

## Moral Pluralism and the Crisis of Secular Bioethics: Why Orthodox Christian Bioethics has the Solution

H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. \*

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### I. Introduction

Moral pluralism is real. Yet, its full implications have generally been inadequately appreciated. This is nowhere more the case than with respect to the project of secular bioethics: the project of establishing a set of uncontroversial moral norms that can guide health care and the biomedical sciences. Our *de facto* moral pluralism is a persistent threat to the search for consensus. Moreover, the principled character of this pluralism is a foundational threat to the project of establishing through sound rational argument a canonical ethics that applied ethics should apply. I will lay out the general contours of the moral pluralism we confront and its implications for secular bioethics, showing how this moral pluralism has undermined the capacity of secular bioethics to keep the significant moral and public policy promises it made as bioethics arose in the early 1970s. Against the background of these secular moral and health care policy challenges, I will then indicate why Orthodox Christianity's approach to morality and to the questions raised by health care and the biomedical sciences is so different.

My goal will be to indicate, and I mean simply to indicate, the gulf between an Orthodox Christian understanding of bioethics and those understandings that frame secular bioethics. In so doing, I will note that much of Western Christian bioethics has a deep consanguinity with contemporary secular bioethics. Orthodox Christian

bioethics stands out in understanding that the meaning of reality is deeply personal – it is the Trinity. As a consequence, morality and bioethics are not about pursuing impersonally appreciable goods or honoring personally detached right making conditions, but about coming into a relationship with the Trinity. Orthodox Christian bioethics points the way through the moral pluralism that fragments secular bioethics to the Trinity, Who is the Source and the Goal of all reality.

## II. Moral Pluralism as a Threat to the Coherence of Bioethics

Not all approaches to reality regard reality in the same fashion. For example, all basic concepts in physics, medicine, theology, and morality are located within particular and often disparate approaches to reality. Thus, although both Newton, and Einstein spoke about time and space, mass and energy, the meanings of these terms are different. They are set within different understandings of the projects of physics. The medicine of Hippocrates and Galen, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, and the contemporary, dominant, scientific account of medicine all speak of disease, health, and cure. The meanings of these terms, however, are different within these different understandings of medicine. So, too, utilitarians and Kantians, atheists and theists, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians engage terms such as good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice with quite different meanings. The meanings of these terms are nevertheless different. They are set within different understandings of morality because these terms are supported by foundationally disparate understandings of morality and reality. The impact of such differences in framing contexts has been well appreciated for centuries and has been underscored most recently in the work of such as Ludwik Fleck (1935), Thomas Kuhn (1962), and G.E.M. Anscombe (1958). The difficulty for contemporary bioethics, which primarily aspires not simply to support a sustained intellectual debate, but to guide public

policy, is that it cannot provide honest, unambiguous guidance without suppressing the reality of moral pluralism.

The deepest of the moral clefs in our contemporary culture is that which separates Christian bioethics, especially Orthodox Christian bioethics, from secular bioethics. This gulf separates those who act, understanding that a personal God lives and commands, from those who act and live as if He did not exist. On the one hand, there are those who approach moral issues in terms of agnostic or atheistic assumptions. They regard the universe and all human existence as if it ultimately came from nowhere, was going nowhere, and without any ultimate meaning. On the other hand, there are those who recognize that the universe comes from the act of a Creator God and is aimed at His purposes such that all of human life is appreciated as having ultimate significance. Traditional Christians live their lives in terms of theistic understandings that set them over against the dominant secular culture that has emerged. These differences in guiding commitments constitute a major cultural fault-line separating massively divergent, indeed conflicting moral and metaphysical views of reality. All looks different, depending on which side of this gulf one lives one's life.

From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, this gulf has opened ever wider in Western European culture, separating the traditional Christian cultures of an already fragmented Europe from a secular culture framed *inter alia* by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the laicism of late-19<sup>th</sup>-century France. By the mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> century changes in constitutional law (American and West European) recast the public forum in secular terms so that the dominant culture of the West now bears the marks of being shaped after and through the disestablishment of Christianity. This still-widening gulf has been cardinal to the emergence of the controversies and battles

of the culture wars, struggles between disparate moral and bioethical perspectives over their roles in the public space. The culture wars that this gulf engenders, are still growing in their scope and impact. From Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) to Richard Rorty (1931-2007), there has been an increasing recognition that the disengagement of morality from a reality transcendent to the horizon of the finite and the immanent is connected to profound cultural consequences. However, neither Hegel nor Rorty fully appreciated and/or articulated the implications of this disengagement.<sup>i</sup> They continued to hold that one could live with contingently binding moral views, as if such moral views could nevertheless give compelling moral guidance, even after the metaphysical foundations of those moral views have collapsed. After God, and once morality is disconnected from being, morality and bioethics become cultural creations that are in principle intractably plural and no longer able to trump considerations of prudence. Further, the secular moral authority of the more-than-minimal state is radically deflated to that of merely a *modus vivendi* in which it is at best generally but not necessarily prudent to acquiesce.

How secular morality lost its metaphysical force is better appreciated if one contrasts it with the moral understanding it replaced. The moral perspective of the Christian West, which forms the historical background against which contemporary secular morality and its contemporary secular bioethics developed, presupposed a unity of morality grounded in God, which is no longer available to a fully secular morality or bioethics. The traditional Western Christian view understood morality as possessing a deep unity through having its genesis, justification, and motivating ground rooted in God. While from a secular perspective, the genesis of morality may be considered to lie in socio-biologically-based adaptations to certain environments, in contrast for traditional Judeo-Christian understandings, the content of morality

comes from the will of the Creator. In addition, the justification of morality in Western Christendom was regarded as secured by a moral rationality grounded in the Divine perspective, which was taken to be the ground and exemplar of rationality. Finally, a cardinal motivation for moral action was secured by the conviction that God rewards those who act rightly in eternity and eternally punishes the evil. The general loss of the recognition of sanctions for immoral actions changed the meaning of morality. As Anscombe observes, without God the very sense of moral obligation is transformed. “It is as if the notion ‘criminal’ were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had been abolished and forgotten” (p. 6). The result is, also, that once morality is located within the horizon of the finite and the immanent, there is no reason to hold that morality must be unitary. There is no God’s-eye perspective in terms of which to guarantee or to presuppose the unity of morality. Moral pluralism, as a consequence, attains a principled status.

Despite this state of affairs, there has been a general reluctance to acknowledge our moral and bioethical pluralism. Indeed, a frank recognition of moral pluralism would bring into question the project of bioethics as a ground for a morally acceptable health care policy. The difficulty is that we do not share one morality, if by a morality one means a generally coherent set of settled judgments about what it is to act rightly, about how to pursue the good, and about what it means to be virtuous as well as to have a good character. There are numerous incompatible sets of such judgments. We are separated by different moralities because moralities are divergent in terms of how they regard the good, the right, and the virtuous. Moralities need only order key human goods and right-making conditions in different fashions to be different. Depending on how one ranks liberty, equality, prosperity, and security, either one will endorse a social-democratic morality and polity, or one will endorse an

elitist, capitalist-Confucian morality and polity, such as that which is dominant in Singapore. Some moralities may even involve special values or concerns, such as holiness and obedience to God, which are not shared with other moralities. Moralities are different when they support discordant views about cardinal elements of human life, such as when it is obligatory, permitted, or forbidden to take human life, have sex, and re-distribute property. Moralities are separated by foundational disagreements regarding such issues as the moral propriety of abortion, homosexual acts, social-welfare states, capital punishment, and physician-assisted suicide. Moral diversity is manifest (Engelhardt 1996, chap. 4).

A plurality of moralities produces a plurality of bioethics. Bioethics is irreducibly plural, because different bioethics are grounded in different moral and metaphysical views secured by disparate moral and metaphysical premises and rules of evidence. There is, for example, a growing Confucian bioethics literature that focuses on understanding bioethics in terms quite different from those dominant in many American circles (Fan 2007, 2009; Qiu 2004). Confucian bioethics would step away from individual consent so as to re-establish family consent (Chan 2004). The recognition that moral pluralism cannot be set aside by sound rational argument is at least as old as Protagoras (480-410 B.C.) and is classically summarized by Agrippa, a 3<sup>rd</sup>-century philosopher, who noted the intractability of moral pluralism by observing that there are five ways, the *pente tropoi*, for recognizing that philosophical argument can not resolve foundational moral disputes, namely that no one has succeeded in conclusively resolving the disputes at hand. Disputants argue from their own perspective and therefore past each other. Finally, absent common basic premises and rules of evidence, disputants argue in a circle, beg the question, or engage in an infinite regress.

The point is that we are destined to live with moral and bioethical differences, because moral and bioethical controversies are irresolvable by secular sound rational argument. This is in principle the case because the advocates of disparate positions in major moral and public policy controversies do not share common moral and metaphysical premises or rules of evidence. As a consequence, they cannot in principle resolve their moral and bioethical controversies by secular sound rational argument. This state of moral pluralism is also *de facto* the case, as shown by the persistence of moral dissidents even in the face of the Inquisition and gulags. This moral diversity, however, does not entail a moral relativism. That is, one may be forced to accept a secular moral epistemological skepticism, but a metaphysical moral skepticism does not follow. However, it does follow that secular bioethics cannot provide uncontroversial moral guidance.

The consequences of embracing a thoroughgoing secular morality are wide-ranging. If one is guided by a methodological atheism or agnosticism, not only is there no ground for the assumption of a single, canonical moral point of view, a final, God's-eye perspective that can in principle give unity to morality, but there is also a general deflation of the force of morality and therefore of the force of secular bioethics. That is, if reality comes from nowhere, goes to nowhere, and for no discernible ultimate purpose, why ought one always to act morally? Or, to restate matters, why would it always be rational to act in ways that affirm a disinterested affirmation of the good and/or a disinterested regard for right-making conditions. These considerations drove Kant to articulate his practical postulates of God's existence and of immortality, despite his own likely agnosticism, if not atheism.<sup>ii</sup> Kant recognizes that without the postulate that God exists, in cases of conflict between moral rationality and prudence it is far from clear why moral rationality should

always trump prudential rationality, namely, the pursuit of one's own good and the good of those to whom one is most committed.<sup>iii</sup> For example, if acting disinterestedly to honor general right-making conditions and/or if acting disinterestedly to maximize the greatest good for the greatest number would lead to the protracted, painful, debasing death of oneself, one's family, and all one's friends, and if acting instead to violate a minor right-making condition and slightly decrease the greatest good for the greatest number would not only protect one's family from these untoward outcomes but would also greatly benefit them, would it not be rational in an otherwise meaningless universe to act prudently although nonetheless immorally?

Once the plausibility of favoring prudence over morality is established in limited cases, then one can proceed to generalize the question of when concerns of prudence should trump those of morality by incrementally decreasing the harms from acting morally and by increasing the benefits from acting prudently. A definitive answer to the question as to when concerns of prudence ought to trump concerns of morality cannot be given without a canonical background normative perspective that can authoritatively weigh the costs of acting immorally versus imprudently, a condition secular morality cannot supply. As a consequence, not only are secular morality and therefore secular bioethics not just in principle plural, but secular morality can no longer necessarily be seen to trump the concerns of prudence, with the consequence that the force of morality is substantively deflated. In addition, in the absence of a canonical moral perspective and of a compelling force for morality over prudence, the authority of the more-than-minimal state is radically deflated to that of a *modus vivendi*.<sup>iv</sup>

The point is that once morality, and for that matter bioethics are disengaged from a recognition of God's existence, the character of morality and bioethics is

substantively changed, because there is no longer in principle a single, canonical morality. Again, this is the case first because, when one no longer recognizes a God's-eye view that could at least in principle identify one morality or bioethics as canonical, morality and bioethics are left in principle plural. Moreover, once there is disengagement from ultimate meaning, there is no longer a standpoint that requires secular moral rationality always to trump prudential rationality. Ironically, this background state of affairs and its implications were poorly appreciated during the early genesis of secular bioethics, particularly that this pluralism would pose a substantive challenge to the moral authority of secular health care policy. Instead, what was prominent was the drive to marginalize religious morality in the face of substantive changes in the dominant culture of the West. These cultural changes secured the secularization of the public culture of the West. As bioethics took shape, these problems at the root of secular morality were not acknowledged. It was not recognized that morality's fragmentation into a plurality of moralities could no longer in principle secure a rational justification for a secular morality over against the claims of prudential rationality. Secular bioethics as it emerged in the early 1970s was therefore framed in terms of a robust Enlightenment presupposition that sound rational argument could secure the justification for a canonical, content-full morality that could provide the foundations for a content-full, secular bioethics.

### III. Secular Bioethics in the Ruins of Christendom

It is against this background of substantive cultural changes and a robust faith in the capacities of philosophical reflection and argument to establish a canonical ethics that an applied ethics could apply, that concerns with medical-moral problems were gathered under the rubric bioethics. Despite the foundational difficulties that lie at the roots of a secular morality, bioethics was born of robust and persistent

Enlightenment hopes. Bioethics emerged in the early 1970s as an attempt to secure canonical secular moral guidance for health care, the biomedical sciences, and health care policy in a newly normatively secular society undergoing rapid change. Although the term “bioethics” is at least eighty years old and has roots in reflections by Fritz Jahr on moral obligations to living things (Jahr 1927), and although the term was re-engaged or re-coined by Van Rensselaer Potter in 1970 to indicate an environment- and survival-compatible ethos, the term “bioethics” took on its contemporary significance in 1971 with the beginnings of the Center for Bioethics at Georgetown University, nurtured by strong natural-law assumptions. Bioethics was conceived as an intellectual project to provide a general, secular, rational basis for medical morality, public policy, and law.

Bioethics was engendered to fill a major cultural and moral vacuum created by the secularization of society and the crisis of traditional social structures. As the traditional moral self-governance of the medical profession was brought into question, as traditional societal norms (e.g., “father knows best”) were under assault, as the authority of individuals gained salience over the authority of families and of the medical profession and medical professionals, and as society’s religious-theological framework were privatized and marginalized, challenging the moral authority of priests, ministers, and rabbis, the result was that government bodies, hospitals, health care professionals, researchers, patients, and their families sought moral guidance as to how properly to engage the increasing promises of medicine and the biomedical sciences. Bioethics was engendered to fill this cultural and moral vacuum on two levels. First, bioethics was to provide a general, rationally grounded secular moral perspective on the basis of which intellectuals could give guidance for law and public policy. Bioethics was articulated in order to secure an intellectual moral framework

for intellectual guidance and to provide basic cultural orientation. The result was the creation of the equivalent of a secular moral theology. The immense popularity of Beauchamp and Childress's *Principles of Bioethics* (1979) reflected the hunger for a canonical secular moral perspective *cum* bioethics, moral diversity to the contrary notwithstanding. In addition to this creation of a canonical, secular bioethics, the secular equivalent of a cadre of priests and chaplains was crafted in order to give concrete guidance. These new authority figures were culturally ordained (i.e., authorized) to provide bioethics consultation, serve on ethics committees, etc. They became the equivalent of secular chaplains.

However, given the persistence of moral pluralism, secular clinical bioethicists infrequently give normative moral guidance. Instead, secular clinical bioethicists usually provide services that are not the services expected from experts regarding a normative morality (e.g., moral theologians in contrast tend to give content-full moral guidance). Indeed, the usual services of clinical bioethicists include providing legal advice (about informed consent, advance directives, etc.), mediating conflicts, and offering non-normative moral services, such as clarifying concepts and analyzing arguments. Clinical bioethicists as a profession provide a collage of services, which rarely include frankly normative guidance in their bundle of tasks. As a default strategy, appeal is generally made to giving guidance in conformity with established law and policy, or is directed by the wishes or consent of those involved. The view becomes that, if one cannot discover what one ought to do, then at least through consent one can in this moral vacuum create a common project. Rarely is an appeal made to a concrete normative view of the moral life or of proper action, especially when approaching issues such as abortion and end-of-life decision-making.

This step away from concrete moral direction reflects a recognition that within secular bioethics matters of life and death, from abortion to euthanasia, remain as cardinal points of cultural conflict, thus placing bioethics at the center of the culture wars and rendering frank normative advice disruptive and divisive. As with the secular revolution of the Enlightenment, so, too, with regard to bioethics, the hopes for a uniformity of moral vision have gone aground on an intractable moral pluralism and a plurality of views of the politically reasonable. On the one hand, there appears to be a growing recognition that substantive bioethical controversies are interminable in the absence of common normative premises (e.g., as reflected in the consequent priority of freedom over equality) and rules of evidence (e.g., the consequent priority of consent over “moral intuitions”). On the other hand, to complicate matters further, despite the failure of the Enlightenment aspirations of bioethics, and in the face of robust moral disagreement, there are passionate claims of secular bioethical consensus in the absence not only of consensus, but of an account as to what amount of agreement regarding which moral issues and by whom should count for what. In any event, where there is moral content, it is not only disengaged from any acknowledgement of ultimate meaning, but it is plural. There is no canonical secular global bioethics (Engelhardt 2006).

#### IV. Why Orthodox Christian Bioethics is so Different

Against this background, Orthodox Christian bioethics stands out as quite different in content and function. First, Orthodox Christianity recognizes that all meaning is radically personal. Orthodox Christian bioethics at its foundation is about the relation of persons with a personal God. Secular bioethics at its foundation is about the relation of humans to goods, right-making conditions, and virtues that can be understood within the horizon of the finite and the immanent. In the case of

Orthodox Christian bioethics, all concerns about moral principles, indeed all relations with humans are recognized as incompletely and one-sidedly understood until they are understood within a rightly-ordered relationship with the Triune God. In the case of secular bioethics, all relations with humans are considered apart from the possibility of a relationship to such a God. In contrast, the focus in Orthodox Christian bioethics is not on a set of moral propositions defended by a detached secular-moral rationality, but is rather on a Truth that is Personal, namely, the Trinity, Who is approached through prayer and within an ascetical life. Christian bioethical concerns contrast with those of secular bioethics in being directed to aiming one's life at the Triune God.

Christian bioethics, unlike secular bioethics, is explicitly integral to the way to salvation. The epistemological, metaphysical, and axiological commitments of Orthodox Christianity, along with its theology and bioethics, thus contrast with that which frames not only secular bioethics, but also the bioethics of much of Western Christianity. Over against the discursive rational secular and even Western Christian reflections on bioethics, which aspire to be articulable in terms of the general canons of natural law or at least in terms of the canons of moral rationality available to all outside of right worship, Orthodox Christianity is embedded in a paradigm in which moral truth is not a set of disengaged rational propositions but a way of acting so as to unite oneself and others to the Persons of the Trinity. The consequences of these differences are far-reaching.

First, for Orthodox Christianity there is no moral philosophy or moral theology as an academically established third thing that can or should mediate the relationship between God and man, as this came to be taken for granted in the West.

One might think of the late Avery Cardinal Dulles's observation with regard to Western Christian theology that

In the late Middle Ages, ... university theology came into its own. ... The theologians of the time immersed themselves in highly technical questions about the processions in the blessed Trinity, the nature of the afterlife, the causality of the sacraments, and predestination. They debated such questions with the tools of Aristotelian logic and metaphysics. ...theology took on its distinctive identity... (Dulles 2008, p. 20).

The result for the emerging Western Christianity and its theology was the development of an independent morality under the stewardship of a philosophically-directed moral theology. Over against this view, Orthodox Christians do not have a morality, a moral theology, or a moral philosophy. The sole true mediator is Christ. Moreover, the Church is the body of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Second, and on an allied point, philosophy is not the handmaid of theology, but theology as the love of the wisdom of God is the true philosophy and the shepherd of non-Christian philosophy.<sup>v</sup> Theological moral knowledge checks purported philosophical moral knowledge.

True theological knowledge in the strict sense is thus personal knowledge, knowledge born of prayer and of illumination by the personal God. As Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos puts it, affirming the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas (A.D. 1296-1359), which teaching was endorsed at the Ninth Ecumenical Council (A.D. 1341, 1347, 1351), "theologians are the God-seers; those who have followed the 'method' of the Church and have attained to perfect faith, to the illumination of the nous and to divinization (theosis). Theology is the fruit of man's cure and the path which leads to cure and the acquisition of the knowledge of God" (Hierotheos 1994, p. 25). There is no independent morality that can be adequately understood outside of the life of right worship and right belief (Engelhardt 2005) and that could then be invoked to judge the proper character of a Christian bioethics. There is in this sense a

consanguinity with Orthodox Judaism, which recognizes a God Who commands, giving 613 laws to Jews and seven to Gentiles, the sons of Noah, with quite different bioethical implications, particularly regarding abortion, but likely also regarding end-of-life decision-making.<sup>vi</sup> We humans are the creatures of a radically transcendent God Who draws us to Him on His terms, not ours.<sup>vii</sup> He is the God Who commands.

These epistemological and metaphysical differences separating the foundations of Orthodox Christian bioethics from the bioethics of the West are very significant in their implications (Engelhardt 2000, chaps. 1-4). Like the differences among terms set in Aristotelian, Newtonian, and Einsteinian accounts of physics, crucial moral and ontological terms are set in different defining contexts. For example, in his account of the gulf dividing the moral, epistemological, and metaphysical world of Orthodox Christianity from that which emerged to frame Western Christianity, David Bradshaw stresses that Orthodox Christianity “has no concept of God. It views God not as an essence to be grasped intellectually, but as a personal reality known through His acts, and above all by oneself sharing in those acts” (Bradshaw 2004, p. 275). Orthodox Christianity recognizes that theology is in its foundation grounded in noetic empirical experience, with the result that there is quite a different sense of bioethics. As John Romanides puts it, “The Fathers do not say anything about God on the basis of philosophical reflection. They do not sit at their desks like the Scholastics in order to do theology, because when the Church Fathers theologize, speculation or reflection is strictly forbidden” (Romanides 2008, p. 85). Where academic study is essential within Roman Catholicism to the formation of theologians in their strict sense of the term, asceticism and prayer are essential in Orthodox Christianity to the preparation of theologians in the strict sense.

The result is that the paradigmatic theologians in the strict sense are the holy Fathers who experience God, who know God, not academics who know about God.<sup>viii</sup> In this experience, God is recognized in His essence as radically transcendent so that it is impossible to bridge the gulf between created and uncreated being. This has important implications for the sociology of theological and moral theological experts, because one would by no means necessarily expect to find those experts in the academy. Also, it is recognized that the good, the right, and the virtuous cannot be correctly understood, save with reference to the holy. *Pace* the *Euthyphro*, the good, the right, and the virtuous cannot adequately be understood apart from God (Engelhardt 2007), because the moral life cannot adequately be understood apart from coming into relationship with the Trinity. As a very lame analogy to the relation of the good to God, meant only to be heuristic and not directly instructive, one might think of a black hole at the center of a galaxy, which determines the movements of every star in the galaxy, while the internal state of the black hole remains forever unexperienced and unperceived. Orthodox Christian bioethics can only in a distorted fashion be appreciated apart from a life marked by a pursuit of salvation through right worship and right belief, because all rightly-ordered morality is grounded in the experience of the transcendent Trinity, not in an independent moral-philosophical framework. Nor can Orthodox Christian bioethical insights be adequately shared with others outside of a common life sustained by such a pursuit in right worship and right belief, because only through such a life of right worship and right belief can one rightly experience the presence of the Holy. Common terms might be used, but with different intensions and extensions.

On this point and in contrast to most moral understandings in the Christianities that emerged in the West, Orthodox Christianity recognizes the moral epistemology of

the first chapter of Romans to be like that involved when one looks through an icon and apprehends the holy. As with an icon, one looks through created reality to the Creator. Not to look through reality and see God requires, as St. Paul indicates, a willful turn from God.<sup>ix</sup> It is not that one concludes to God's existence in a discursive fashion on the basis in reality from evidence of God's existence. For example, St. John Chrysostom shows that the reference in the second chapter of Romans to the Gentiles or Greeks as having the *ergon* (Romans 2:15) of the law in their hearts identifies only those whose hearts are not closed to knowing the moral law due to false worship and wrong action.

[B]y Greeks he [St. Paul] here [Rom 2:14-15] means not them that worshipped idols, but them that adored God, that obeyed the law of nature, that strictly kept all things, save the Jewish observances, which contribute to piety, such as were Melchizedek and his, such as was Job, such as were the Ninevites, such as was Cornelius (Chrysostom 1994, "Homily V on Romans," vol. 11, p. 363).

To see rightly morally, one must have the grace that comes with rightly-directed piety. The turn to worship the creature rather than the Creator perverts the moral sense. Moral knowledge thus requires more than intellectual analysis and reflection. At its core, it demands an act of the will that encompasses a rightly-ordered turning to God and then His response. In fact, morality is nothing more than the rightly-ordered pursuit of the kingdom of God.

Traditional [ i.e., Orthodox] Christian bioethical understandings recognize, for example, that one will not get such end-of-life decision-making right, unless one is rightly aimed at God. In contrast with secular bioethical understandings, which are focused on right-making conditions such as free choice, and values such as personal dignity, along with death with dignity, Orthodox Christian bioethics articulates its concerns with regard to end-of-life decision-making in terms of the personal relationship of humans with the personal God, the Trinity. Nor is the discourse of

Orthodox Christian bioethical decision-making embedded in the more anonymous language of a natural-law ethics, but rather in the personal language of turning in repentance and love to one's Creator. This contrast even exists between traditional Christian bioethics and what emerged in the Roman Catholic synthesis of Christian, Aristotelian, and Stoic thought. This contrast lies at the roots of the difference between a natural-law legalism and a spiritually-directed, pastoral approach to decisions regarding the withholding and withdrawing of possibly life-preserving medical interventions. The difference is clear in the injunctions by St. Basil the Great regarding the proper use of medicine.

Whatever requires an undue amount of thought or trouble or involves a large expenditure of effort and causes our whole life to revolve, as it were, around solicitude for the flesh must be avoided by Christians. Consequently, we must take great care to employ this medical art, if it should be necessary, not as making it wholly accountable for our state of health or illness, but as redounding to the glory of God and as a parallel to the care given the soul (Basil 1962, pp. 331-332).

It is not simply that St. Basil reminds his reader to avoid that which would involve one in an inordinate solicitude for the flesh, but that he addresses his remarks to what is proper for Christians. He also underscores that the use of medicine must be integrated with the care of the soul. His point is that “we should keep as our objective (again I say it), our spiritual benefit...” (Basil 1962, p. 334).

Implicit in these injunctions of St. Basil is that we should avoid all-encompassing medical interventions that are the equivalent of holding on to this life as a physical idol. That is, we must avoid interventions that involve an undue solicitude for the flesh and that cannot be integrated into the responsible care of our soul. End-of-life decision-making is thus placed within the very personal struggle of repentance involved in our turn from ourselves to God. For this reason, as St. Basil concludes:

Therefore, whether we follow the precepts of the medical art or decline to have recourse to them for any of the reasons mentioned above, we should hold to our objective of pleasing God and see to it that the soul's benefit is assured, fulfilling thus the Apostle's precept: "Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God (I Cor 10:31)" (Basil 1962, pp. 336-337).

Although one can recognize a concern with determining what treatment is appropriate or inappropriate, as in Roman Catholic bioethics, the concern is articulated within a context and normative content that is centrally spiritual/therapeutic. Because the focus is not simply on natural-law concerns such as determining when the duty to preserve the good of physical life is defeated by burdens or a limited prospect for success, it is an approach that is not disengaged from the proper human striving to come into union with God.

The Roman Catholic position, a much later Western Christian development, attempted to marry Athens with Jerusalem, engendering as its offspring a secular morality, along with its bioethics. Such is not the case in the roots of traditional Christian concerns with end-of-life decision-making. Although there is an attention to what choices right reason requires, St. Basil's reflections are not set within the anonymous discourse of natural law, but within a paradigm of pastoral care. Orthodox Christian bioethics is lodged within an ascetical practice of pastoral care aimed at the spiritual cure of the soul, not within an intellectually independent, academic "science of ethics", to borrow a phrase from the Roman Catholic medical-moral manuals of the 1950s. Once again, the very logic at the roots of Orthodox Christian approaches to bioethical issues turns out to be foundationally different from that of secular bioethics. These two will invariably speak past each other or attempt to convert the other.

## V. Some Conclusions

What I have offered is in part a description and diagnosis of the problems that beset secular bioethics. This account has been lodged within an examination of the

foundational shift in the character of morality, once it is disconnected from a connection to the Source of all reality, God. All reality, all morality, are different if one approaches reality as if it came from nowhere, went to nowhere, and for no ultimate purpose. Once morality is dislodged from a possible God's-eye perspective, it fragments into a plurality of moralities, the authority of which is deflated. The implications of this state of affairs are that neither bioethics as a general discipline, nor clinical bioethicists in their multiple roles in hospitals and ethics committees, can give the unambiguous guidance that had been promised as bioethics took shape in the early 1970s. This state of affairs is that which Orthodox Christianity understands to be the result of disconnecting human life from the Source and Orientation of all meaning, the Triune God. Orthodox Christianity has the solution, though it is a fundamentally religious solution. Morality and bioethics must be relocated as elements of the path towards union with the Triune God, the path to salvation. As a consequence, Orthodox Christian bioethics and secular bioethics are set within radically different thought-styles, paradigms, understandings of what morality is about (Engelhardt 2000, chaps. 2-4).

Christian bioethics and secular bioethics do have some family resemblances. Again, their relation is somewhat like the various projects of medicine, which include not only the dominant scientific medicine that replaced traditional Western medicine in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but all alternative medicines as well, including traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, chiropractic, etc. Just as these various medicines do not share one paradigm or thought-style, and therefore do not share the same meaning of crucial notions such as disease, so that they do not share one concrete vision of what medicine is concretely about, neither does traditional Christian bioethics understand crucial moral notions in the same way that these are

engaged within the various secular bioethics. It is this gulf in understanding that in part undergirds the culture wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The differences and disagreements are defined within different paradigms of what one should be about in morality and the character of the responses one takes to be appropriate, as has been shown by the examination of Orthodox Christian versus secular bioethics. Their approaches to such bioethical issues are foundationally different. The culture wars will remain with us.

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Professor H Tristram Engelhardt is Professor at Rice University in Houston, Texas. He is also Professor Emeritus at Baylor College of Medicine. He is a member of St George's Antiochian Orthodox Church in Houston.

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\* H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Ph.D., M.D., is professor in the department of philosophy, Rice University, and professor emeritus in the department of medicine, Baylor College of Medicine.

<sup>i</sup> Hegel, in observing that with the vanguard culture of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there was “the feeling that ‘God Himself is dead’” (Hegel 1977, p. 190; Hegel 1968, p. 414), recognized that a major change was under way in the dominant culture of Europe.

<sup>ii</sup> Manfred Kuehn argues in his biography of Kant that “Kant did not really believe in God” (Kuehn 2001, pp. 391-2).

<sup>iii</sup> “Without a God and without a world invisible to us now but hoped for, the glorious ideas of morality are indeed objects of approval and admiration, but not springs of purpose and action” (Kant 1964, p. 640, A813=B841).

<sup>iv</sup> The minimal state preserves at least the internal authorization of the consent of those who freely participate in its structures.

<sup>v</sup> The characterization of philosophy as the handmaid of theology (*ancilla dominae*) was introduced by Peter Damian (1007-1072) and Gerard of Czanad (d. 1046) not in order to expand, but rather to limit, the authority of philosophy over theology. See, for example, Copleston 1962, vol. 2.1, p. 167.

<sup>vi</sup> Rabbinical authorities have created different norms (halakha) for both Jews and Gentiles bearing on issues of bioethics. This is clear with regard to the issue of abortion. Also, it is far from clear whether the rabbinic rulings regarding how one ought to treat a dying Jew who is *goses* [on the brink of death] would need to apply to the sons of Noah.

<sup>vii</sup> As an example of a law given to the sons of Noah and enforced within Orthodox Christianity, one might think of the prohibition against eating blood (“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” - Genesis 9:4), which was then reaffirmed by the first Council in Jerusalem reported in Acts 15:28-29. Note also Canon LXVII of the Quinisext Council (A.D. 691-2):

Divine Scripture has commanded us to “abstain from blood, and strangled flesh, and fornication” (Gen 9:3-4; Lev 17 and 18:13, Acts 15:28-29). We therefore suitably penance those who on account of their dainty stomach eat the blood of any animal after they have rendered it eatable by some art. If, therefore, anyone from now on should attempt to eat the blood of any animal, in any way whatsoever, if he be a clergy man, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman let him be excommunicated (Nicodemus & Agapius 1983, p. 371).

Similarly, Canon LXIII of the 85 Canons of the Apostles states, “If any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, or anyone else on the sacerdotal list at all, eat meat in the blood of its soul, or that has been killed by a wild beast, or that has died a natural death, let him be deposed. For the Law has forbidden this. But if any layman do the same, let him be excommunicated” (Nicodemus and Agapius 1983, p. 108). As with the Jews, so with the Orthodox Christians there are constraints on moral action difficult to

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derive from a general notion of rational moral department. Natural-law reflections are insufficient to the task.

<sup>viii</sup> 20<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox Christian theologians in the primary or strict sense include St. John of San Francisco (A.D. 1894-1966), Elder Joseph the Hesychast, the Cave-Dweller of the Holy Mountain (A.D. 1895-1959), Elder Paisios of Romania (†1993), Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos (A.D. 1924-1994), Elder Porphyrios (A.D. 1906-1991), St. Silouan the Athonite (A.D. 1866-1938), and Archimandrite Sophrony (A.D. 1896-1993).

<sup>ix</sup> In chapter 1 of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul underscores that all should have recognized God's existence and His demands, given the accessibility of knowledge of God. "So they [who do not recognize God] are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). They may fail to see rightly, because they attempt to fashion their own moral and metaphysical accounts. St. Paul notes that such persons can go awry because of their false reasonings. "They did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking...claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom 1:21-22). As St. John Chrysostom notes,

Did He send them a voice from above? By no means. But what was able to draw them to Him more than a voice, that He did, by putting before them the Creation, so that both wise, and unlearned, and Scythian, and barbarian, having through sight learned the beauty of the things which were seen, might mount up to God. Wherefore he says, "For the invisible things of Him from the Creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made" (Chrysostom 1994, "Homily III on Romans," vol. 11, p. 352).

What is described is not a discursive conclusion to God's existence, but rather an experiential apprehension of His existence.