

## **BIRTH, SUFFERING AND DEATH**

# Philosophy and Medicine 41

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## CATHOLIC STUDIES IN BIOETHICS 1

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# BIRTH, SUFFERING, AND DEATH

## CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVES AT THE EDGES OF LIFE

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FOREWORD

For centuries the Roman Catholic Church has been concerned with the moral implications of medical practice. Indeed, until two decades ago, Catholic moral theologians were the major source of moral guidance, scholarly reflection and teaching on a variety of medical-moral topics, particularly those bearing on human life. Many, not only those within the Catholic communion, turned to the Church for guidance as each new possibility for altering the conditions of human life posed new challenges to long held moral values.

Two decades ago, the center of gravity of ethical reflection shifted sharply from theologians and Christian philosophers to more secular thinkers. A confluence of forces was responsible for this metamorphosis – an exponential rate of increase in medical technologies, expanded education of the public, the growth of participatory democracy, the entry of courts and legislation into what had previously been private matters, the trend of morality towards pluralism and individual freedom and the depreciation of church and religious doctrines generally. Most significant was the entry of professional philosophers into the debate, for the first time. It is a curious paradox that, until the mid-sixties, professional philosophers largely ignored medical ethics. Today they are the most influential shapers of public and professional opinion.

As a result, the character of contemporary biomedical ethical discourse has become predominantly secular. Subjects of the utmost importance – abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, terminating life support, surrogate parenthood, definitions of death, personhood, and individuality, the ontological status of the embryo, to name a few, are all treated in ways which prescind from, and even depreciate, religious values. Contemporary philosophical ethics is predominantly pluralistic, libertarian, and individualistic. It is antipathetic to natural law arguments. Its ethos is relativistic, strongly utilitarian and inclined to social, cultural and historical determinism. In this intellectual climate religious arguments are inadmissible. To cope with the loss of metaphysical foundations, procedural ethics has virtually displaced substantive ethics. Many deny



that there is any “foundation” for bioethics except autonomy, or coherence and “consensus” among and between, competing ethical theories. In this context religious commitments are considered outmoded, “unreasonable” and divisive. Any source of moral authority other than law or public consensus is discredited. Believers whatever their persuasion are virtually disenfranchised in public policy debates.

Given the profoundly non-theological orientation of biomedical ethics today there is urgent need for a more visible, witness to the Catholic Perspective on Medical Morals. To be effective that witness must be informed, intelligent, and scholarly. It must be in dialogue with the mainstream of thinkers in secular biomedical ethics. The Christian ethical points of view must be authentically, responsibly, and charitably presented. Such an effort must be international and trans-cultural, since medical progress presents a world-wide challenge to moral values.

The new series inaugurated with this volume, is a welcome addition to the expanding world literature in biomedical ethics. It offers a forum in which qualified scholars in the Roman Catholic Tradition may present their critical reflections for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. This series will complement the Philosophy and Medicine series also published by Kluwer. Edited as it is by a panel of international scholars, the new series promises to reach a wide audience among theologians, health professionals, and moral philosophers.

To the Editors: Ad multos Annos!

## PREFACE

Pope John XXIII said at the opening of the Second Vatican Council: "Recent research and discoveries in the sciences, in history, and in philosophy bring up new problems which have an important bearing on life itself and demand new scrutiny by theologians" (Pope John XXIII). The late Dr. André Hellegers, the founder of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University, in 1972 echoed Pope John's words. He insisted that there was a real need for careful, serious, and prayerful dialogue between biomedical scientists and medical practitioners on the one hand and Roman Catholic philosophers and theologians on the other. He recognized that the magnificent new and unprecedented advances in medical science and technology had brought concomitant problems concerning moral behavior which added even greater urgency for such dialogues. New and correct scientific facts need to be incorporated into the reflections of ethicists and moral theologians so that in light of newly discovered knowledge a keener discernment of the Revelation may be possible. Accurate knowledge or truth is always presupposed in moral affirmations about human behavior. And truth may be found, Thomas asserted, on the basis of human reason reflecting on human nature in the light of faith.

Pope John Paul II addressed the issue of ethics and medicine on October 27, 1980. When speaking in an audience granted to the members of the Italian Society of Internal Medicine and the Italian Society of General Surgery, on the occasion of their annual meeting held in Rome, the Pope appealed to the physicians to help in promoting a science that is tailored to man's real needs and not a science merely pursuing technological progress and organizational efficiency for its own sake (Pope John Paul II). As a response to this appeal of the Holy Father, in March of 1981 representatives of some member universities of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) and other institutions met in Milan under the Chairmanship of the Rector Magnificus of the Catholic University of Italy, the late Professor Giuseppe Lazzati, to organize a group that could promote the type of dialogue referred to above. In time

the group was organized as the International Study Group on Bioethics (ISGB) of the IFCU.

The main goal of the ISGB is to promote dialogue among medical scientists on the one hand and Roman Catholic ethicists and moral theologians on the other. As a first step this dialogue was limited to Roman Catholic ethicists and moral theologians, but as time goes on it is to be expanded into an ecumenical dialogue. By this means it is hoped that the ethicists and theologians will have correct and timely facts concerning whatever biomedical and technological advances they may discuss. Thus they may incorporate into their ethical reflections the most up-to-date scientific knowledge. Such exchanges of information, with the subsequent identification of the moral problems which arise, may enhance the exploration of the solutions to these identified moral problems. The ISGB has from the beginning of its work offered the fruits of these dialogues to the Magisterium from loyal members of the Church.

Since 1981, some 19 dialogues have been held. Invited participants have included prominent and knowledgeable biomedical scientists and medical practitioners, of various religious persuasions and each a noted figure in his or her field, and Roman Catholic philosophers and theologians reflecting both conservative and liberal views. Some of the subjects covered in these dialogues have been: the concept of nature; embryology; growth and development; genetic engineering; human genetics and neonatology; foetal therapeutics; genetic treatment; new obstetrical technologies; definitions of death; the persistent vegetative state; and modern epidemic diseases.

To insure free, open, and uninhibited discussion of these subjects from the scientific and ethical viewpoints, it was determined at the outset that no record of the proceedings would be published. Individual participants found that the dialogues have been rich, fruitful, and illuminating. It has always been the policy that individual participants were free to publish their own presentation if they so wished. Many of the individual participants have subsequently published a reworking of their paper in one or another scholarly journal (e.g., Demmer, 1988). The ISGB came to the realization that much valuable philosophical and theological reflection upon these topics was being lost. In 1988 it collected some of the articles already published individually and republished them, with permission, as a collection concerned issues surrounding the beginnings of life (Abel, Boné, Harvey, 1988).

It became apparent from this endeavor that a vehicle was needed to

offer those scholars who participated in the dialogues and who wished to do so, the opportunity of publishing their reflections in a timely manner and as a part of a group of essays organized about a particular biomedical topic or technology. Such an opportunity came about when the editors and publisher of the series *Philosophy and Medicine* conceived the idea of a subseries for Catholic bioethics. Thus the series *Catholic Studies in Bioethics* was born!

Initially one volume will be published annually. The series will have only an indirect relation to the ISGB. It will have editors and an editorial board independent of the ISGB and responsible only to the editors of the series *Philosophy and Medicine* and the publisher. It will, however, give preference to any participant in any of the dialogues sponsored by the ISGB for consideration of publication of his or her paper. Other papers fitting the topic under discussion will be solicited from appropriate scholars as required for completeness in the exploration of a given topic.

Both the Editors are members of the ISGB. The Associate Editor is the managing editor for the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*. The Editors, Associate Editor, and all members of the Editorial Board as well, are active practicing Catholic scholars in one or more fields of medicine, biomedical science, ministry, ethics, or moral theology. They are an international group. They represent a cross-generational age mix. They come from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. They represent varying viewpoints from conservative to liberal within the Roman Catholic tradition. A listing of these individuals and their qualifications follows:

Name	Degree	Institution Awarding	Field	Current Position
Francesc Abel, S.J.	D.Med.	University of Barcelona	Med. (GYN), Ethics, Demography	Director, Borja Institute of Bioethics, Barcelona
	M.A.			
Antonio Autiero	D.Phil. D.Theol.	Pontifical Lateran University	Moral Theology	Prof. of Theology, University of Münster
Thomas J. Bole, III	Ph.D.	University of Texas	Moral Theology	Prof. Med. Ethics University of Oklahoma, U.S.A.
Paolo Catorini	D.Med. D.Phil.	U. of Pavia Catholic U. of Italy	Philosophy of Medicine Medical Ethics	Coord., School of Med. Hum., Institute San

Klaus Demmer	S. T. D.	Pontifical Gregorian University	Moral Theology	Raffaele, Milan Professor of Moral Theology, Pontifical Gregorian University
Josef F. Fuchs S.J.	D. Theol.	University of Münster	Moral Theology	Professor of Moral Theology, Emeritus, Pontifical Gregorian University
Erny Gillen	S.T.D.	Catholic University of Louvain	Moral Theology	Secretary-General, Caritas, Luxembourg
John Collins Harvey	M.D. Ph.D.	Johns Hopkins St. Mary's U. (Baltimore)	Med. (Geriatrics), Bioethics, Moral Theology	Prof. Med. Emeritus, Georgetown U., Sen. Research Scholar, Kennedy Institute
John M. Haas	S.T.L. Ph.D.	University of Fribourg Catholic University of America	Moral Theology	Professor of Moral Theology, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary
Bernard Hoose	S.T.D.	Pontifical Gregorian University	Moral Theology	Lecturer, Missionary Institute, London
Johannes Huber	D. Med. D. Theol.	University of Vienna	Med. (OB/GYN), Moral Theology	Prof. of OB/GYN, Univ. of Vienna
William M. Joensen	M.A. (Theol.)	Pontifical Coll. Josophinum (Ohio)	Pastoral Ministry, Moral Theology	Associate Pastor, Sacred Heart Church, Waterloo, Iowa, USA
James F. Keenan, S.J.	S.T.D.	Pontifical Gregorian University	Moral Theology	Asst. Prof. Theol., Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Mass.
James J. McCartney, OSA	Ph.D.	Georgetown University	Moral Theology	Assoc. Prof. Phil., Villanova U., Penn.
Jean Porter	Ph.D.	Yale University	Christ. Eth., Moral Theology	Asst. Prof. U. of Notre Dame, Indiana
Frank H. Rossi	S.T.L.	Pontifical Lateran University	Pastoral Ministry, Moral Theology	Vice-Chancellor, Diocese of Galveston-Houston, Texas
Edward C. Vacek, S.J.	Ph.D.	Northwestern University	Moral Theology, Pastoral Theology	Assoc. Prof. Weston School of Theol., Cambridge, Mass.

Paul J.M. van Tongeren	Ph.D.	Catholic University of Louvain	Moral Philosophy	Prof. Moral Phil., Cath. U. Nijmegen
Matthias Volkenandt	D.Med. Dipl. Theol.	University of Bonn	Med. (Oncology), Moral Theology	Fellow, Sloan- Kettering Cancer Center, New York
James J. Walter	Ph.D.	Catholic University of Louvain	Christ. Eth., Moral Theology	Prof. Christ. Eth., Loyola U., Chicago
Kevin W. Wildes, S.J.	M.S. M.Div. M.A. M.A. Ph.D.	Fordham Weston Weston Rice U.	Philos. Ministry Theology Philosophy	Philosophy Dept., and The Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University, Washington

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Each volume will deal with a particular topic relating to medical discovery, praxis, or technology which creates ethical problems needful of consideration. The contents of that volume will explore that topic from the scientific, ethical, social, and theological considerations within the context of the Roman Catholic tradition. In no sense will these essays be the final words on such subjects – that is the task of the authoritative Magisterium. These presentations will merely be the reflections of the invited scholars contributing their thoughts upon the topics in the hopes of furthering our understanding of a solution to these human problems. In this way the dialogue, so dear to the heart of Dr. André Hellegers, may be enhanced.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium), The Catholic University of Italy (Milan), Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.), The Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome), The University of Santo Thomas (Manila), and the Borja Institute for Bioethics (Barcelona).

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