

**ERC Starting Grant 2018
Research proposal [Part B1]**

**Deep uncertainties in bioethics: genetic research, preventive
medicine, reproductive decisions**

BIOUNCERTAINTY

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Project duration: 60 Months

Uncertainty is everywhere, as the saying goes, but rarely considered in ethical reflections. This project aims to reinterpret ethical discussions on current advances in biomedicine: instead of understanding bioethical positions as extensions of classical normative views in ethics (consequentialism, deontology, contractualism etc.), my project interprets them more accurately as involving various normative approaches to decision making under uncertainty. The following hard cases in bioethics provide the motivation for research:

- 1) Regulating scientific research under uncertainty about the ontological/moral status (e.g. parthenogenetic stem cells derived from human parthenotes) in the context of meta-reasoning under normative uncertainty.
- 2) The value of preventive medicine in healthcare (e.g. vaccinations) in the context of decision-making under different kinds of indeterminacy.
- 3) Population or reproductive decisions (e.g. preimplantation genetic diagnosis) in the context of valuing mere existence.

The main drive behind this project is the rapid progress in biomedical research combined with new kinds of uncertainties. These new and “deep” uncertainties trigger specific forms of emotions and cognitions that influence normative judgments and decisions. The main research questions that will be addressed by conceptual analysis, new psychological experiments, and case studies are the following: how do the heuristics and biases (H&B) documented by behavioral scientists influence the formation of normative judgments in bioethical contexts; how to demarcate between distorted and undistorted value judgments; to what extent is it permissible for individuals or policy makers to yield to H&B. The hypothesis is that many existing bioethical rules, regulations, practices seem to have emerged from unreliable reactions, rather than by means of deliberation on the possible justifications for alternative ways to decide about them under several layers and types of uncertainty.