transformation by means of that technique of intervention of the genome (the recombinant technique).

This revelation of molecular biology, says González Valenzuela (2017), shows us that DNA, in addition to the possibilities of transforming itself by means of human intervention, has existed throughout the eternity of life. Every living being possesses it, so that this is the unity of which Heraclitus and the other Milesian thinkers speak to us. This is a long-standing vision of the relationship between life and



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nature, which Bioethics deals with, but it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that we were able to put it into scientific evidence. The whole that is the genome is also the unity from which it proceeds. Everything is one, and everything moves; the movement of the genome, translated into natural combination but also into genetic engineering, is precisely the intervening factor that the Greeks of the time could not see. But they did imagine the relationship between *ontos* and *ethos*: between being and good custom; scientific Modernity, by separating itself from this premise, determined a course in the history of science that declares nature as an object of intervention based on the power generated by scientific action.

The that stands out from all this, is that the current state of the art of biotechnology, not only invites us, but forces us to take that attitude of the Presocratics: "astonishment" and "wonder". And this is precisely because the matter of which all living beings are made, favors the generation of the vital energy that is the soul; that is why it is found in the foundations of all this scaffolding of the relationship between reality and action; between ontology and ethics, what we have already expressed: that biogenetics and technosciences, by generating new forms of matter, even living matter, generates a new sense of the relationship with that energy called soul, which Aristotle also three-dimensioned (vegetative, animal and rational); the relationship between being and ought to be is deeply reflected.

In this way, it can be seen that the relationships fostered by ancient philosophical thought have already brought us the original reflections necessary to understand the role of bioethics in the face of techno-scientific development. There are new paths to follow from this line of thought, but what is not new is precisely the idea that bioethics has always been present in philosophical thought. The owl of Minerva, before taking flight at the end of the day, had to nest in order to reproduce its next generation. Only, unlike other birds, it hatches its offspring in broad daylight, as does the techno-science of these technically challenging times; however, at night, it flies at the level of the stars.

**Dr. José Vicente Villalobos Antúnez/Editor-in-Chief**



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