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Editorial

## **European bioethics – from cyborgs to surrogacy**

Last quarter's themed issue on environmental sustainability and bioethics in a post-Covid world proved both timely and extremely popular, receiving thousands of views and downloads in a matter of weeks. This autumn issue is another first for the journal as all the papers in this issue happen to come from Europe but cover a very wide spectrum of ethical issues.

Papers on novel ways of doing bioethics are relatively rare and this issue commences with one of them. Stoeklé and his colleagues from France outline their systemic modelling method, in which the topic of study is modelled as a whole to understand its overall organization and functioning. They suggest this method is ideal for the generation of a range of possible solutions to problems, rather than their validation. They then apply systemic modelling to understanding the impact of personalized medicine in France.

We then move to Sweden for a wide-ranging yet deeply penetrating analysis of the ontology of cyborg identity and how this affects a host of other issues, not least the claims made about e-enhanced learning and teaching being 'inherently valuable for pupils-students-educators-politicians-citizens to embrace'.

Strandbrink cogently challenges this and other common assumptions declaring

"There is no easy way around the fact that revolutionary moments crave refilling and refurnishing. They continuously demand new novelties to replace the ones that were recently novel. Since its inception capitalism has thus been a literally revolutionary system, that cannot by ontological necessity rest in relation to the objects and processes it feeds on."

The controversy continues with Pilgrim from the UK and Entwistle from Portugal, in their ethical analysis of prescribing of puberty-blocker and cross sex hormones to children and adolescents respectively, with a particular focus on Dutch and UK practice. After considering practical concerns about consent and the risks of iatrogenesis, they reframe these clinical issues in the context of competing claims about male and female personhood. In the concluding section, they argue that current restrictions on freedom of expression on transgender issues cast doubt on whether children and adolescents are truly able to give informed consent. They

also question whether clinicians involved in their treatment are able to freely discuss the challenges of their prescribing practice.

Next, Hurford explores the ethical implications of the UK Court of Protection decision in the case of *Briggs v Briggs* and questions whether previously expressed wishes of patients should or should not be given effective decisive weight in determining 'best interests' in legal ruling about the withdrawal of clinically-assisted nutrition and hydration. He concludes that if the judge's ruling in this case 'is a correct view of the law, it leads to a – frankly perverse – situation' and explains why.

The final paper from Romania is an empirical study exploring the attitudes of Romanian women to having children by means of IVF, surrogacy or adoption. They found that adoption was the most preferred option and surrogacy the least. Psychologists, Maftei and Holman explain this finding on several grounds. These include the context of the horrific conditions in orphanages prior to the fall of communism in 1989, which 'may be the main reason why Romanians support and promote adoptions, in the light of well-known, first-hand information about the past (and in many cases, present) conditions of abandoned children who dream of a real family.'

Maftei and Holman's findings about surrogacy, which are overall rather negative, may come as a surprise to many readers living in a different context from Romania. However their discussions do lead me on to mention of the next issue of *The New Bioethics* which is a themed issue exploring ongoing controversies surrounding commercial surrogacy and whether it constitutes a service for, or an exploitation of women.

Meanwhile in this issue, there are two commentaries on a recent article about attitudes to women who have had an abortion. In addition, an unusually large collection of book reviews awaits on topics ranging from genetic editing to suicide tourism.

Trevor Stammers

Editor in Chief