

Reflections

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Can it be already 30 years since the first days of modern, secular bioethics? As those of us in the field for almost all these years arrive near the end of our careers, we find that time has truly flown and the challenges have not diminished one bit. If anything, they are even greater than in the early years. Along the way it was tempting to think that the broad consensus reached on research ethics, on the four principles, on the need for consent in clinical ethics, and then on rights in reproduction and dying, would paint the picture rather well. Only fill-in would be needed by the apprentices coming afterward. Yet time and again new biological and medical discoveries continued to challenge that painting. A new canvas had to be hung. Among the major newer developments were the challenges of healthcare reform, genetics, antifoundationalism, the certification of ethics consultants, and now, the internationalization of bioethics, its relationship to the environment and world politics, and biotechnology.

Albert Jonsen boldly wrote his personal reflections about the history of modern bioethics almost 5 years ago. Virtually no one else in the field had a better overview of the public policy features of bioethics. But it quickly became apparent that other voices needed to be heard as well, particularly from those who concentrated on establishing educational programs and those who focused on clinical ethics.

Some of the first and most influential voices in the field, like Paul Ramsey, Joseph Fletcher, and Hans Jonas, had already died. Then, in the interim between the publication of Jonsen's book and the appearance of this issue, some additional original voices have been taken from us, including K. Danner Clouser, Richard McCormick, and Van Rensselaer Potter. Philosophers Richard M. Hare and Robert Nozick, whose thinking has had a significant impact on bioethics, have also recently died. And important voices of those who turn theory into action were silenced with the losses of Jonathan Mann and Henry Spira. Given that we are now welcoming fourth and even fifth generation scholars into the field, it seemed fitting to honor Jonsen's initiative by inviting some original bioethicists to reflect on their beginnings, on the thinkers and movements that influenced them, and on how the particulars of their own experiences shaped their ideas and those of their contemporaries.

In the midst of a movement it is hard to see its outlines, its real achievements, and where it is going. We're still in the midst of this movement we call bioethics. We welcome any other first voices who would like to contribute to this ongoing reflection on the movement as well as any responses our readers wish to offer. It is our hope that a constant stream of reflections is generated in years to come as a result of this and similar initiatives taken by others in the field.