

Coming of Age



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Ethics and Biological Anthropology in the 21st Century

Vanessa Campanacho and
Francisca Alves Cardoso

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Chapter 1

What about ethics in biological anthropology?

Francisca Alves Cardoso and Vanessa Campanacho

This chapter introduces the topics covered in this book and the reason behind its creation. Its content results from contributions presented at the AnthroEthics 2021 Conference, an online conference presented at the BioantTalks channel. The inaugural session took place on July the 5th, 2021, with presentations lasting until the 9th of June (2021). Those who wish to view its contributions can do so by accessing channel¹. One objective of the conference, which is also an objective of this edited volume, was to secure contributions from various continents and countries, not limiting ethical-related research to mainstream science producers. The conference and this book were successful in that endeavour, with contributions from Australia, Brazil, Finland, Lithuania, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom, offering a wider view of ethical concerns and biological anthropology. Some of the writing styles and composed chapters will express precisely that, as not all authors are native English speakers. But the book aims for an inclusive approach to ethics in biological anthropology, regardless of the writing skills and narrative proficiency of the authors (editors included): therefore, we encourage the readers to take that into consideration when reading the book.

Another objective was for the conference to be inclusive, aggregating early-career and senior scholars' researchers. Those with junior roles often lack opportunities to be part of major contributions. Hence, we view this book as an opportunity to showcase their research and build collaborative networks. The book achieved both objectives, securing significant contributions addressing major research topics within biological anthropology with an emphasis on ethics and related issues.

Ethics is the conductive thread throughout the book and is explored in various contexts and avenues of research. Alongside the rising ethical issues, the need for accountability, responsibility, care, and caution is also constant. This further contributed to another objective: to spark critical thinking in the readers and, for those working within biological anthropology, an invitation to a reflexive approach to their own research and/or those closer to them. Each manuscript introduces a particular context/topic, its limitations, and south out resolution, as described by each corresponding author. Some of the chapters may feel like ethnographical accounts relative to others, but we leave that for the reader to decide.

Those who have long been working on ethics and discussing ethical issues (no matter its framework) are aware that there are no "rights" and "wrongs" in the sense that a "... meaning of "ethics" is hard to pin down, and the views many people have about ethics are shaky." (Velasquez *et al.* 1987)². Consequently, when faced with the same dilemma, one can respond differently, offer diverse solutions, and argue many viewpoints. However, no matter this inability to provide a cohesive definition of ethics, the principle of "do no harm" is fundamental. But even this simple concept may differ between people, as when faced with complex dilemmas. With this in mind, we invite the reader to explore this

¹ AnthroEthics 2021 conference at BioantTalks channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctgfYtH-fco&list=PLnM-MDORLbrfHagKryu5-dkxi-1ynjP3X>

² Velasquez, M., Andre, C., Shanks, T., & Meyer, M. J. (1987). What is ethics?, *Issues in Ethics*, 1(1), revised version January 2010. Accessed, March 25th, at: 1-2.<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/what-is-ethics/>

book, allowing the opportunity to be surprised, enraged, astonished, sad, happy, but most of all, to be made aware of a significant number of issues that have been discussed within the discipline of biological anthropology. This book, alongside the contribution at the AnthroEthics 2021 Conference, offers precisely that.

The reference to human remains is also a constant within the context of this book. Either by directly referencing human remains or by addressing contexts in which a relationship exists. For example, Chapter 2 delves into exploring related to the curation, display, and study of human remains, in Finland, with an emphasis on collections gathered from archaeological contexts, which is complemented by Chapter 3 on issues related to the preservation and curation of poorly a priori preserved human remains, and Chapter 4 addressed both the short-term and long-term curation of human remains within the medico-legal system. These 3 chapters compose the book section on curating and displaying ancestral human remains.

Alongside the handling and curation issues related to real bone, later years have observed a growing concern for the digitalization, creation, and dissemination of 3D models of human remains. Such aspects are explored throughout Chapters 5 to 9. The acknowledgement that the digital age brought new and challenging issues regarding human remains is now well-established in academia, with each one exploring the digital need to be accounted for. Digitalization also brought the “novelty” of democratization on the access to the remains in the sense that what was once limited to anatomy theatres, academic, and archaeological contextual work is now accessible with the click of a keyboard or mouse. And, with the extended growth of artificial intelligence, one can only expect added concerns. Although these chapters relate to the discussion of digital ethics in biological anthropology, they are not limited to biological anthropology. Many collections and human remains that are being scanned and/or have given origin to 3D replicas are held in museums and are part of museological collections; for this reason, the discussion extends beyond the concern of biological anthropology into those of heritage and memory, with added dimensions of care and concerns.

The book reaches out to other domains of biological anthropology, such as ethical issues in the study of ancient DNA in South America (Chapter 11), contexts of violence in which the retrieval of history, memory, and human remains is ongoing (Chapter 12 and 14), and legal issues (Chapters 10 and 13), as a reminder that ethical and legal social aspects are always intertwined. To address one is to address both. Although the final section of the book dwells on professional issues (Chapters 16 to 18), these are as important as the remaining chapters since science is a product of those who make/write it, and this relates to society. Who produces science, engages with it, dictates research agendas, and how limited, bullied, and constrained certain groups of people?

Although the book Chapters are grouped per section, they are interconnected. Reading them is also an invitation to find those interconnectivities. We stress that this introduction aimed to provide a background to the broad themes in this book and to raise questions in the reader’s mind. Scientists are privileged in the ability to shape minds in the sense that many of us are also teachers and writers of ideas, accounts, and research, which may influence policy-making and societal views of the world. And, particularly in our case, we work in a field of study in which we have the privilege to work with ancestral human remains and associated contexts. We must always remember that these remains were those of people. It is, therefore, essential to maintain and promote the highest possible ethical standards throughout our work. Hopefully, this book will provoke discussion surrounding best practices and ethical standards.

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