

A Bioethicist's Dictionary

William Eisenhower, Cascade Books, 2022.

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Words are powerful. They impart shared meaning and serve as the foundation for any area of human study, and bioethics is no different. In addition, the meanings of terms may change over time, influenced by prominent cultural thinkers. With this in mind, William Eisenhower has crafted *A Bioethicist's Dictionary* to help ethicists and clinicians alike speak the same language and recognize the contributions of key individuals who have formed our modern understanding of bioethics.

A Bioethicist's Dictionary is organized into two main sections. True to its name, the first part defines the essential terms relevant to bioethics, arranged in alphabetical order and comprising the bulk of the text. The second section, which genuinely sets this work apart, describes nearly one hundred individuals or groups with whom modern bioethicists should be familiar. These figures are primarily arranged in alphabetical order by last name, making this section easy to navigate.

Eisenhower's work has many strengths. The definitions are clear and concise, with just the right amount of foundational philosophical language. Cross references are arranged to allow the reader to search for terms based on how each is used in practice, even as an abbreviation. For example, those who want to understand the word *EEG* can look up this abbreviation rather than *electroencephalogram*. Etymology is included for several terms, particularly when this contributes to a better understanding of the definition.

While the title of this volume may suggest that only terms pertinent to ethics are defined, this is far from the truth. Eisenhower has carefully constructed an amalgamation of words from the disciplines of epidemiology, medicine, law, philosophy, psychology, science, social work, and theology. This approach makes the text useful for clinicians seeking to enhance their understanding of ethics and for ethicists desiring to understand the broader context of other fields.

True to his theological training and convictions, the author filters his definitions through a Christian worldview grounded in biblical truth. Readers from Christian traditions will appreciate his attention to definitions for biblical terms relevant to bioethics today, such as the Greek words associated with love (i.e., *agape*).

What makes *A Bioethicist's Dictionary* unique is the second part of the text, containing Eisenhower's treatment of historical figures with pivotal roles in shaping the current landscape of bioethics. Once again, he artfully includes individuals from varying fields, including medicine, religion, and public health. While a text from a secular author might gloss over or completely ignore the importance of religious figures such as Augustine, Calvin, and Luther,

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Eisenhower gives them their proper recognition and context and shows how they have helped inform bioethics both historically and today.

Considering the utility of this work for the study of bioethics, I hope Eisenhower has plans for a second, expanded edition. Defining all terms with relevance to bioethics is a monumental task. With that in mind, some commonly used words in modern medicine are missing that are also pertinent to bioethics. Some examples are: *embryo*, *gender*, *protected health information*, and *treatment allocation*. In some specific definitions, the author's use of colloquial language and metaphors unique to a Western context might limit the understandability of these definitions to specific sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, definitions of terms related to behavioral health might be more precise.

The second part of the text might benefit from including key political figures and philosophers instrumental in shaping secular ethics today, such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Reich, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As Carl Trueman has recently described, the views of these individuals have contributed to the modern conception of the self, which has important implications within bioethics.¹ Whether or not one agrees with these individuals, this context is essential to promoting an understanding of various worldviews and fostering meaningful dialogue with others in a pluralistic world.

In summary, Eisenhower has gifted us with a wonderful reference to aid in establishing a common language for the field of bioethics, masterfully bringing the sciences and the humanities together in one text, as they should be. Historically faithful and presently applicable, *A Bioethicist's Dictionary* should be on the shelf of every ethicist, clinician, pastor, and student who desires to develop fluency in the language of bioethics. Considering the rapid pace of changes in medicine and science, I hope that updated editions will be forthcoming so that future generations will continue to benefit from this work.

REFERENCES

1. Carl Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2022).

2. Ken Magnuson, *Invitation to Christian Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 262.

3. Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 27; referenced in and examined in the domain of contemporary bioethics in O. Carter Snead, *What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2020), Chapter 3, "An Anthropological Solution."

4. See Farr Curlin and Christopher Tollefsen, *The Way of Medicine: Ethics and the Healing Profession* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021).

5. Edmund Pellegrino, *The Philosophy of Medicine Reborn: A Pellegrino Reader* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 38.

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