

Editorial

Life is the most fundamental good of any living being and body is the primary prerequisite for the most fundamental good to exist. Life is not an abstract entity. Life exists in a body. Human life exists in a human body. Without a human body, human life becomes impossible. Such simple arguments can oppose abortion. We need however strong moral norms to defend, promote, preserve and protect human life. We need sound arguments to say why we should protect a human life at all. There is something unique about human life. Uniqueness of human life gives a priceless value and demands protection to every bearer of human life. There are, of course, varied, similar as well as contrary views on various ethical issues concerning human life.

Change, growth and reproduction are the fundamental properties of any form of life from the simplest bacteria to humans. However, beyond these properties, there lies an unchangeable moral value in humans, as this issue of *jnanadeepa* explicates. Not everyone agrees to the fact that moral value of human life is inherent and absolute. Some may consider that moral value of human life changes or increases according to the gradual growth or usefulness. There are many opinions regarding understanding of human dignity, beginning of human life, moral status, sacredness, etc. Accordingly, there are absolutist as well as gradualist views of the moral status of human life. Modern biosciences have challenged the very idea of human life due to reproductive and genetic technologies that can produce or design new humans. They invite us for discussions on human life.

With the advanced knowledge on biological development of human beings, more than ever the question “when does an individual human being begin to exist?” has come to the forefront. While an element of mystery continues to encircle human life, modern sciences have fathomed human life much more than before. Yet, there are more questions than answers. The answer/s to the abovementioned question from the perspectives of biology sets the basis for the ontological status of a human being, which in turn becomes the basis for the moral value of the individual human being. Though we cannot and should not make a

normative statement directly from a statement of biology in order to avoid naturalistic fallacies, it has to however rely subsequently on the ontological status and ultimately on biological facts, in order to know the moral status of human beings.

The ontological status of a human life is crucial to attribute to or recognize its moral status. On the one hand, we cannot attribute a value to someone who does not exist, and on the other, a mere biology is not enough to give moral status to the being. The non-arbitrary and absolute beginning of a human life, at least from a biological point of view, is at conception. However, there are varied opinions on the ontological status of the human life that comes to exist at fertilization or conception. Depending on the answer to the ontological status, the ethical debates on issues such as embryo research, embryonic stem cell research, abortion, female foeticide, gender determination, suicide, euthanasia, etc., have taken different directions or conclusions. There are also other moral and social arguments used to either support or oppose these ethical issues or researches.

This particular thematic issue of our journal *jnanadeepa* deals with “*ethics of human life from the interdisciplinary perspectives.*” There is a wide range of questions regarding human life beginning from conception to death. Some urgent ethical issues have been chosen for scholarly reflection on this issue. The views are of the authors. This issue begins with an article by Stephen Jayard on purpose, meaning, meaningfulness, dignity and sanctity of human life. The unimaginable advances in the modern science and technology, especially in the fields of biosciences, genetic engineering and reproductive treatments, seriously challenge the age-old notion of life and the very meaning of life. The author attempts to show that the sanctity and dignity, meaning and meaningfulness of life will not be affected by the modern biosciences. He says that the biosciences may help us improve our life, but they cannot assure us that life is meaningful. We must therefore go beyond the biosciences, biology and technology to find the meaningfulness of human life which would otherwise run the risk of being thrown into a form of commodity.

Next there is an analytical study of spirituality, ethics and human life from the perspectives of different religious traditions in India. Stephen Chundamthadam asserts that a sound ethical foundation is important for any seeker of truth to progress in a genuine spiritual life. Genuine spirituality deals with life and values of the person individually as well as collectively as humans, and seeks harmony with the whole of creation. The author believes that a genuine, ethical, spiritual and moral human living is the solution to the rampant atrocities, violence and injustice in the world. Humanistic as well as religious spirituality focuses on ethical living and helps to overcome struggles of human life in the present life. Ethical values promoted by religions can thus bring in lasting peace and harmony.

Nishant Irudayadason attempts in the following article to provide clarity on the moral issue of abortion from scientific, philosophical and legal perspectives. Having carefully analyzed diverse opinions and arguments which have long dichotomized the abortion debate emphasizing on the rights either of the mother or of the preborn, Nishant concludes that the very dichotomy is false and abortion is anti-human, anti-life, anti-preborn and anti-woman. Abortion can thus never be an act of women empowerment. It affects both the mother and the preborn. Hence, he argues that choosing not to voluntarily interrupt pregnancies is a moral choice with a dual purpose of both empowering women and protecting the preborn.

Subsequently, Charles Davis deals with the moral value of the preborn in Classical Hinduism, in which there are moral and social arguments that reiterate the moral status of the unborn humans and demand absolute protection. There is consciousness in the preborn right from the moment of conception. The preborn are sacred and are endowed with the inviolable right to life in their possible journey to attaining salvation. In the light of Classical Hinduism, as the author concludes, it would be immoral to destroy the life of the preborn for any purpose or any research however noble it might be. A rare exception of removal of foetus was practiced in extreme cases where the life of the mother was in danger, though Suśruta – the father of surgery - appealed that attempts must be made to save the life of both mother and child.

The article “Baby Donors” deals with commercial gestational surrogacy in India. Lourdhu Jeevaraj analyses the issue of surrogacy and evaluates the use of the increasing technology in India. Indian government encourages medical tourism of surrogacy without sufficiently having discussed its ethical intricacies, possible exploitation and malpractices. Surrogacy violates the sanctity of marriage and the dignity of women and the child. The right of a child to be born through rightful biological parents is challenged in surrogacy. There are also often many legal problems due to surrogacy. Commercial misuse of surrogacy is possible in India where economic poverty is a reality. Jeevaraj defends that human life has a priceless worth and science and technology must play the role of promoting and enhancing human life and should not make human life an object for monetary transaction and commodity for buying and selling.

Then the alarming problem of “Suicide in India,” which puts India to shame, is discussed. Suicide is increasing in India. 601 farmers in Maharashtra committed suicide in the first three months of 2015. While there are other reasons such as psychiatric disorders, social and cultural factors, economic stressors have caused more suicidal deaths in India. Jose Thayil says that suicidal behaviour is determined by a number of social factors, although it is deeply a personal act. Suicide should not be considered a permanent solution to the problems in life. Life is a gift from God and everyone must treat their life with love and respect. There is a great need for personal accompaniment of persons with suicidal tendencies in addition to suicide prevention programmes. The ecclesial community has a duty to improve the quality of life and save human life.

V. M. Jose discusses about euthanasia in India with a specific reference to the case of Aruna Shanbaug who more than 42 years remained within a world of a hospital bed at KEM Mumbai where she was earlier sexually assaulted by a ward boy on 27 November 1973. Having discussed the various ethical standpoints on euthanasia, the author promotes palliative care to take care of the suffering. Euthanasia is not a solution to alleviate human suffering. He proposes that we must stand for compassionate care of the dying while standing against any form of killing.

There is then a discourse on death by Kuruvilla Pandikattu. Constantly knowing and reminding ourselves that we are going to die would change our life-style personally and collectively. Ordinarily we tend to deny death. Looking into the face of death directly and fearlessly can put us in touch with our own true self and free us from daily bondages. This would make personal and societal transformation possible. In the second part of his article, the author tells us in the light of Tonybee's study that individuals die but civilizations do not. If we let our civilizations die, that may be the end of human life. Pandikattu ends his article with a few reflections on fostering life from the recent Papal document *Laudato Si`*. Knowing our personal death, not letting the death of civilizations and protection of environment – all of them – need ever renewed moral and spiritual courage and conviction.

Finally, there is a paper by Martin Alukaputhussery from a perspective of virtue ethics promoting peace and non-violence for a better India. He says that the teachings of Buddha and Christ are the greatest heritage that humans have received from the past. In the context of violence, terrorism, corruption, persecution and conflicts, the author believes that the teachings of Buddha on non-violence and of Jesus Christ on peace through beatitudes would help us dissipate fear and hostility and promote peace and harmony. The followers have the role of becoming peacemakers like their masters.

This issue has thus tried to understand the priceless worth of human life in the context of many bioethical issues. Every article has in some way tried to illuminate human minds that human life is a gift, and it must be protected and promoted against all odds of problems. Ethics opens the eyes of the scientists and researchers to use modern technologies to improve human life and not to destroy human life. Human beings create technologies, which should not be allowed to control human beings. Human beings are the masters of their technologies. Human wisdom is required to see the differences between human subjects and technological objects. Virtues and values help them to value human life beyond biosciences.

I hope that this issue of *jnanadeepa* will promote serious reflection and discussion on ethics of human life and help the readers to recognize the moral value of human life, and the dignity and the sanctity of human beings in oneself and in others and thus lead to building peace and harmony in our society.

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