

Preface

Most areas of intellectual pursuit, such as theology, philosophy, history, and medicine, have been the object of study for centuries. As a result, the subject matters and methodologies of these disciplines are relatively clear, and students wishing to pursue careers in these fields not only know what they will be studying when they seek their degrees, but also what they will be doing once they graduate and begin practicing their professions. Bioethics differs from these traditional areas of study. For one thing, it is only about 35 years old. For another, it is, by its very nature, interdisciplinary in character. That is to say, its practitioners come from diverse backgrounds (e.g., history, philosophy, literature, theology, medicine) and it is primarily by virtue of the communication between and among individuals from these backgrounds that the discipline has flourished and come to be recognized as a distinct field of study. Still, many students, and even some of those who have graduate degrees in the specific disciplines that contribute to bioethics, remain unclear just what “bioethics” means, what bioethicists do, how one prepares for practice in the field, and the value of the profession.

The Nature and Prospect of Bioethics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives seeks to provide readers with critical information of this sort. In order to accomplish this goal, the editors have carefully selected the authors who are contributors to the volume. When choosing authors, the editors used two criteria: (1) the author’s prominence in his or her particular field of study, e.g., philosophy or history and (2) the reputation of the author as a bioethicist. All of the particular disciplines that are represented in the text have either contributed significantly to, or been closely associated with, the literature of bioethics and the education and professional work of bioethicists. Specific questions addressed by the various contributing authors include the following: How has the author’s discipline contributed to the development of bioethics? What has been the impact of bioethics on the health care delivery system in general and the author’s field of study in particular? What are the most significant current and future issues in the intersection between the author’s discipline

and bioethics? What issues or perspectives have been neglected? What is the state of the art of interdisciplinary scholarship, education, and service in bioethics? From the perspective of the author's discipline, what are the most significant strengths and weaknesses in the current state of bioethics? What basic knowledge and skills connected with the discipline should be acquired to obtain competence in bioethics? What methods or theoretical approaches related to the author's discipline are most promising for the future development of bioethics?

Taken as a whole, *The Nature and Prospect of Bioethics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* seeks to achieve four general goals: (1) To explore the roots of bioethics in those disciplines that have principally informed its subject matter, (2) to illustrate how bioethics' present and future flourishing depends on its being nourished by the insights and methods that derive from those varied sources of scholarship, (3) to demonstrate the value of bioethics as a profession, and (4) to indicate the directions in which future scholarship in bioethics will most likely proceed.

One incontestable fact about any multiauthored text is that its value is almost exclusively dependent upon the ability, diligence, conscientiousness, and trustworthiness of its various contributing authors. Recognizing this fact, we would like to express our thanks to the authors whose works are included in this text. All have selflessly taken time from their busy schedules to help in the production of a volume that is intended primarily for use as an educational tool. This is a public service for which the authors should be thanked, not only by the editors, but also by other members of their professions, practitioners of bioethics, and the public at large.

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