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PEDRO LAÍN ENTRALGO: A FUNDAMENTAL PREDECESSOR OF SPANISH BIOETHICS

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Abstract: In this paper we have aimed to approach one of the most important intellectual figures in Spanish culture in the second half of the 20th century: the doctor, medical historian and promoter of the so-called Medical Anthropology, Pedro Laín Entralgo (1908-2001). Addressing him from a new perspective, that is, by relating him to the context of Spanish medical ethics and bioethics, we wanted to show how part of Laín's theories influenced some of the most important authors in those academic fields, taking his disciple Diego Gracia as a paradigm. It is a mistake to consider Laín Entralgo as a bioethicist because, when this discipline was constituted as such in the seventies, the central topics of Laín's thought had already been developed and his intellectual itinerary was already defined. However, his thoughts on medicine, clinical practice or doctor-patient relationship, among other subjects, have served as a theoretical basis for many later thinkers. Thus, from Laín's insights, those who were his disciples have been able to ground their philosophical systems by building a bioethical perspective that includes the application of the Medical Anthropology Laín proposed. Therefore, we believe it is legitimate to conclude that, although Laín Entralgo was not a bioethicist, he deserves to be recognised as an intellectual predecessor whose ideas nourished considerations on bioethics and medical ethics, since he influenced some of the authors acknowledged as authorities in such fields.

Keywords: *bioethics, medical ethics, Medical Anthropology, Pedro Laín Entralgo, Diego Gracia.*

The word “bioethics” first appeared in 1927, when protestant theologian and philosopher Fritz Jahr introduced it in the title of his paper “Bio-Ethik: Eine Umschau über die ethischen Beziehungen des Menschen zu Tier und Pflanze” (Bio-Ethics: A Review of the Ethical Relationships of Humans to Animals and Plants), published in the journal *Kosmos. Handweiser für Naturfreunde*. Four decades later, bioethics started to grow as an academic discipline in North America. In 1969, David Callahan and Willard Gaylin founded *The Hastings Center*, devoted entirely to ethical and social study and reflection on healthcare, medical sciences, and technological progress. In the following two years, the American biochemist and oncology professor Van Rensselaer Potter published two articles and a book pondering the need for a field to reconcile the humanities and sciences, which he called «bioethics».¹ In October 1971, this word first appeared in the name of an institution: the centre *The Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics* –which was later rebranded as *The Kennedy Institute of Ethics*. In the European scope, Spain was a pioneer in importing the progress being made in North America. In 1976 the doctor and theologian Francesc Abel i Fabre founded in Barcelona the *Institut Borja de Bioètica*, the first European centre for bioethics, intending to introduce this discipline in the Spanish medical and academic fields. But if there is an overall relevant figure in Spanish bioethics it is, without a doubt, Diego Gracia, who has entirely based his career on the study of bioethical issues and promoted its establishment in medical research around the country from virtually its beginnings in the United States.

It must therefore be appreciated how the birth of bioethics as a discipline relates to several other fields of study. In bioethics do not only converge ethics and medical sciences, but also metaphysical and sociopolitical reflections, new and emerging technologies, and issues on religion. In addition, in the history of its development, several personalities appear

¹ The texts in question are: “Bioethics, The Science of Survival”, published in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* in late 1970; “Bioethics”, published in *BioScience* in November 1971; and the book *Bioethics, Bridge to the Future*, published in January 1971.