

## GLOBAL BIOETHICS



*Stem cell research, genetic testing, cloning: progress in the life sciences is giving human beings new power to improve our health and control the development processes of all living species. Concerns about the social, cultural, legal and ethical implications of such progress have led to one of the most significant debates of the past century. A new word has been coined to encompass these concerns: Bioethics.*

*In 1925, the physician and theologian, Albert Schweitzer, coined the word "Lebensethik," life-ethics or bioethics, meaning not only medical bioethics, but reverence for all life. In 1970, Van Rensselaer Potter (1911-2001) originally formulated "bioethics" in his book "Bioethics – Bridge to the Future" and defined this comprehensive field of thought, action and respect for Nature. The concept of bioethics as a global integration of biology and values, on knowledge how to use knowledge, was designed to guide human survival, ever mindful of ecology and environmental preservation. Potter's concept was inspired by many others, including notably pioneering land ethicist Aldo Leopold and his 1949 work "A Sand County Almanac."*

*Dr. Potter was a biochemist and original bioethicist who devoted his scientific career to cancer research. As professor of Oncology at the McArdle Laboratory for Cancer Research at the University of Wisconsin, as founder of the Global Bioethics Network (GBN) in 1999, and member of the PAEP Advisory Council, he and co-founding colleagues made important contributions in shaping the global bioethics development dialogue for our common humanity. We are honoured to find the efforts reflected in the founding text of the*  
**2005 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights.**

*PAEP is instrumental in developing and advancing the emerging discipline of Global Bioethics as an important principle in scientific education for our common humanity, for advancing not only the scientific-technological but also the environmental and cultural. PAEP is committed to promote and advance the 2005 Declaration.*

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## **Towards a declaration on universal norms on bioethics**

***Since the 1970s, the field of bioethics has grown considerably. While it is true that bioethics today includes medical ethics issues, its originality lies in the fact that it goes much further than the various professional codes of ethics concerned. It entails reflection on societal changes and even on global balances brought about by scientific and technological developments. To the already difficult question posed by life sciences – How far can we go? – other queries must be added concerning the relationship between ethics, science and freedom.***



### **Explanatory Memorandum on the Elaboration of the Preliminary Draft Declaration on Universal Norms on Bioethics (21 February 2005) (in PDF format)**

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001390/139024e.pdf>



### **Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (19 October 2005)**

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The General Conference, at its 33rd session, adopted by acclamation

the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights

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[http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=1883&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1883&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

## **The Background**

A growing number of scientific practices have extended beyond national borders and the necessity of setting universal ethical guidelines covering all issues raised in the field of bioethics and the need to promote the emergence of shared values have increasingly been a feature of the international debate. The need for standard-setting action in the field of bioethics is felt throughout the world, often expressed by scientists and practitioners themselves and by lawmakers and citizens.

States have a special responsibility not only with respect to bioethical reflection but also in the drafting of any legislation that may follow. In the field of bioethics, whilst many States have framed laws and regulations aimed at protecting human dignity and human rights and freedoms, many other countries wish to establish benchmarks and sometimes lack the means to do so.

At its 31st session in 2001, the General Conference invited the Director-General to submit “the technical and legal studies undertaken regarding the possibility of elaborating universal norms on bioethics”.

At the request of the Director-General, the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) therefore drafted the Report of the IBC on the Report of the “**IBC on the Possibility of Elaborating a Universal Instrument on Bioethics**” finalized on 13 June 2003. The Report examines some issues in bioethics that could be addressed in an international instrument and illustrates how the elaboration of such an instrument could contribute to and support international efforts being made to provide ethical guidelines in matters related to recent scientific developments. The Report explores the likely form and scope of an instrument as well as its value in terms of education, information dissemination, awareness-raising and public debate.

## **The mandate**

At its 32nd session in October 2003, the General Conference considered that it was “opportune and desirable to set universal standards in the field of bioethics with due regard for human dignity and human rights and freedoms, in the spirit of cultural pluralism inherent in bioethics” (32 C/Res. 24).

The General Conference also invited “the Director-General to continue preparatory work on a declaration on universal norms on bioethics, by holding consultation with Member States, the other international organizations concerned and relevant national bodies, and to submit a draft declaration to it at its 33rd session” (32 C/Res. 24).

## **Which instrument?**

As to the form of the instrument, IBC – supported by Member States during the General Conference – came out clearly in favour of an instrument of a declaratory nature, at least initially, which would be best suited to a constantly changing context and would enable the broadest possible consensus to be reached among Member States.

The form of the instrument does not prevent its content from contributing to a code of universally recognized general principles of bioethics (such as human dignity, solidarity, freedom of research, respect for privacy, confidentiality, non-discrimination, informed consent, integrity of research and intellectual honesty) insofar as these principles pertain to bioethics. Lastly, an instrument on bioethics must call strong attention to the importance of awareness-raising, information, education, consultation and public debate.

## **Why UNESCO?**

Over the years UNESCO has confirmed its standard-setting role in bioethics. UNESCO has already contributed to the formulation of basic principles in bioethics through in particular the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, adopted unanimously and by acclamation by the General Conference in 1997 and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1998, and the International Declaration on Human Genetic Data, adopted unanimously and by acclamation by the General Conference on 16 October 2003.

Apart from the fact that ethical issues related to the advances in life sciences and their applications are highly topical, the depth and extent of their roots in the cultural, philosophical and religious bedrocks of various human

communities are reason enough for UNESCO, the only organization whose fields of competence include the social and human sciences, true to its ethical vocation, to take the lead in this initiative.

## **Which procedure?**

UNESCO will obviously not be able to embark alone on such an undertaking. If the first steps of the elaboration of the declaration are entrusted to IBC, in close consultation with the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC), only the participation of all the actors concerned could ensure that all the different perceptions of ethical and legal issues are taken into account.

As explicitly requested by Member States, wide-ranging consultations and hearings will therefore be held from the very beginning of the elaboration of the declaration in order to involve in particular States, the United Nations and the other specialized agencies of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and appropriate national bodies and specialists.



**The "Principal Doctrines,"  
also sometimes translated under the title "Sovran Maxims,"  
are a collection of forty quotes from the writings of Epicurus (341-270 BCE)  
that serve as a handy summary of his ethical theory.**

**(Add CIYL link)**



**The Rebirth of Bioethics:  
 Extending the Original Formulations of Van Rensselaer Potter**  
**Peter J. Whitehouse, M.D., Ph.D., Case Western Reserve University**  
[http://www.bioethics.net/journal/pdf/3\\_4\\_IF\\_w26\\_Whitehouse.pdf](http://www.bioethics.net/journal/pdf/3_4_IF_w26_Whitehouse.pdf)



**Classic Article: “History of the Notion of Care”**  
**Warren T. Reich, Ph.D., Georgetown University**  
<http://care.georgetown.edu/Classic%20Article.html>



**In Memoriam: Professor Emeritus Van Rensselaer Potter II (1911–2001)**  
**James E. Trosko, Ph.D., Michigan State University**  
**Henry C. Pitot, M.D., Ph.D. University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
<http://cancerres.aacrjournals.org/cgi/reprint/63/7/1724.pdf>




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**This Canadian International Youth Letter (CIYL) is part of a new series with an emphasis on science and human affairs.** The series incorporates cultural and youth studies as well as research-based information on the science of human behaviour, including the effects of war, destructiveness and violence on youth development, global mental health and the environment. Under the theme **'Exploring New Ways of Knowing – A Meeting of Minds, Science and Human Experience'** it is part of the new project of the **International Youth Network for the Advancement of the Sciences, Humanities and Global Bioethics (IYNet)**

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**Contact: Hans F. Schweinsberg – Tel: 416-486-9333 – Fax: 416-483-0002 – [paep.utm@utoronto.ca](mailto:paep.utm@utoronto.ca) – <http://www.paep.ca>**

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