

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the relationship between literature and bioethics has intensified. Initially, it was mostly reflected from the perspective of the traditional biomedical, doctor-patient relationship. But today, bioethics is an interdisciplinary field that on the one hand works closely with the natural sciences and biomedicine, while interacting with the cultural sciences, arts, and humanities on the other. As opposed to the traditional topics of medical ethics, modern biotechnologies have introduced brand new themes to literature, such as gene editing, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, neurotechnological interventions in the brain, organ transplants, enhancement of human capabilities, or euthanasia. All of these are compelling motifs for literary and cinematic adaptations and can become examples of new shared discourses as well as the emergence of new research aspects, for example, narrative bioethics.

Along with the accelerated development and application of new biotechnologies, we are confronted with new life situations and moral dilemmas, for the solution of which we often lack adequate interpretational models. In many cases, the principles of traditional normative ethics are insufficient to address new, emerging problems, which prompts the exploration of other suitable methodological approaches. The authors of this book focus on exploring the relationships between literature and bioethics and reveal their extraordinary potential to foster critical thinking, moral action, and the formation of visions for the development of society. They not only examine how literature reflects and addresses bioethical dilemmas, but also analyse how the literary treatment of these dilemmas and the anticipation of their possible solutions can help shape, refine, and deepen the bioethical discourse. The individual studies in this volume confirm that the development of narrative skills is becoming an important part of a broader bioethical reflection which can strengthen the moral competencies needed to solve complex moral issues.

The book consists of eight chapters. The author of the first chapter, Ivan Lacko, uses the American writer Jodi Picoult's novel *My Sister's Keeper* (2004) to address issues related to the application of preimplantation genetic diagnosis when conceiving a child who, owing to her genetic fit becomes a suitable donor for her gravely ill sibling. Lacko interprets this strong literary narrative from the point of view of three bioethical approaches – utilitarian ethics, virtue ethics, and care ethics. He discusses the importance of personal autonomy and the fragile nature of maintaining it, the challenge of taking moral responsibility for one's

actions, and the difficulty in ethical decision-making by parents and doctors in complex moral situations. The author reflects on the numerous promises of new technology as well as the considerable risks associated with its practical application.

In the second chapter, Tomáš Károly focuses on the use of social robots in healthcare. He first traces the current development of robots based on advances in artificial intelligence and robotics, noting that, in addition to surgical procedures, technology is already being used in healthcare for diagnosis, prediction, and prevention. Károly pays special attention to social robots that could serve as companions for lonely people, patients with dementia, babysitters for children, or even psychotherapists. This raises a number of bioethical questions, to which the author seeks answers by means of philosophical, ethical, and literary analyses. In doing so, he explores the connections between sci-fi stories and current technological development in the real world.

Adam Škrovan, the author of the third chapter, shifts the attention from the frequently discussed theme of the relationships between humans and machines in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) to the question of genetic enhancement – a topic that is also strongly present in the novel. The enhancement procedure, referred to as *lifting* in the novel, allows the author to analyse potential consequences of genetic enhancement and its effect on individuals and society as a whole. The analysis confronts us with possible changes not only on the level of individual people, but also regarding such issues as social coexistence and social exclusion.

Two chapters of the book are dedicated to the topic of euthanasia. In the fourth chapter, Bogumiła Suwara uses two artistic works to reflect on euthanasia. She analyses the aspect of death denial in Edson Oda's movie *Nine Days* (2020) and presents the difficult decision-making whether to try to get relief from excruciating pain through euthanasia or palliative care on the backdrop of the novel *How I Didn't Kill My Father and How Much I Regret It* (2021) by the Polish writer Mateusz Pakuła. The author conducts her analysis from two perspectives, noting how the topic is approached in bioethical discussions and, at the same time, how these discussions influence the interpretation of film or literary works.

In the fifth chapter, Peter Fraňo offers a comparative analysis of selected bioethical issues related to the current discussion on euthanasia and compares these with two descriptions of suicide in Roman literature. His ancient sources include *De Viris Illustribus* by the Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos and the letter collection *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* by Seneca. Fraňo's analysis

focuses primarily on the examination of three issues – the type of illness in question, a clear formulation of the will to die, and the assistance of a doctor and/or philosopher. Based on these, he identifies parallels and differences between ancient and contemporary approaches to a voluntary termination of life brought about by persistent and intolerable pain.

Numerous contemporary authors have sought inspiration in ancient stories and myths preserved in the oldest works of our culture in order to understand recent phenomena. When discussing human enhancement today, authors present both stronger and weaker arguments, primarily seeking to support the idea of reinforcing cognitive, emotional, or physical abilities. Matúš Porubjak, the author of the sixth chapter, uses the story about the creation of the first woman – Pandora – to extend the bioethical discussion by an innovative aspect. He not only points out the facets of enhancement implicit in the myth of Pandora, but also argues that Pandora was deliberately created as a highly complex social being. In the author's view, her creation brought about fundamental social improvement for humanity, which can serve as a powerful inspiration for guiding our visions of human enhancement.

In the seventh chapter, Denisa Mišinová focuses on Young Adult dystopian literature, which she perceives as suitable experimental material to examine various moral dilemmas related to genetic modification, emotional manipulation, or technological control. Young Adult dystopias are becoming increasingly popular among young readers and, if appropriately incorporated in the educational process, could serve as a useful tool to develop critical thinking and the shaping of a moral character and value systems in young people. The author tests her opinions on the backdrop of the debate on whether morality is inherent or acquired.

In the last chapter, Jana Tomašovičová examines the relationship between reinforcing narrative abilities and increasing moral competence. The moral competence of relevant actors in moral action is, alongside ethical expertise, an important part of decision-making in major moral cases. The author bases her reflections on the works of the moral philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum, according to whom a detailed interpretation of the moral dilemmas depicted in literary texts and the ways of resolving them stimulates moral imagination, which is a preparation for moral action. These considerations support the narrative approach in bioethics. Its significance does not lie in replacing rational ethical argumentation, but in complementing it, because it can shape and strengthen the moral competence necessary for moral reasoning.

Drawing on their analyses, the authors of the chapters concur that literary works which feature ample bioethical themes are an important medium to reflect on past experiences and to anticipate and test future possibilities for the use of the latest biotechnologies. The contribution of literature to bioethics is indispensable. It creates sufficient space for a detailed reflection and discussion of the possible positive and negative consequences of technological applications, confronts us with alternative concepts of moral action, and develops narrative abilities that shape and reinforce our moral competence. In addition, bioethics is an inexhaustible source of inspiring motifs, attractive themes, and moral dilemmas for literature, which, thanks to its artistic treatment, attracts greater attention and provokes reflection among the broader cultural public. And this is especially important today.

Jana Tomašovičová and Bogumiła Suwara

The Ethics of Care and Consequence: A Bioethical Reading of Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*

Ivan Lacko

Abstract: The novel *My Sister's Keeper* (2004) by popular American writer Jodi Picoult offers a literary exploration of several bioethical dilemmas. Through the story of Anna Fitzgerald, who was conceived through preimplantation genetic diagnosis to be a genetic match for her sister Kate, who suffers from leukaemia, the book provides a thought-provoking view of consequentialist justification for genetic engineering. It also offers literary material to further discuss the relevance of individual autonomy. By raising critical questions about the ethical limits of medical interventions and the moral responsibilities inherent in the intersection of science, family, and identity, Picoult's novel can serve as a case study that bridges literature and bioethics and presents the implications of current bioethical issues. This article will endeavour to use Jodi Picoult's novel as a bioethical case study, offering an analytical view at how various bioethical theories apply to Picoult's narrative, characterization, and overall literary effect. By integrating such theories as consequentialism, care ethics, and virtue ethics, this article offers a critical reading of *My Sister's Keeper* as a novel addressing a whole range of bioethical concerns, from genetic engineering, through bodily autonomy, all the way to family ethics and responsibility.

Keywords: Preimplantation genetic diagnosis. Individual autonomy. Identity. Responsibility.

Introduction

A prolific, popular, and best-selling author of more than two dozen novels, American novelist Jodi Picoult often engages her characters in familial intricacies and moral dilemmas, while dissecting the issues at hand with a sense for detail and social relevance. Her 2004 novel *My Sister's Keeper* presents a literary story that lends itself to explore not only emotional and psychological interactions and relations among family members, but also initiates a discussion about several bioethical and moral dilemmas. Through the story of thirteen-year-old Anna Fitzgerald, who was conceived through preimplantation genetic diagnosis to be a genetic match for her older sister Kate, who suffers from leukaemia, Picoult's novel provides a thought-provoking view of consequentialist justification for genetic engineering, highlighting utilitarian as well as virtue and care ethics principles contained in the decisions made (or planned to be made) by Anna's parents.

My Sister's Keeper is essentially a story about the complexities of making medical and parental decisions in a situation where fundamental human emotions

Machines Like People in Healthcare: From Science Fiction to Reality

Tomáš Károly

Abstract: The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and robotics has led to the increasing presence of social robots in healthcare. These robots, which are just as good and often even better than humans, serve as medical assistants, companions, and psychotherapists, raising fundamental ethical and philosophical questions about their role in human society. This paper explores the intersection of science fiction narratives and real-world technological developments, analysing how literature and movies has long anticipated contemporary discussions on human-robot relationships. Particular attention is given to bioethical dilemmas, anthropomorphising, addiction to social robots, and their psychological impact. The study highlights the importance of patient awareness, through informed consent, that robots do not possess true emotions, even though they exhibit behavioural expressions of them. While robots can enhance healthcare services, human oversight remains essential to prevent over-reliance and ensure ethical deployment.

Keywords: Anthropomorphising. Artificial intelligence. Healthcare. Sci-fi. Social robots.

Introduction

We can consider literary fiction to be timeless when it responds to universal human traits. If we are able to intersubjectively evaluate the main message of a work and rank it among the timeless gems, then we can say that such a work successfully expresses the universals of human nature through its narrative (Károly 2024b). For over a hundred years, since the work *R. U. R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* by Karel Čapek ([1920] 1990), we have been encountering literature that reflects the relationship between humans and robots. Although we can consider these sci-fi works about robots as relatively new, it turns out that the speed of technological development and the immutability of the basic universal traits of human nature have served as a test of their credibility and classification as valuable literature. These works can serve as a predictive tool for us for the potential development of technologies, because even in the past various authors have asked themselves the same questions that we are asking ourselves today, and some current works respond to today's dilemmas.

This text is primarily about the nature of social robots and their relationship with people in the healthcare industry. We will examine the current state of

Beyond Genetic Enhancement in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*

Adam Škrovan

Abstract: This study focuses on *Klara and the Sun* (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro, a novel that has received considerable attention for its depiction of artificial beings but less so for its portrayal of genetic modification. While existing interpretations often emphasize its cautionary tone, this study seeks to broaden the novel's interpretive framework by examining enhancement through a bioethical lens. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from bioethics scholars, the study explores how the narrative ambiguity in *Klara and the Sun* invites the reader to reflect on the emotional, moral, and social implications of human enhancement. In doing so, I suggest positioning the novel as a space where the bioethical issues of technological progress are not resolved but open to speculation.

Keywords: Genetic enhancement. Autonomy. Emotional inequality. Social consequences.

Introduction

While radical interventions designed to alter human capabilities were once restricted to the domain of science fiction, advances in biomedicine have transformed speculative themes into pressing concerns for both literary and scientific inquiry. Literary narrative has long served as a space in which emerging scientific developments are not only imagined but also explored in terms of their broader human significance. As ethics scholars Bert Gordijn and Henk ten Have (2018) observe, fiction contributes to reflections on the ethical tensions surrounding technological development not through abstract analysis, as theoretical discourse often does, but through speculative portrayal of the uncertain consequences such advancements may bring. This study focuses on Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021), which has attracted considerable scholarly interest for its portrayal of artificial beings designed to serve as companions to genetically enhanced humans (e.g., Hosuri 2021; Li and Eddebo 2023; Naqvi 2025). Fewer interpretations, however, engage with the novel's depiction of genetic modification, and those that do tend to echo the cautionary tone Ishiguro himself expressed in interviews surrounding the novel's release (e.g., Narimani Charan 2023). Rather than disputing existing interpretations, I aim to broaden the novel's interpretive framework by examining the theme of genetic modification through a bioethical perspective. Drawing on selected works on human enhancement (e.g., Agar 2004;

The Diversity of Life and Its Finitude in Selected Works

Bogumiła Suwara

Abstract: All cultures have established “systems of death”, yet a significant issue debated within their contemporary context is the law of “death on demand”. This article focuses on two aspects: “the denial of death” in the systems of death, using Edson Oda’s film *Nine Days* (2020), and the resolution of “unbearable pain” through euthanasia or appropriate palliative care, as shown in Mateusz Pakuła’s work, *Jak nie zabiłem swojego ojca i jak bardzo tego żałuję* (How I Didn’t Kill My Father and How Much I Regret It, 2021). The analysis examines cultural texts to explore a key issue in bioethics: how can we assist individuals in dying? It also examines how perspectives from the field of bioethical discourse can shape the interpretation of a film or literary work. The incorporation of a bioethical context allows for the interpretation of Pakuła’s text not only as a “protest song” advocating for the legalization of euthanasia, which has been the primary focus of previous analyses, but also as a significant critique of the prevailing approach to palliative care.

Keywords: Finitude. Fragility of life. Euthanasia. Palliative care. Edson Oda. Mateusz Pakuła.

Nothing ever happens twice, and
nothing ever will. Because of this,
we are born without proficiency
and die without routine.

Wisława Szymborska *Nic dwa razy*
(Nothing Twice) ([1957] 1966)

Introduction

It is evident that all cultures developed “systems of death” that have shaped societal perceptions of death and dying, influenced expressions of emotions related to these experiences, and dictated responses (Kastenbaum 1977).⁶ Currently, the issue of legalizing euthanasia – both passive and active euthanasia, as well as assisted suicide – has been included in this discussion. It has emerged as a significant aspect of understanding death and dying in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere, and has transcended ethnic and cultural boundaries (Lloyd, White and Sutton 2011); as a global trend, it is influencing other “systems of death” (Kastenbaum 1977). Today, as the right to end one’s life at will has been

⁶ This chapter is a revised version of the study Suwara (2024): “Rozmanitost’ života, a najmä jeho konečnosti, na príklade vybraných diel.” [The Diversity of Life, and of Its Finitude in Particular, on the Example of Selected Works].

Two Cases of Suicide in Roman Literature and the Issue of Assisted Death in Bioethics

Peter Fraňo

Abstract: The reflection on the issue of suicide is a theme of many works of world literature. And it is no different in the case of Greek and Latin literary sources. In particular, the treatises from the Late Republic and the Early Empire are of particular importance, since it is in these literary texts that we have the highest number of descriptions of suicidal action statistically documented in the whole of ancient literature. From the many examples of this life-ending choice, we will analyse in the text the description of the final years of the life of Titus Pomponius Atticus, whose biography has been preserved for us in the work *De viris illustribus* by the Roman biographer Cornelius Nepos (Nep. Att. 21.1-22.4). The second ancient source would be Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, which contains the story of the death of an unknown young man, Tullius Marcellinus (Sen. Ep. 77.5-9). In contrast to many other sources from this period, these literary excerpts deal with the subject of suicide in some detail, and for the main actors in the plot, the primary reason for its occurrence is ongoing pain or suffering (*impatientia*), and thus in their process they are perhaps most reminiscent of contemporary bioethical debates regarding the issue of euthanasia.

Keywords: Suicide. Euthanasia. Starvation. Titus Pomponius Atticus. Tullius Marcellinus.

Introduction

Reflections on the issue of suicide is an element of many works of world literature from ancient times up to the present. Several characters who decided to end their lives in this way have at the same time become permanently inscribed in the history of world literature, and the motives for their acts are the subject of ongoing considerations by literary scholars. It suffices to recall the fates of the main protagonists of works such as *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *Anna Karenina* or *Madame Bovary: Provincial Manners*. Along with literary and academic research, however, the issue of suicide in literature may also be of interest to other scholarly disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, philosophy), which can make use of the often-detailed narrative descriptions of the psychological state of characters or the social circumstances that accompany acts of suicide in their own professional research. One such discipline is bioethics, which examines, for example, the issue of the ethical justification of carrying out assisted suicide or euthanasia. Therefore, in the text presented herein, we will focus on a comparative analysis of three selected bioethical issues that are closely associated with the topic of assisted

Was Hesiod's Pandora a Posthuman?

Matúš Porubjak

Abstract: An important component of Hesiod's Promethean myth is a story whose relevance in association with the human enhancement is often overlooked. This is the story of the first woman – Pandora. This chapter will be devoted to an analysis of this story and a possible connection with the issue of human enhancement. In it I will first outline very briefly the origin of this myth and its transformations in a diachronic line from antiquity to the present. I will then focus on a detailed analysis of the context and the story itself in the form we find it in Hesiod. I will try to find answers to the following questions: Why did Zeus allow Pandora to be created? What did he intend to achieve? What qualities will Pandora have? And how will her arrival among humans change them? In the conclusion – based on Bostrom's definition of posthuman – I will assess to what extent it would be possible to perceive Pandora not only as the first woman (as she is depicted in Hesiod), but also as the first posthuman.

Keywords: Pandora. Posthuman. Enhancement. Hesiod. Women.

One of the great bioethical topics of our time is the question of human enhancement. The desire for human enhancement and the fear of the possible risks it may entail are, of course, not merely a modern phenomenon. They can be found in various myths across cultures. Our own culture, where we can trace this topic back to the myths preserved in the oldest written monuments of ancient culture – specifically in the epic works of Homer and Hesiod – is no different. It is in Hesiod where we find the story of Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods in order to bring it back to people, a story that became “one of the central myths of Western culture” (Most 2010, lxvi).¹³

An important component of Hesiod's Promethean myth is another story whose relevance in association with the human enhancement is often overlooked. This is the story of the first woman – Pandora. This chapter will be devoted to an analysis of this story and a possible connection with the issue of human enhancement. In it I will first outline very briefly the origin of this myth and its transformations in a diachronic line from antiquity to the present. I will then focus on a detailed analysis of the context and the story itself in the form we find it in Hesiod. I will try to find answers to the following questions: Why did Zeus allow Pandora to be created? What did he intend to achieve? What qualities will Pandora have?

¹³ Regarding the issue of ancient inspirations for later technologies and posthumanism, see, for example, Mayor (2018); Chesi and Spiegel (2019); Saniotis, Mohammadi and Galassi (2024).

Dystopia as a Moral Experiment: The Educational Potential of Literature

Denisa Mišinová

Abstract: This chapter focuses on the analysis of dystopian literature as a tool for developing moral competencies in adolescents. The research is based on a transdisciplinary framework linking philosophy, literature, psychology and pedagogy, with particular attention paid to the question of the innateness and acquired nature of morality. The aim is to critically assess the extent to which dystopian literature, through its thematization of ethical dilemmas, social structures and questions of justice, contributes to the formation of moral values in young readers. At the same time, it seeks to refute the thesis that the moral development of adolescents is independent of literary stimuli and, on the contrary, based on available literature and theoretical concepts, supports the argument that dystopia can play a key role in the process of ethical maturation. Currently, dystopias for young readers, known as Young Adult dystopias, have become especially popular and have evolved into a distinct literary sub-genre. They are characterised by a combination of suspense, fantastical worlds and philosophical reflections, offering not only powerful narratives but also valuable tools for reflection. Analysis shows that dystopian works, due to their complexity and emotional impact, activate not only the cognitive but also the affective components of the reader's personality, thereby promoting deeper reflection on values, identity and responsibility. This aspect plays an essential role in the development of the discussion on the practical use of literature in the educational process and underlines the importance of fiction as a tool for shaping world-views in a period of dynamic development. The primary aim is to actively participate in the obvious growth in popularity of the genre and to capitalise on its many positive aspects.

Keywords: Dystopia. Transhumanism. Bioethics. Moral autonomy. Adolescents.

Introduction

Philosophy is a field that has dealt with fundamental questions of human existence, society and morality since its inception. Since ancient times, philosophers have attempted to theorise the ideal order of the world, which has led to the development of utopia and dystopias. While utopia may be an attempt to approach a perfect state, dystopias often serve as a warning of possible negative consequences. They are not just a leisure activity for readers of fiction, but also have a deep philosophical meaning that touches not only on theoretical considerations but also on practical problems in society. Currently, dystopias for young readers, known as Young Adult (YA) dystopias, have become particularly popular and have developed into a distinct literary sub-genre. In an ever-changing world where

Narrative Abilities and Moral Competencies: Inspiration from the Works of Martha C. Nussbaum

Jana Tomašovičová

Abstract: This chapter builds on the analysis presented by Norbert L. Steinkamp, Bert Gordijn, and Henk ten Have (2008), according to which current decision-making in complex moral cases should take into account not only professional ethical expertise but also the moral competence of the relevant actors in moral action. In this context, we consider it legitimate to ask how moral competence can be developed so that it functions as an effective element of moral reasoning. Based on the Aristotelian tradition of moral character formation, we will examine the connection between strengthening narrative abilities and increasing moral competence. We will draw on the analysis of the works of Martha C. Nussbaum, a moral philosopher who examines the influence of narrative imagination on moral reasoning against the backdrop of a dialogue between literature and ethics. According to the author, the interpretation of moral conflicts depicted in literary texts and the ways in which they are resolved stimulate moral imagination, which is a preparation for moral action. With these reflections, Nussbaum provided strong inspiration for later development of the narrative approach in narrative bio/ethics and narrative medicine. In this chapter, we will examine the method of reflective equilibrium, which can be used to incorporate moral intuitions and beliefs gained through narrative-ethical analysis into moral judgement. In the last part, we will present some forms of narrative representations in bioethics and evaluate the importance of the narrative approach and narrative abilities for moral reasoning.

Keywords: Ethical expertise. Moral competence. Narrative abilities. Narrative imagination. Reflective equilibrium.

Introduction

The study of the interrelationships between literature and bioethics has gained professional recognition from many researchers in recent decades. On the one hand, they note new themes, inspirational motifs, and complex moral dilemmas that literature finds in bioethics and that arise alongside the development of biotechnology and its gradual application in biomedicine. They analyse the impact of new knowledge and biotechnological innovations on artistic works (Lesch, Leniger et al. 2022; Lacko 2024; Károly 2024). On the other hand, they reflect on how bioethics increasingly uses high-quality literary texts to supplement rational argumentation and illustrate bioethical problems. An important role is played by the ability of literature to intensively stimulate bioethical discussions, to describe in detail the circumstances of decision-making, its prerequisites and conse-