

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CURRENT BIOETHICAL THINKING

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In the last two decades there has been an astonishing growth in the study of bioethics. It is an honor to be speaking here at the invitation of the Pope John Paul II Center for bioethical study. This is the newest of the many centers for study of bioethical questions in recent years.¹ Such centers reflect the abundant growth of research in these areas. Not only do we see today an increasing number of journals and newsletters devoted to moral questions touching medicine and other life sciences, but medical journals themselves are giving ever increasing attention to reflection on ethical issues. The huge bibliographies that appear in this field reflect the flood of books and articles being written.² Not only do schools of philosophy and theology now provide opportunities for advanced study in bioethics, but medical schools themselves are hiring ethicists and offering courses in unprecedented numbers.³ It would be rash to say that we are more ethical in medicine today than our fathers were, but we do talk about ethics a lot more.

There are four points that I would like to make about this remarkable development in bioethical thinking. First, it was in a certain sense to be expected: it was and is necessary. Secondly, in another sense this development is surprising. The earnest discussion of ethical issues in life sciences is a blessing that we should seek to nourish. Third, the growth has of course not been entirely healthy. We live in a world of spiritual confusion: and word that Johnny or Mary is studying bioethics even in a Catholic high school or college is not necessarily good news. Finally, there is good reason to be optimistic about the future of bioethics.

I. BIOETHICS HAD TO GROW.

The range of bioethics is wider than that of the medical ethics of old. Professor K. Danner Clouser speaks of it as extending to the whole bio-realm: not only to medicine, but to all the sciences and professions that touch life.⁴ It would be concerned with environmental issues, with biological research into the new technologies of birth or studies in genetics; with fertility research and population studies. Clouser points out two reasons why bioethics had to grow. All these areas of study to which bioethics is applied have grown exponentially in the last decades. We have come to know a lot more, and are able to do a lot more, so that ethical questions that simply didn't exist before have arisen before us and demand answers.⁵ Moreover these questions in life sciences touch so closely the lives of all of us that it would be inhuman not to think seriously about them.

Forty years ago we simply did not have the ways to ward off death that we now have. If a child were born with spina bifida he or she was likely to die. We could do no more than care for such children a little while. But now we have complex ways of saving their lives. In some cases, the lives we could save would be lives of much pain and would be severely limited; and sometimes great resources must be expended to save them. But since we can save them now we have new questions: ought we? And we must ask the question earnestly. In days of old, spouses who longed for children they did not have could resort to prayer; now they may resort to a great variety of techniques, technologies, and drugs. But about most of these there are serious new

questions: is that a human and right way to initiate life? It used to be rather clear whether a person were dead or not, so that there was no room for a serious moral questions: may this person rightly be considered dead? Even King Lear in his madness could place a mirror at Cordelia's mouth, and know she was dead. But when machinery can keep vital signs flourishing, new ways of honestly detecting the coming of death are needed. Modern skill in organ transplantation created puzzling moral issues.

These new moral questions do not arise merely because people have fallen away from their old moral convictions: they arise because even familiar principles can be applied to new contexts and issues only with difficulty. One who firmly rejects abortion, or ever directly killing what is or probably is a human being, might yet wonder whether using DES (diethylstilbestrol) in the treatment of rape victims is moral or not: the question involves new complexities that need to be newly thought out.

II. SURPRISINGNESS OF THIS GROWTH

While growth in bioethics was necessary, we have reason to be both puzzled and pleased at the rise of a high tide of ethical interest in our day. University departments are having every kind of ethics course tailored these days: business ethics, engineering ethics, communications ethics, political ethics, and a further rich variety, along with bioethics.⁶ Now in every case it can be said that the profound changes in every field have made such courses imperative – but it was not at all evident that they would actually come to be.

In fact, the dominant forms of ethical theory in English speaking universities would tend to suggest that such professional ethics courses would *not* be established, and that the multiple centers of ethical inquiry would be *not* established.

A generation ago Alfred Jules Ayer in his essay "Critique of Ethics and Theology"⁷ expressed in classical form the hostility of positivism to ethical thinking. He wrote: "It is plain that the conclusion that it is impossible to dispute questions of value follows from our theory also."⁸ In Ayer's theory, "good" and "bad" are not genuine concepts with some definite assignable meaning. To say that abortion is wicked or that it is morally permissible would be equally meaningless utterances. Underlying moral statements are simply nonrational emotional attitudes. Some people happen to approve of abortion in some circumstances and some happen not to. Since moral judgments express attitudes and assert nothing rational, it would be ridiculous to try to prove a moral judgment true or false. Ayer argues further that people not only should not, but they cannot and do not ever "dispute about questions of value."⁹ Ayer concedes that in a sense a person could have moral principles, that is, have an emotional stance that could cause him to approve or disapprove various sorts of things. "What we do not and cannot argue about is the validity of these moral principles. We merely praise them or condemn them in light of our feelings."¹⁰

Ayer's theory is born out of his own version of logical positivism, a philosophy that was extremely popular especially before World War II. But it expresses a conviction that has long been common in the empiricist tradition: that we can establish the truth of matters of fact, but values cannot be known, proved or rationally debated.¹¹ Even when logical positivism faded, and

contemporary forms of analytic philosophy arose, the conviction persisted that moral judgments about kinds of acts or about particular acts flow from chosen values, preferences, or commitments, and that it would be simply impossible to establish any one of them as actually true or false.¹²

For this reason ethics courses in this country in the main stream of analytic thought tended to ignore the great new questions that the rising technologies presented. If moral judgments about medical procedures are emotive utterances, if by their very logic and nature they cannot be true or false, it is not the work of a clear-headed thinker to try to establish the truth about them. That should be left to preachers, theologians and editorial writers, who are not thought (by philosophy professors) to be afflicted with clear analytic intelligence.¹³ People may indeed have their preferences, and fight for them with all the rhetorical devices they can. But they should realize that there is no question here of determining the truth of the matter.

Many forms of popular moral education these days reflect this moral nihilism of positivism than they would care to acknowledge clearly. Many educators in value theory are bitterly opposed to what they call “indoctrination” especially because they really believe that nothing simply is morally good or bad, so that any teacher who bears witness to what he or she “knows” to be good or bad would be merely imposing a subjective opinion. Even some forms of education in Christian conscience are descendants of value skepticism. Each should follow his or her own conscience, because there can be no interpersonally valid knowledge of what is good or evil, even from a public divine revelation. If a person really judges something good or bad (often this becomes equivalent to really wanting to do or to avoid something), then it is good or bad for that person.¹⁴

Even when the dominant philosophy of an age is unable to explain the nature of moral judgments and moral debate, the need to face practical moral questions remains. In the sixties there was a great rebirth in interest in moral questions. People wanted not only to assert their convictions about war and sex and drugs and new technologies of death; they wanted to affirm that their convictions were right, and even more, to insist that those who said otherwise were wrong.¹⁵ It was not the mainstream professors of ethics who created the current concern for bioethics and other forms of professional ethics. Rather it was a great multitude of serious people who knew that changed conditions required decisions of them. They wished their decisions to be made intelligently, in ways that would authentically enrich their own lives and the lives of those they loved. They demanded ethics courses that would face the issues of the day. What they were seeking was a rational ordering of life, the very thing classical moralists always sought. Often they sought it in the midst of great spiritual disorder, themselves at times partly penetrated by the relativism and moral nihilism of the age, and at times penetrated by an earnest will to catch the truth of things in moral matters. That confusion weakens much moral debate today; but the earnestness that created profound concern for rational reflection on moral issues, even in quarters where philosophical resources to handle such questions well were drastically lacking, provides an opportunity that the Christian ethicist must delight in. If he has any good things to say, he has an audience disposed to listen.

III: NOT ALL IS WELL IN BIOETHICS.

The Winter issue of *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*, sounded a warning against taking too much pleasure in the current resurgence of interest in ethics. The editor of the issue, Professor Henry Veatch, noted that here is something puzzling about the contemporary eagerness to apply ethics to every kind of complex problem at a time when so many who do this are unwilling to recognize the literal truth of any principles that might be applied. “While, of course, no one is against ethics in these days – just as in former days no one was against things like God and motherhood – still might there not be ground for suspicion, when one is confronted with such a plethora of sudden attempted applications, here, there, and everywhere?”¹⁶ For the most part, there is no effort to prove that any ethical principles are true (and there is a grave fear that any allegedly wise man who sought to communicate the truth of any moral judgment would be guilty of the sin of indoctrination.) Yet, without knowing if our principles are true or not, we are eager to apply them to every kind of question. “And could not this indeed be the Achilles heel of all our new-fashioned, new-day ethics? Notice how in the Harvard Report nothing whatever is said about teaching students any *truths* of ethics; rather all the talk is about familiarizing students merely with ‘ethical *problems*.’ Or again, those educators who are so concerned with bringing ethics into the classroom have a way of always sliding away from the question of whether ethics is an affair of genuine knowledge, and hence the kind of thing that can legitimately be taught. Instead, the emphasis is all on the kind of thing often called ‘values clarification’ – as if the concern in ethics education, so called, were simply to acquaint students with what might be called values alternatives, it then being up to the students ‘to make up their own minds’ just which of the assorted sets of values they would opt for, each of them for themselves.”¹⁷

All this is a besetting temptation of the times. People want to know what it would be right and wise to do; but they don’t want to grasp a truth so lucid that they might feel actually required to walk in its light. The great moral philosophers of the ages, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Kierkegaard, passionately sought what was truly good. They realized the quest for moral truth was especially difficult. One must seek the truly good with all one’s heart and energy. The wise man did not take the stance of a cynic, reluctant to be forced to acknowledge moral truth. Neither would he affirm them mindlessly. But with all one’s resources, with integrity and care, the truth of how to lead a wise and good life is to be sought.¹⁸

I do not wish to take here the role of the pessimist. Many good things are happening in contemporary ethics. But Veatch has certainly touched an important point. In the same issue of *Listening* I had contributed an article with the somewhat cynical title: “Professional Ethics Courses: Do they Corrupt the Young?”¹⁹ My own answer was that they very easily can, though they need not. Certainly I hope I am not corrupting the young people among you as I speak of bioethics here. But a study of some of the more popular textbooks in metaethics shows rather clearly how demoralizing study of them could be.²⁰

Usually a contemporary textbook will begin with an introductory section on moral theory, in which different positions on basic issues are sketched. There will be a brief treatment of what morality means to the utilitarian or consequentialist; sadly, this will often be labeled (with total disregard for what teleology meant in classic ethics) “teleological” thinking. Often there will be a treatment of some Kantian form of thinking; this will be labeled “deontological.” Other forms of moral theory will be noted: perhaps cultural relativism and subjectivism; and there may be some explicit discussion of noncognitivism. Normally there will be no effort to urge that any of these

theories is true. One is to look over the advantages and disadvantages of each, not with the hunger and thirst for moral truth of a Kierkegaard or an Augustine, but with the polite detachment of Newman's unfortunate gentleman. It would be gauche to seek truth here too passionately; to teach as though one had found a truth that he loved to share with another would be to flirt with the severe sin of indoctrination. The result of all this dispassionate treatment is predictable.²¹ The intelligent student realizes that he is not going to learn whether any of these broad views is or could be decisively true. So he wishes to rush into the "real questions," where hopefully something definite can be decided.

Alas, the hope is rather desperate. When difficult contemporary questions are raised, the situation becomes really hopeless. Their textbooks are anthologies of articles written with considerable dialectical skill in defense of sharply opposed positions. The arguments in different articles are extremely difficult to assess. Authors appeal to different kinds of evidence; they have different presuppositions about the proper forms of moral argumentation. Each is soliciting the reader's approval for reasons that it would be difficult to analyze and reduce to principles; but if the student could reduce them to principles, it would not help him, for he has not been helped to get personal possession of or insight into the validity of any particular principles anyway. Hence the student becomes more and more convinced that he cannot really give intelligent answers to moral questions. He can only take sides, hoping that he has guessed rightly about good and evil. Nothing could seem better calculated to lead one from the earnest hope that first lead to the study of ethics: the hunger to know what is really good, the form of life actually worth living.

Hence, precious as the new interest in bioethics is, it can have unhappy consequences for many. Often young medical students approach the study of bioethics already in possession of some moral convictions that they realize are true, although the mode with which they grasp them is not scientific or clear. Both the Greek and Judaeo-Christian traditions held that it is very possible to possess with certainty true moral positions before one enrolls in an ethics course.²² Greek philosophers, in fact, tended to believe that the seeds of virtue had to be planted (by wise teachers: i.e., by those who knew something of good and evil) and by living among virtuous people, so that one came to know what is truly good by tasting what is truly good in virtuous action. Students often approach ethics courses hoping that these courses will reveal to them the roots and grounds of their deepest hopes and convictions. Unfortunately in badly taught courses they can become convinced that what they have known is not knowable; so that their last state is worse than the first.

When people become convinced that no particular position can be known to be noble and right, they can drift toward inhuman ethical positions. The contemporary bioethical world at times speaks of a new ethics that is about to overtake the old ethics. The supposedly "old" ethics, that of classical position of virtue and natural law, that of a religious view of truly good ways made known by divine revelation and intelligent understanding, is to be replaced by a self-styled "new" ethic: relativistic, without recognition of inalienable human rights in each person, consequentialist, ready to do evil if good will come of it. This new ethics is openly embraced by

many. A much quoted editorial in the journal *California Medicine* declares that the new ethic will be a relativist one. No longer will we define “the intrinsic worth and equal value of every human life regardless of its stage or condition.”²³ Already, the journal argues, “we” have ceased believing that. The needs of the time have driven us to place only relative value on individual human lives. If the quality of many lives can be improved by killing some human beings, we will want to do that; and we will; and we will create an ethics to justify it. In fact, we do this already. The article (clearly it supports abortion) forthrightly acknowledges that an abortion is the killing of a human being. When some pro-abortionist deny “the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous, whether intra- or extra-uterine until death,”²⁴ the reason for this curious denial is that they have not yet shaken off the hangups of the old ethic. They still feel that each human being should be treated as an end, not as a means. But they also feel (and this more strongly) that they want intensely to achieve their own longed for goals, and they wish to have them even if other human beings must suffer for it. Until they get courage to affirm boldly the new ethics, they must pretend they are not acting against the values of the old ethic that they clearly are acting against.

Such brazen anti-personalist stands can be found in the bioethical literature of our time. In fact, very many well known bioethicists defend views that assail the dignity of human persons. There are very many defenders of abortion, and growing numbers who would justify infanticide and euthanasia.²⁵ Despite the tragic experience with human experimentation by Nazi physicians, some bioethicists take intolerably casual attitudes toward experimentation on humans without informed consent.²⁶ Those who indoctrinate young people in relativistic consequentialism insist that they are not indoctrinating when they are trying to prove their principles, and so argue that no specific moral principles are always valid. Indoctrinating is what principled moralists do when they try to prove their principles.

IV. GOOD REASONS FOR HOPE.

But it would be absurd and demoralizing to suggest that entry into the world of contemporary bioethics is entry into a world simply dominated by relativism, consequentialism, rejection of the humane and insistent principles that have protected human dignity through the centuries. Nor should Catholic people, who often have reasons for a special anxiety about theologians who probe such issues, feel excessive concern. There have, indeed, been a number of moral thinkers in the Church, treating a variety of bioethical questions, who have conspicuously rejected the magisterial teaching of the Church. Some of them have been so honored by dissenting associates and by the media that a vague impression arises that these are the great and creative moralists of the day. But this is far from the truth. The great Catholic ethicists of the day are hardly those lionized by the *National Catholic Reporter*. If one were to seek the two English-speaking Catholic moralists today who are most respected throughout the world, by secular as well as religious thinkers, they would almost certainly be Elizabeth Anscombe, who holds the chair of Philosophy at Cambridge University, and John Finnis, of Oxford.²⁷ Interestingly, each of these (like the majority of Catholic moralists working today) is a moralist whose thought is fully in

accord with authentic Catholic teaching, personalistic, defending the human rights with clear teachings on moral absolutes, and successful in making peace between the received moral teaching of the western tradition and the legitimate needs of a contemporary expression of morality. As the Pope John Paul II Center for bioethics engages in moral research, it has no lack of great Catholic moral thinkers upon whom it can draw with confidence: creative and principled moralists like Germain Grisez, Vernon Bourke, Ralph McInerny, William May, Joseph Boyle.²⁸ And there is a wide range of non-catholic moralists, including the most creative among today's bioethical experts, whose fundamental principles are deeply in accord with the personalistic ethics of Catholicism. One need mention only a few names: Paul Ramsey, Arthur Dyck, Basil Mitchell, Stanley Hauerwas, Fred Carney. Should any wish to lament that the whole world has run off toward consequentialism and relativism, he would have to ignore the most intelligent and influential moralists of our time. The days are not bad ones for authentic Christian and personalistic ethics of a principled kind.

But there is one contemporary moralist who can most of all give heart to the creative ethicist today. Certainly it is a singular blessing that in this time of tension and of opportunity in moral thinking that a distinguished Catholic moralist should have been elected pope. John Paul II had many scholarly interests; but his fundamental work over these last thirty years has been that of the ethicist. He has studied the living questions of our time long and with great care, and has been in dialogue with the great minds of the times, teaching and lecturing not only in Poland, but throughout the world community. His election brought a remedy to a problem many had felt. The pope and bishops had been teaching one vision in moral thought; certain celebrated moralists were teaching another. The division between witnessing to faith and the insights of scholarship had to be bridged. Some feared that Church officials simply did not understand why the moralists were crying out for a change in standard teachings. But this pope clearly understands. And we have seldom had pastoral leaders with so much pastoral compassion. In him we have a new sign of hope and unity.²⁹

Like other great Catholic moralists of the time, John Paul has studied carefully the differences between the two kinds of thinking dominant in the world today. Consequentialist thinking is concerned with results: it is not so important what people do, i.e., what the actions that make up their lives are. What is significant will be the effects of their actions, what they bring about in the obscurities of this contingent world. The principled moralist, on the other hand, holds with the whole Catholic tradition that the actions one performs, the life one lives, is far more important than the consequences that may follow as physical consequences of these actions.³⁰ The logic of consequentialism is one that rejects absolutes: for a proportionate reason, one would be justified in doing the sorts of acts that authentic teaching always called intrinsically wrong. But principled thinking holds that men have inalienable rights, rights that may be violated for no proportionate reason whatever; that there are absolute duties, not in order to oppress men, but to guard authentic values and the dignity of each person.

John Paul's position on this question is very clear. "The human act is simultaneously transitive and non-transitive. It is transitive inasmuch as it goes to the other side of the subject, seeking an expression or an effect in the external world, and thus objectivises itself in some product. It is non-transitive in the measure in which 'remaining in the subject' in which it determines the quality and the value, and establishes his own 'fieri' essentially human. There-fore man, in acting not only fulfills some action, but in some way realizes himself, becomes himself." ³¹

That is to say, human actions cause effects in the world. But they also cause effects in the depths of the human person. The more profound and important effect is that which a human action has on the person himself. Our actions are our lives. When we choose to do the actions we do we choose to make ourselves the kinds of persons who do, such things. We create ourselves, and show the direction in which our heart is willing and desires to go.

When, even in tragic cases, one does a deed that is in itself simply a doing of evil (for example, starving to death a baby who is considered defective, or killing an aged and suffering person) in the hope that something good may come of it, then one is taking a view of the world very different from that which shaped the judgment of the saints. It is a view that producing good effects, having fine things *happen* in the world, is better and more important than *doing* actions which are free deeds honoring God by their goodness; and that having painful things happen is worse than having free persons deliberately doing deeds which are unequivocally attacks on real goods in real persons.³² At heart consequentialism is the view that the prime way of loving persons is that of making this world a pleasant and happy place; while the saints felt that the world is a place in which souls are made, in which persons are shaped by their own free actions. The most important thing that anyone can do is to do excellent and good deeds, not out of self-love or in a desire to esteem oneself for one's "virtue," but rather because one recognizes that the person as an image of God serves his brothers and sisters by pursuing only good in his life, pursuing it well, and never doing evil that good may come of it, never treating what is good in any person or personal act as if it were evil.

Medical ethics has gone astray most severely when it sought to justify doing bad kinds of deeds for excellent reasons. The most shocking pages in medical history flow from such decisions. Nazi doctors did not engage in human experimentation of cruel kinds simply to be cruel; they hoped to accomplish important goals useful for humanity by such vicious behavior. Now it is true that we have a duty to make this world a good place, to care about the consequences of our conduct. But we must care first of all about what we do, about the actions that are our life; and seek always to achieve good only by good means.

In treating one bioethical question in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John adverts to the very different conclusions than a principled and a consequentialistic mode of thinking may come to in this matter. And he noted with a certain intensity that the difference between the two views "is much wider and deeper than is usually thought, one which involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person."³³ To adopt the principled

view of morality that one must never, for any reason, attack any basic good in any person is to adopt the view that every person is of transcendent dignity; it is to treat all men as images of God. To adopt the view that one may attack basic goods in a person when there is a proportionate reason is to judge that in the end human beings may be treated as means serving the purposes of others.³⁴

One schooled in the paths of Christian wisdom will not do deeds that are direct attacks on any authentic good in any person in the vain hope of making the world better by such deeds. Whether the material world and the circumstances of human living will be better or worse in the future, we cannot know with certainty. We are uncertain of the effects of even our best intended actions. What we are sure of is that if we do acts that are faithful to the dignity of every person, and honor every human value in every person, then we will be honoring God in our life, and he who is the absolute ruler of providence will be able to make of all our labors something that serves the growth of the kingdom. St. Thomas More tried in every honorable way to save his life that he might participate more richly in goods that he loved on earth. But he was right in judging that it would be wrong to participate in every kind of good by means of doing an act which was itself wrong.³⁵ The reason for this is not that rules are to be more honored than persons, but that persons and human actions, what people do, and what they are is more important than what happens to them. The transient effects of our actions on the world and on persons can, as every medical professional and every intelligent person well knows, be frighteningly important. But in this world of persons, nothing is more important for the good of each and of all, than the excellence of the actions that are the core of our lives.

What modes of thinking and teaching and living will dominate in the world of bioethics in the years immediately before us? The answer is not predetermined: it lies in our own hands. The medical and life professions are surely tempted to yield to the blandishments of a “new” ethic – an ethic essentially like that of the pre-Socratics, who, having despaired of the possibility of coming to know what is absolutely good, encouraged their disciples instead to do what they earnestly wanted to do as though they did not know the dark depths of the human spirit when it despairs of knowing what is authentically good, and deserving of full loyalty. But the medical and life professions are tempted too by that newer and richer ethic of the Gold Age of Greece, and of the Enlightenment, and especially of the fire of the Judaeo-Christian visions – that ethics of personal rights, and principles that endure, and values that are good beyond measure – that ethic that requires self-discipline, yet gives freedom and dignity to the human spirit.

In recent years I have taught bioethics in a great many contexts: in secular and religious universities, to medical students, to seminarians. Obviously young people of our time feel the pressures of the age toward moral solutions which are convenient, but do not respect every person and every basic human value. But it has seemed to me that when the young people of our time begin to understand what is at stake, and what is it that they themselves want in their own lives, that they have almost universally chosen gladly to adopt that form of moral thinking that defends the dignity of the person more securely. The future is full of hope if we give our young

people a real opportunity to lay hold of the moral heritage they have a right to know well. But it will remain necessary to help them see how the bracing principles of Christian morality are not exercises in legalism, but protections of the freedom and dignity of the human person.

NOTES

¹ Major centers for the study of bioethics in this country include The Hastings Center (Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences), Hasting-on-Hudson, New York; The Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri and The Kennedy Center for the Study of Human Reproduction and Bioethics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.. Like the second of these, the Pope John Paul II Center, Cromwell, Connecticut, is concerned to study bioethical questions in light of the moral teaching of the Catholic Church.

² Useful and relatively complete continuing bibliographies include the *Bibliography of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences*, published by the Hastings Center; Walter Leroy, ed., *Bibliography of Bioethics* (Detroit: Gale Publishing Co., 1975 -) (a large volume is published each year in this series). The *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (New York: Free Press, 1978) is also an exceptionally good source for helpful bibliographies.

³ For a study of the growth of the study of bioethics, see R. Veatch, W. Gaylin, and C. Morgan, eds., *The Teaching of Medical Ethics* (Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Hastings Center, 1973). For a survey of the history of medical ethics and education in medical ethics, see the series of articles in the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, vol. 3 and 4, pp. 870-1007.

⁴ K.D. Clouser, "Bioethics," in *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, vol. 1, p. 120.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 124-25.

⁶ See Henry Veatch, "Ethics and Applied Ethics: an Introductory Note," *Listening* XVII (Winter, 1982), pp.3-6.

⁷ This essay is the sixth chapter of A.J. Ayer, *Logic, Truth, and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936). The second edition of this work has an important new preface (1946) modifying the militancy of the first edition's severe positivism.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 110.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

¹¹ This familiar position, that all values are based on subjective evaluations, so that nothing at all can be strictly and objectively known to be good or bad, is expressed, e.g., in R.B. Perry, *General Theory of Value* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926); it has been a common position among liberal behavioral scientists.

¹² This conclusion is defended by many, such as Professor R.M. Hare, of Oxford, because of a strange conviction that the kind of freedom required by morality demands that each person must freely choose his or her own moral principle (i.e., cannot possibly discover that any are true, and worthy of being freely chosen for that reason.) For these moralists no principle could be simply true and morally binding for anyone before one chose to commit oneself in a certain way. See Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 60 ff. See also the critique of this position by R. Lawler, *Philosophical Analysis and Ethics* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968), pp. 95-109.

¹³ Cf., e.g., C.L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), ch.1 and ch.11.

¹⁴ For a critique of these positions, see Paul C. Vitz, "'Values Clarification' in the Schools," *New Oxford Review*, June 1981, pp. 15-20, and "Secular Humanism and Morality," *New Oxford Review*, July-August 1981, pp. 12-126. See also Paul Philibert, "Moral Education and the Formation of Conscience," and William B. Smith, "The Meaning of Conscience," both in William May, ed., *Principles of Catholic Moral Life* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1981), pp. 383-411 and 361-382.

¹⁵ This point was stressed by Julian Huxley in his critique of Nazi ethics in "Evolutionary Ethics," The Romanes Lectures, 1943, in T.H. Huxley and J. Huxley, *Touchstone for Ethics* (New York: Harper, 1947), p. 114.

¹⁶ Henry Veatch, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸ Thus Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were passionately concerned to transcend the shadowy opinions that the Sophists dealt with, to examine life with depth and to pursue the real truth of things, to grasp what is actually good, what makes life actually worth living.

¹⁹ R. Lawler, "Professional Ethics Courses: Do They Corrupt the Young?," *Listening* (Winter, 1982), pp. 7-17.

²⁰ Granted their own ground rules, some of these studies are well-constructed indeed. Their surveys of ethical theories are conscientiously done (though they reveal no passion to pursue what might really be true in such

matters), and the collections of essays on specific questions are, in some cases, very well chosen. Among the best books of this kind one might note: S. Gorowitz et al., eds., *Moral Problems in Medicine* (Encino, Calif.: Dickenson, 1977).

²¹ John Henry Newman's reflections on this point remain instructive. See *The Idea of a University* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947) (originally published 1852), Lecture VIII.

²² Thus the *Republic* of Plato reflected a Greek conviction that one could come to a personal knowledge of what is good only if one were educated in ways that led to virtue; but that the virtuous man can in fact come to a knowledge of what is good. Christian philosophies had many ways of teaching that young people need to be formed in excellent ways of living before they will be able to grasp intellectually the ultimate roots of the excellence of these ways; but that coming to true intellectual insight into these matters is possible.

²³ An Editorial, "A New Ethics for Medicine and Society," in *California Medicine*, September 1970, reprinted in R. Baum, ed., *Ethical Arguments for Analysis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976), p. 186.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Cf. e.g., Michael Tooley, "Infanticide and Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1973) pp.37-65.

²⁶ For an introduction to this question, see Paul Ramsey, *The Patient as Person* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp.1-58; see also K. Lebacqz and R. Levine, "Informed Consent: Ethical and Moral Aspects," *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, vol. II, pp. 754-62.

²⁷ G.E.M. Anscombe is Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge University. Her collected works have recently been published by the University of Minnesota Press: G.E.M. Anscombe, *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 3 vol. John M. Finnis is Praelector in Jurisprudence and University College and Reader in Law, University of Oxford. He has recently published *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Law Series, 1980). Anscombe and Finnis are certainly, in the eyes of the secular intellectual community, the most respected of Catholic moral theorists. Even more creative is the work of Germain Grisez, professor of moral theology at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, Md. Grisez is now preparing a striking new moral synthesis in moral theology that is far more inclusive and innovative than the work of any of the prominent dissenters, yet entirely faithful to received Catholic teaching. See especially his *Christian Moral Principles*, Second Draft, a privately printed preliminary edition (Emmitsburg, Md.: Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, 1981). This is a preparatory edition of the first volume of a projected four volume study of Catholic moral theology.

²⁸ We use the term "principled" in contrast with "consequentialist." In this distinction, the principle moralist holds that there are some principles which are known to be universally true, from which, in reflection on relevant facts, one can deduce true, certain, and exceptionless conclusions in some ethical questions. Consequentialists generally hold that there are no moral principles with specific though universal content that are known to be universally true. Thus for them slaying the wicked may be said to be generally wicked, but one would be justified in doing such a deed in a particular case if one has a proportionate reason for so doing. Some comments on consequentialism will be given below.

²⁹ Before his election to the papacy as John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla published many important works in moral theory and its application to contemporary problems. See especially his *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981). For his critique of consequentialism (utilitarianism) in this work, see pp. 34-39.

³⁰ See John Paul II's treatment of this point in his *Encyclical Letter "Laborem Exercens"* (September 14, 1981), nn. 6-9.

³¹ Karol Wojtyla, *Ocena mozliwosci*, p. 122; cited in A. Woznicki, *Karol Wojtyla's Existential Personalism* (New Britain, Ct.: Mariel, 1979), p. 47. See also R. Lawler, *The Christian Personalism of John Paul II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), pp. 51-74.

³² The contrast between the mode of thinking in scholarly saints like Thomas More and the positions of consequentialists is hard to exaggerate. Thomas More was utterly opposed to swearing falsely, even to save his own life, to save his wife and children, to provide the King with good counsellors, and the like. Calculation did not enter into such questions: faithfulness to true and enduring principles, to the goodness of truth and the duty never to act directly against it, were decisive, whatever the consequences. In defense of the position that one may properly act directly against great human goods for a proportionate reason, Richard McCormick expresses his belief that those who are unwilling to act directly against a great human good in some person for the sake of some other good probably do not love the good not acted for as do those who would willingly act directly against the basic good in question. See R. McCormick, *Ambiguity in Moral Choice* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1977), p. 88. Apply this to the situation in Thomas More's time: did those Englishmen who were willing to swear falsely, as Thomas was not, in order to care for their wives and children, and obtain other goals, really have a more intense love for their wives and children than Thomas More had for his? It would be an absurdity to pretend that; cf. his letters to

his daughter, and the studies of contemporary biographers. Thomas More loved intensely the goods he was to lose because he was faithful to the truth; but nothing could lead him to attack basic values like truth and loyalty to the faith. See E.E. Reynolds, *The Life and Death of Thomas More*, esp. chs. 27 and 28.

³³ John Paul II. *Apostolic Exhortation* "Familiaris Consortio," (November 22, 1981), n. 32.

³⁴ See the comments of Bernard Williams, of Cambridge University, on the demoralizing fruits of consequentialist thinking in J.J. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), esp. pp. 108-34. See also J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, pp. 111-25, and G. Grisez, "Against Consequentialism," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 23 (1978) pp. 21-38.

³⁵ The playwright Robert Bolt catches the spirit of More's principles thinking, his firm refusal to do the evil and self-destroying deed of swearing falsely for any reason whatever, throughout his *A Man for All Seasons* (New York: Random House, 1960).