The Principle Features of Medical Ethics and the Crisis of Moral Relativism

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Introduction

Since the US Supreme Court ruling of Roe versus Wade in 1973, a ruling which legalized abortion on demand in every state of the union, a very strange phenomenon has occurred in medical centers throughout the US. In some medical centers unborn but otherwise healthy fetuses are being aborted by the D and C (Dilation and Curretage) method of scraping the walls of the uterus to dislodge the unborn fetus from the uterus, or by the suction method of abortion in which the fetus' body is evacuated from the womb by a strong vacuum. Either way, the body is torn to pieces, and the bloody remains of these unborn fetuses are then disposed of with the rest of the morning's garbage. Saline abortion has also been used after sixteen weeks gestation which essentially poisons the fetus until the outer layer of skin burns off. The partial birth method of abortion has been employed even later in pregnancy. A suction tube is inserted at the base of the skull and the fetus' brains are suctioned out of the cranium. At the very same time, and in many of the same medical centers, teams of doctors are feverishly attempting to save the lives of pre-mature babies who could not survive on their own outside the mother's womb, something R.J. Rushdoony has dubbed, intellectual schizophrenia. As long ago as 1976, fifty percent of premature babies weighing less than one kilogram were being saved (*Whatever Happened To the Human Race*, Frances A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, M.D., p. 37).

Now, you will notice that I have labeled the unborn organism either a **"fetus"** or a **"baby".** Which is it? In US society, the mother gets to decide whether the unborn organism is either a "fetus" or a "baby" depending on whether or not she values it. If she values it, it's a baby. If she doesn't value it, it's a fetus. In other words it isn't human unless the mother says that it's human—that is, until the fetus exits the womb, at which time it magically turns into a human being regardless of the mother's value judgment. However, if medical practice in the US seems ambiguous to you, consider the state of the legal system in the US. Women under the age of 18 can get abortions without the consent of their parents, while they cannot, as minors, purchase tobacco and alcohol (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 35).

When does the life of a human being begin? We now have sonograms showing unborn babies sucking their thumbs, something they can do after 12 to 13 weeks of gestation. No one can seriously question that life has begun before birth. It has begun at conception. Even the pro-abortionist, Nan Mizrachi, writing as long ago as 1977 in the *Medical Tribune*, made the following confession,

> Arguments that the fetus is only "human" at a particular stage of gestation violate biological reality. It attempts to over-simplify a complex issue. Whereas the reality that abortion is killing would not, in my view, remove abortion as a socially acceptable surgical procedure, I do think we should face up to the reality of what the decision to abort entails (quoted in *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, M.D., p. 87).

Two things stand out in this quotation. First, she acknowledges that abortion involves the killing of a human being. The fetus does not become "human" only "at a particular stage of gestation". By implication, she admits that the fetus is human at the moment of conception. Second, although she admits that abortion is the killing of a human being, she continues to accept abortion as a "socially acceptable surgical procedure". By logical deduction, then, she accepts the killing of a human being as a socially acceptable surgical procedure.

So here's the problem: Upon what universal ethical principle is an unborn human considered expendable or worth saving? Is there, in fact, a **universal, absolute principle** of ethics binding upon all of us; and, if not, upon what basis are you, as doctors, going to make the difficult decisions about life and death? Let's begin by outlining three basic theories of ethics and then examining the most influential theory to determine its merit.

I. Three Basic Theories of Ethics

A. Deontological Ethics

In **deontological** ethics, ethical norms are based on absolute, universal principles of right and wrong which apply to everyone. They must be universal; otherwise, they cannot be absolute. What is right for one person and one culture must also be right for another person and another culture. Basically, the deontological theory of ethics says that "A good act is a response to duty, even if it requires self-sacrifice" (John A. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 50). A duty is something we **ought to do.** If it is wrong for me to kill, then it is wrong for you to kill in the same situation. For the sake of simplicity, we don't have time to discuss extenuating circumstances in which killing might be acceptable; for example, in the case of self-defense or defending the life of another person or protecting the life of the mother whose unborn baby presents a threat to her life.

The question naturally arises: From whence does this duty come? From where, from whom, or from what do we derive a set of universal duties obligating the whole human race? From a purely secular point of view which eliminates religion from the discussion, it becomes impossible to construct a deontological set of rules and obligations. Who gets to make the rules and why do they, rather than someone else, make the rules?

B. Existential Ethics

In **existential** ethics, it is the inwardness of the act, the motive, which is most important. "A good act is an act that actualizes the true self", particularly the actualization of our freedom. Expressed in simple terms, **"Be true to yourself"** or **"follow your heart".** Laws or principles must be affirmed from within the person; therefore, we cannot, on the basis of existential ethics, determine whether an act is right or wrong simply on the basis of external conduct (Frame, p. 53). In other words, even if I do something which appears to be moral by others, but I fail to act sincerely from the heart, I am a hypocrite and morally wrong, no matter what I do.

Existential ethics has become popular with the man on the street, but it has not been widely held by modern philosophers who seek more objective approaches to the question of right and wrong (Frame, p. 77). Obviously, a society cannot maintain any system of law and order based on the subjective

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obligation to be true to oneself or to always act with the **motive of absolute freedom**. John Wayne Gacey, a renowned serial killer in the US, could say that he was being true to himself by killing over 20 young men in their teens and early twenties and burying their bodies under the floor of his house; but existential principles did not keep the courts from sentencing him to death. "Be true to yourself" is a declaration of anarchy which is incapable of sustaining law and order in any society.

C. Teleological Ethics

1. Definition of Teleological Ethics

In **teleological** ethics, a good act maximizes human happiness or pleasure. Therefore, a **good** act is **goal-oriented** and the goal is human happiness, either personal happiness or the corporate happiness of many people—a whole society.

On the personal level, teleological ethics is either **Epicurean** or **Hedonistic**. The Greek philosopher **Epicurus** preferred long-term pleasures (goals) to short-term pleasures—in other words, delayed gratification. Therefore, instead of getting drunk, he would prefer drinking wine in moderation and spreading the pleasure of wine over a long period of time, looking forward to his next glass which would not be there if he drank the whole bottle the night before. Likewise, instead of spending all his money on wine and parties, he would have preferred saving his money, buying a house, and being able to enjoy some of the finer things of life like classical music concerts and works of art.

Aristippus, on the other hand, founded the Cyrenaic school of ethics commonly known as **Hedonism** in which the good was the greatest, most intense amount of pleasure. The word "hedonism" is used today to describe those who are trying to grab all the physical pleasures they can, regardless of the long-term consequences. Short-term pleasures should not be sacrificed for long-term pleasures; therefore, we would expect members of this school to prefer immediate sexual relationships with multiple partners to the delayed gratification of a long-term marriage to one person. Of course, the hedonist may eventually want a long-term relationship in marriage, but he is willing to take the risk of AIDS and broken relationships to gratify his immediate desires. He is also the kind of person who would have difficulty maintaining loyalty to one person for an extended period of time, knowing that he is sacrificing the intense pleasure of having sex with different partners.

If teleological ethics concentrates on **the greatest good for the greatest number of people**, it becomes **utilitarianism**, the most influential version of teleological ethics in the modern world, a system of ethics formally developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Whenever ethical issues are discussed in modern culture, this is the system of ethics ordinarily assumed (Frame; *DOCL*, p. 97). Another term for utilitarianism is the **"social approval"** theory of ethics. A good act is what evokes social approval. Over a long period of history, society has developed either a written or oral code of socially approved behavior. This code is assumed to be the **majority opinion** of society. Stated simply, utilitarianism says, **"Everybody does it"** or "Everybody knows that [such and such] is right or wrong."

For example, in a predominately monogamous society, the members of this society have determined that allowing more than one wife per husband is not healthy to society in general. It does not bring the greatest good to the greatest number in the society. Western culture says that polygamy is

unhealthy to society, and it supports this belief by enforcing laws against it. African culture says that polygamy is acceptable, and it supports this belief with legislation permitting polygamy. Ironically, American culture also has laws against adultery, but adultery has become so common in American culture that society does not enforce its own laws against adultery. In other words, you can have as many women or as many men as you want, but you can only be married to one of them at a time. Ethically, I would have much less trouble with the polygamy of Uganda than the serial adultery of American culture. Laws against adultery were written many years ago when adultery was not socially acceptable; but today, with the exception of evangelical Christians, US society takes little notice of adultery. As a result, you never hear about anyone being prosecuted in a court of law for adultery. This does not necessarily mean that a majority of the people in the US approve of adultery; it simply means that we are **socially indifferent** to it, and our indifference has the same practical effect as approval. The same is true of abortion. The majority of US culture may disapprove of abortion, but the critical mass of social disapproval is insufficient to change the law.

Therefore, society rules; and laws are made and enforced—or not enforced—on the basis of **social consensus or agreement.** We will punish certain behavior and reward others on the basis of what we believe will bring the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people.

2. Formulations of teleological ethics

Both the personal and utilitarian theory of teleological ethics is presented in the *Humanist Manifesto II*, written in 1973.

> We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because **we create and develop our futures.** Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Method of Greg L. Bahnsen*; edited by Gary DeMar, p. 168, emphasis mine).

Expressed in a different way,

> It can no longer be maintained nowadays that there is one, single morality which is valid for all men at all times in all places. . . .The purpose of morality practiced by a people is to enable it to live; hence morality changes with societies. There is not just one morality, but several, and as many as there are social types. And as our societies change, so will our morality (Emile Durkheim, 1858-1917, quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, pp. 168-169, emphasis mine).

A more current expression of personal teleology, maximizing personal pleasure, is found in a teen magazine in the US.

> Early on in life, you will be exposed to different value systems from your family, church or synagogue, and friends. . . . It is up to you to decide upon your own value system to build your own ethical code. . . . You will have to learn what is right for yourself through experience. . . .

> Only you can decide what is right and comfortable for you (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 169, emphasis mine).

Notice, "Only you can decide what is right and comfortable for you"—"comfortable", being another word for describing **what brings you the most personal pleasure**. You can see from this statement that it is very difficult to differentiate or isolate the **existential** principle from the **personal approval theory** of teleological ethics. Existentialism says we must be true to ourselves. The teen magazine says that your ethical system must be comfortable for you. You must decide for yourself what is right and wrong for you. As a consequence of this personal approval theory of ethics, the public schools of the US have adopted **"values clarification"** as the means by which ethics can be taught to school age children. In values clarification, young people learn to "clarify" what moral values are "comfortable" to them and which aren't. We should not be surprised that sex before marriage—what the Bible calls fornication—is "comfortable" for most teen-agers.

Another internet article on *Wikipedia* defines "moral relativism" as

> …the position that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect absolute and universal moral truths but instead are relative to social, cultural, historical or personal **preferences**, and that there is no single standard by which to assess an ethical proposition's truth. Relativistic positions often see moral values as applicable only within certain cultural boundaries [social approval theory] or the context of individual preferences [personal approval theory] (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 169, emphasis and words in brackets mine).

Thus, moral relativism insists that there is no absolute truth about right and wrong, good and evil. What's more, they insist that it is **absolutely true that there is no absolute truth about right and wrong.** Most moral relativists never quite see the internal contradiction to their own ethical system. Quite naturally, as the consequence of this thinking, we should expect people simply to do whatever they want to do within the legal limits of their respective societies. Aldous Huxley, writing as long ago as 1937, admits as much.

> The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics [the essential nature of things]; he is also concerned to prove that *there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do.*
>
> For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness [nihilism] was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation... from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it <u>interfered with our sexual freedom</u>; we objected to the political and economic system because <u>it was unjust</u>. The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning (a Christian meaning, they insisted) of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and at the same time justifying ourselves in our political and erotic revolt: *we could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever* (*Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 169, italic emphasis DeMar's, underlined words and words in brackets mine).

Huxley doesn't appear to have noticed his own self-contradictions, either. It is true that if there is no meaning in the universe, then a person might as well do as he pleases. But Huxley doesn't see that if the world is meaningless, then his very argument for sexual freedom is also meaningless. In a

meaningless world, even verbal discourse has no meaning, so why discuss anything? Secondly, in a meaningless universe, **on what basis** does Huxley judge the injustice of the existing political and economic system during his day? In a meaningless world, the concept of justice is also meaningless.

Aside from Huxley's desire for sexual freedom, other philosophers are candid about the possible social fallout from the man on the street, the common man, when he is informed by the philosophical elite that there are no rules. Paul Kurtz, one of the notable signatories of the *Humanist Manifesto II* (1973), faces the consequences realistically,

> Nevertheless, the humanist is faced with the crucial ethical problem: Insofar as he has defended an ethic of freedom, can he develop a basis for moral responsibility? Regretfully, merely to liberate individuals from the authoritarian social institutions, whether church or state, is no guarantee that they will be aware of their moral responsibility to others. The contrary is often the case. Any number of social institutions regulate conduct by some means of norms and rules, and sanctions are imposed for enforcing them. Moral conduct is often insured because of fear of the consequences of breaking the law or of transgressing moral conventions. Once these sanctions are ignored, we may end up with [a man] concerned with his own personal lust for pleasure, ambition, and power, and impervious to moral constraints (*Understanding the Times—The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth*, David A. Noebel; p. 206, words in brackets his).

III. Critique of Teleological Ethics

A. The Greatest Pleasure for the Individual

Let's now examine the logical consistency of teleological ethics in more detail. I have chosen to spend the bulk of my time examining this theory since it is the theory of ethics most often taken for granted. First, on the personal level, the greatest good is what brings me, personally, the greatest pleasure. It would not take long to figure out that if everyone in society is doing whatever brings him, or her, the most personal pleasure, life as we know it would become a living hell. Some men intensely enjoy the sexual exploitation of women; and if it were legal, they would spend much of their spare time raping women. But if "there is no valid reason why [a person] personally should not do as he wants to do"—according to Huxley—then surely we have no standard of ethics to forbid rape. Serial killers, to use another example, must get some personal pleasure from tracking down and killing weaker victims, and getting away with it to repeat the behavior. Why else would they do it were it not for some perverted sense of gratification? If the greatest personal pleasure to the individual was the social standard, then there would be no standard, and all of us would soon be afraid to walk out of our houses in the morning.

But what about activities which do not incur legal consequences? Adultery will not land you in jail, and the pleasure and personal fulfillment it brings you may convince you that it is morally justifiable. But does your personal pleasure prove that adultery is therefore morally correct? Who says? Would your spouse believe that your adultery is morally correct, and could he or she now bring the maximum personal pleasure to himself or herself by putting a bullet between your eyes for your infidelity?

You can see that very often my personal pleasure must end where yours begins. My personal pleasure may render your personal pleasure impossible. Traveling through downtown Kampala over the last eight years has been one of the most irritating experiences of my life, and I have often wanted an army Humvee as my personal vehicle (not the pretty red and yellow ones, but the ugly drab green one with the machine gun on top) modified with very large extended front and rear bumpers to push imposing traffic out of my way—an act which would give me great personal pleasure. But if you were driving the Toyota Corolla next to me, your personal pleasure of driving would be diminished in proportion to mine. This is, of course, why there are laws against the ethics of personal approval. They simply don't work on a practical and social level; and the philosophers know they don't work, but they like to talk about them anyway. If they didn't they would not have a high paying job at an elite university.

But even on a philosophical level, it does not follow that the maximization of personal pleasure is the moral thing to do. The goal of personal pleasure does not determine what ought to be done; it merely describes what is done. Most people want to maximize their pleasure. That is a situation which exists (but, incidentally, there are many exceptions to this throughout the world, people who choose to do difficult things sacrificially for mankind). But what is, is not necessarily what ought to be. This is the naturalistic fallacy. You cannot demonstrate an **ought** (a moral principle) from a non-moral **is**, (a fact). **Is** does not imply **ought**. Fifty percent of the young people in the US are sexually active outside of the marriage relationship. This describes what is, a **fact**. It does not say anything about what ought to be (cf. Frame, p. 97). "Everyone does it" is not a moral standard for me or anyone else to follow.

B. The Greatest Pleasure for the Greatest Number

1. Philosophical critique

This brings me to **utilitarianism** or the theory of social approval. How does this theory stack up? Should we not at least agree that a whole society of people has the right to establish the norms and laws for that society which would bring the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of people? Shouldn't the majority of a society be able to decide what is right and wrong for that particular society? After all, isn't this what a democracy is all about? The laws of any given society, it is generally assumed, are simply the conventions or norms of a majority of that society which have developed during its history. Said another way, any given culture has determined what actions bring the greatest good to most members of that society.

But think about it. Is it really possible to calculate all of the possible pleasure—or pain—which results from the actions of a whole society of people? Can we determine mathematically what is the greatest good for the greatest number of people? This is what Marxist governments have pretended to do economically with disastrous results. One single action can have an enormous impact on a whole culture to such an extent that no one could possibly calculate its positive or negative consequences into the distant future (Frame, p. 98)—although there are many people in Kampala, Uganda who claim to know what is best for everyone in Uganda, and there are likewise many people in Washington, D.C. who claim to know what is best for the whole world.

Who could have calculated the consequences of Christopher Columbus' desire to sail west across the Atlantic Ocean (Frame, p. 98)? Who could have calculated the consequences of the Supreme Court decision in 1973 to allow abortion on demand? Could anyone living then have known that it would result in over 50 million legal abortions by 2012? Could anyone have calculated the exact increase in the incidence of child abuse since 1973 in the US alone—60,000 cases of child abuse reported in 1972; but just four years later in 1976, three years after abortion was legalized, 500,000 reported cases of child abuse (*Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, p. 30). The situation is far worse in 2012. Whenever society decides that the unborn baby has no worth apart from the autonomous decision of the mother, then who is morally obligated to impute worth to children who are **already living**? The difference in the worth of one child and that of another is all a matter of timing; and this difference is purely arbitrary and ambiguous.

From a purely economic perspective, could anyone have calculated the economic consequences of removing so many young people from the US work force by 2012, thirty-nine years later, when these young people could have been fathers and mothers of millions of others? The US is now 16 trillion dollars in debt, and the government has no solution to meeting its Social Security obligations in the near future, simply because it has allowed the murder of those who could have been contributing to the Social Security system for the last 18 years or so. This is, of course, an ironic twist of events for those who decided to kill their unborn children because they would have been an economic burden to their "personal peace and affluence" (Frances Schaeffer). But if a US congressman were to suggest that abortion is morally wrong because it fails to provide the greatest amount of happiness for the senior citizens of the US—measured in Social Security payments—he would be accused of crass materialism and booted out of office by a vast majority of his constituents, young and old.

But returning to the philosophical argument, men cannot determine the future, and, therefore, cannot develop a system of ethics or laws which guarantees the greatest good for the greatest number of people. On the very surface of things, abortion has not been the greatest good for 50 million children put to death in the US alone since 1973. That's a significant number of votes about what is good that will never be heard.

But for the sake of the argument, even if we could calculate the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people in a culture, would the happiness of the majority necessarily make an action good? Stated another way, can we decide what is moral by majority vote, or can we determine what is moral by the will of an elite minority in government elected by the majority?

2. Historical critique

It doesn't take long to answer this question if we do nothing more than look at the history of man which includes genocide, cannibalism, infanticide, pederasty, widow immolation and the list goes on. Many societies have practiced these things and they are still being socially sanctioned in many social contexts. But as soon as we hear these words, something inside of us says, "These things are morally wicked." But who gives us the right to say this?

Adolf Hitler justified the extermination of six million Jews in Europe to purify the Aryan race and ensure a superior German nation. There was no critical mass of social outrage among the German population to oppose his actions. In Rwanda, one million or so Tutsis and moderate Hutus were

massacred within three months in 1994. Again, no sufficient critical mass of people to stop it. The US has been practicing infanticide since 1973 with the approval of the United Nations and the relative social indifference of the US population.

But, if we assume the validity of a utilitarian ethic—the greatest good for the greatest number of people—and if we assume for the sake of the argument that a majority of people agreed to these genocidal or infanticidal acts, then both are legitimate acts. Carrying this logic a step further, we can also justify the extermination of old people who drain the nation's economic resources, handicapped people who lie on the sidewalks of Kampala asking for handouts, and the mentally retarded—considered by some as contaminants to the gene pool. Accepting the premise that a good act brings the greatest good to the greatest number of people, pretty much anything, however cruel and inhumane, can be justified. As the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky once said, "If there is no God, everything is permissable."

For the next few minutes I want to pursue the question of how the medical profession can be critically involved in deciding what brings the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people. While the Jewish genocide is a well-known fact to all educated people—with the exception of the former Iranian president, Ahmadenijad, who denies it ever happened—Hitler's extermination of the sick and handicapped before the Jewish genocide is not a well-known fact. Dr. Leo Alexander, a Boston psychiatrist, was consultant to the US Secretary of War in 1946-47 and was attached to the Chief of Counsel on War Crimes in Nuremberg. In his presentation, "Medical Science Under Dictatorship", he identified the philosophical underpinnings of Hitler's systematic extermination of 275,000 chronically sick or handicapped people in German society beginning on September 1,1939.

> Irrespective of other ideological trappings, the guiding philosophic principle of recent dictatorships, including that of the Nazis, has been Hegelian in that what has been considered "rational utility" and corresponding doctrine and planning has replaced moral, ethical and religious values….
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> Medical science in Nazi Germany collaborated with this Hegelian trend particularly in the following enterprises: the mass extermination of the chronically sick in the interest of saving "useless" expenses to the community as a whole; the mass extermination of those considered socially disturbing or racially and ideologically unwanted; the individual, inconspicuous extermination of those considered disloyal within the ruling group; and the ruthless use of "human experimental material" for medico-military research…It started with the acceptance of the attitude basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived….
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> [Before Hitler came to power in 1933] a propaganda barrage was directed against the traditional, compassionate nineteenth century attitudes towards the chronically ill, and for the adoption of a utilitarian, Hegelian point of view. Sterilization and euthanasia of persons with chronic mental illnesses was discussed at a meeting of Bavarian psychiatrists in 1931 (Schaeffer and Koop, pp. 105-106; bold emphasis mine, words in brackets theirs).

What's more, the killing centers which murdered 275,000 were just the beginning of a much larger network of centers which were being prepared for the future extermination of Jews, Poles, and thirty million Russians (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 106).

> The first to be killed were the aged, the infirm, the senile and mentally retarded, and defective children. Eventually, as World War II approached, the doomed undesirables included epileptics, World War I amputees, children with badly modeled ears, and even bed wetters.
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> Physicians took part in this planning on matters of life and death to save society's money. Adults were propagandized, one outstanding example being a motion picture called *I Accuse*, which dealt with euthanasia (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 106, bold emphasis mine).

Another example of propaganda included a high school mathematics textbook, *Mathematics in the Service of Political Education*, which included math problems calculating the cost of caring and rehabilitating those who were chronically sick or disabled. One of the problems posed the question, "…how many new housing units could be built and how many marriage-allowance loans could be given to newly–wed couples for the amount of money it cost the state to care for 'the crippled and the insane'"? (Schaeffer and Koop, pp. 106-107)

"The important thing to remember," say Schaeffer and Koop, "is that the medical profession took a leading part in the planning of abortion and euthanasia." Continuing, they say,

> It seems likely that had it not been for the example and active role played by German physicians in the practice of euthanasia, Hitler's progress in the extermination programs would have been slowed if not stopped. The medical profession went along with Nazism in discouragingly large numbers. More than a few participated in the terror, genocide, extermination programs, and active and barbaric experimentation on the unfortunate minorities in the Nazi grip (p. 103).

I would add to this by saying that it is a slippery slope, indeed, from declaring unborn children to be non-persons to declaring the old, infirm, and mentally handicapped as being non-persons. This is certainly the conclusion of Joseph Fletcher, famous professor of ethics at Harvard University.

> To speak of living and dying, therefore…encompasses the abortion issue along with the euthanasia issue. They are ethically inseparable (*The Humanist*, quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, p. 87).

In an interview with the *The American Journal of Nursing* in 1973, Fletcher says,

> It is ridiculous to give ethical approval to the positive ending of sub-human life in utero as we do in therapeutic abortions for reasons of mercy and compassion but refuse to approve of positively ending a sub-human life in extremis. If we are morally obliged to put an end to a pregnancy when an amniocentesis reveals a terribly defective fetus, we are equally obliged to put an end to a patient's hopeless misery when a brain scan reveals that a patient with cancer has advanced brain metastases (quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, p. 99).

But Fletcher fails to answer the question of why we can end a sub-human life in the uterus as well as the subhuman life of an adult with brain cancer, while allowing a subhuman infant—already born—to continue living. We may safely assume that Fletcher would have any subhuman life snuffed out, although he is incapable of defining the term "subhuman". It is a logical conclusion of humanistic utilitarianism to eradicate all infant children, unborn or newly born, who would not significantly contribute to the well-being of society as a whole.

Abortion and euthanasia lead us naturally to a discussion of infanticide. Consider these quotations from James D. Watson and Francis Crick, Nobel prize laureates who discovered the double helix of DNA. In a 1973 interview with *Prism* magazine, a publication of the American Medical Association, Watson offers this suggestion,

> If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then all parents could be allowed the choice only a few are given under the present system. The doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so choose and save a lot of misery and suffering. I believe this view is the only rational, compassionate attitude to have (quoted by Schaeffer and Koop, p. 73).

Watson's colleague, Francis Crick, concurs with this conclusion in a 1978 article of *Pacific News Service*.

> …no newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment and that if it fails these tests it forfeits the right to live (quoted by Schaeffer and Koop, p. 73, emphasis mine).

Again, the logical ambiguities of these scientists are left unanswered. A child is declared to be alive only after three days. Why three days? Why not seven days, or a month? Why not one year to make very sure the parents really want the responsibilities and inconveniences of an infant? If not, then they can kill their little "inconvenience". As for Crick's suggestion, what exactly are the "genetic endowments" necessary to make a life that is worth living? What is the "cut off" for IQ tests: 100, 115, 116, what? Does the child have to be pretty? If so, then better to wait two years rather than three days to assess the child's beauty.

Essentially we are all the way back to the ancient Greek and Roman cultures. In ancient Roman cultures the *pater familias*—the head of the family—decided whether his new-born child lived or died. Generally more girls were left to the scavenger dogs than boys. The boys left to be eaten generally had genetic defects. The Greek Spartan culture was no different since this war-loving society had no use for weak males. Christians would often lie in wait under the aqueducts of Roman cities for these throw-away children to be abandoned to the roving packs of dogs. Whenever they were left to die, the Christians would gather them up and adopt them into their own families.
In response to Watson's suggestion that his view is "the only rational, compassionate attitude to have", we might ask: Who gets to decide the definitions of words like "rational" and "compassionate"? Compassionate to whom? Rational as compared to what?

The scientists are not alone in their well-laid plans for the rest of society. Millard S. Everett, former professor of philosophy and humanities at Oklahoma A&M, voices his own solution in his book, *Ideals of Life*.

> My personal feeling—and I don't ask anyone to agree with me—is that eventually, when public opinion is prepared for it, no child should be admitted into the society of the living who would be certain to suffer any social handicap—for example, any physical or mental defect that would prevent marriage or would make others tolerate his company only from the sense of mercy….This

> would imply not only eugenic sterilization but also euthanasia due to accidents of birth which cannot be foreseen (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 73; bold emphasis mine).

Notice the words, "when public opinion is prepared for it". Everett is correct on this point. Little by little, a society is "desensitized" to the idea of killing innocent people for the "good" of society. Abortion on demand would not have happened in the US in the early part of the 20th century—although surely abortions were taking place illegally at that time and even in the 18th century (see Marvin Olasky, *Abortion Rites*). The general public, which adhered at least formally to a Christian view of man, would not have tolerated it. One wonders whether Everett has known many handicapped people who could not marry, or deformed people who were "tolerated out of mercy", who would prefer to be single or to be "tolerated" rather than being exterminated. But it would be a terrible inconvenience to people like Everett to tolerate someone who is mentally handicapped or physically deformed! This would not make Everett happy. Schaeffer and Koop trace such thinking to its sociological conclusions.

> We are moving from the state of mind in which destruction of life is advocated for children who are considered to be socially useless or deemed to have nonmeaningful lives to the stance that we should perhaps destroy a child because he is socially disturbing. One wonders if the advocates of such a philosophy would espouse a total blockade and "starving out" of urban slums as a solution to poverty—considering all the social and economic problems this would solve all at once! (p. 75; emphasis mine).

Or perhaps we should leave the starving millions in Somalia and Sudan to survive on their own in order to maximize the happiness of the millions of hedonists in Europe and North America who would rather drive a new car than donate to victims of prolonged war.

One can see, I hope, that scientific brilliance (and Watson and Crick are certainly brilliant) does not qualify anyone to establish ethical norms for society. Science describes what **is**, using empirical evidence to determine cause and effect. However, it can never prescribe what **ought to be**. Western countries can blow the world to pieces with nuclear weapons, but this capability is universally denied by all as a justifiable reason to do so. There is no experiment that can identify right and wrong. We may see an action, but we cannot visibly determine the rightness or wrongness of it (Frame, p. 60). Science is the collection of data through empirical observation, but has anyone ever observed right and wrong through a microscope? If not, then why are scientists like Crick and Watson so sure about their ethical conclusions? It is the arrogance of the scientific community, including many in the medical field, that leads them to believe that superior intelligence and education qualifies them to decide what is right and wrong for a given society. The consequences of this arrogance are evident for all to see: abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, Hitler's Germany, and Stalin's Russia.

We could multiply examples of other behavior which could be defended on the basis of the social approval theory, majority theory, or utilitarian theory of ethics: cannibalism, human sacrifice, pederasty (man/boy sexual relationships), or widow immolation (the burning of Hindu widows on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands), to name but a few examples (*Pushing the Antithesis*, pp. 174-177.)

Now just imagine using these examples of socially sanctioned behavior—i.e. sanctioned and approved in their particular social contexts—in an argument with American or African young men and women. When excusing sex before marriage, these young men and women will defend their sexual activity by an appeal to the social approval theory of ethics (the greatest pleasure for the greatest number). They will insist, "But everyone does it." And this statement is supposed to be the end of the argument. If everyone does it, it must be okay. The statement, as it stands, is only a half truth since everyone does not have sex before marriage. But the statement will be accepted as dogma by many people, if not most people, in African and American societies, particularly the youth culture. But transport one of these young females into a traditional, rural Hindu village in India and marry her against her will to an old, snaggle-toothed Hindu man who dies shortly after the wedding. She will now be expected to burn herself alive on the funeral pyre of her dead husband—the practice of *suttee*—while she is in the prime of life. She pleads for her life before the village leaders who respond to her pleas, "But every widow does it". I suspect that she will no longer accept majority ethics as justification for what she now sees very clearly as an absurd and cruel atrocity against women.

IV. The Origin of Moral Relativity and the Collapse of Human Dignity

Thus far in this lecture I have spoken of various manifestations of moral relativity—genocide, abortion, and euthanasia. I have not considered the origin of this moral crisis which all of us face in the modern world. In the western world, materialistic humanism has been gaining ground as the majority world-view ever since the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859. In this world view, there is no room for the supernatural; and most scientists in the west will not concede that biological evolution proceeded under the hand of a wise, omnipotent God who guided the evolutionary process in the creation of man. Their idea of the universe is that of a **closed system** of matter and energy which produced life from non-life over a period of billions of years by chance collisions of atoms and molecules. Where did this matter and energy come from? Their answer: "In the beginning was matter and energy." Eternal, omnipotent matter and energy have replaced an eternal, omnipotent God as the ultimate source of life.

Now if materialistic humanism is true, and if humanity is the product of chance collisions of atomic particles, then where is the basis for human dignity? I think most, if not all, of us in this room would agree that the basis for medical ethics is the principle of human dignity. But if we are products of chance, how can we defend the principle of human dignity? Charles Darwin himself struggled with the implications of his theory. In a letter to a friend in 1881, 22 years after *Origin of the Species* was published, he confessed,

> But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has always been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind? (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 224, emphasis mine).

Modern scientists are much more to the point. In reviewing a book by Paul Davies on the possibility of life on another planet, Gregory Koukl makes this revealing statement,

> [The author] has some interesting thoughts about the impact of the idea of evolution on the notion of human value and dignity. If you believe that we are the result of the natural processes of cause and effect, you end up with a serious problem with value, purpose, worth and dignity. It is hard to argue that someone who is an accident of the universe has some kind of special destiny (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 225, emphasis mine).

Stephen Jay Gould, former professor of paleontology at Harvard University, not only challenges the concept of man's "special destiny", but even questions his relative importance in the evolutionary chain of being.

> Human existence occupied but the last geological millimicrosecond of this history—the last inch of the cosmic mile, or the last second of the geological year. . . . If humanity arose just yesterday as a small twig on one branch of a flourishing tree, then life may not, in any genuine sense, exist for us or because of us. Perhaps we are only an afterthought, a kind of cosmic accident, just one bauble on the Christmas tree of evolution (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 225).

Bertrand Russell, famous philosopher of the early 20th century, also not a Christian, sums up the pessimistic conclusions of humanistic materialism in his book *A Free Man's Worship: Mysticism and Logic.*

> Why does science rob human beings of their dignity? Science has limited its area of study to the area of natural occurrences. Not only has it limited its search to that area, but it has essentially said that that is the only area that really exits [sic]. This is called philosophic naturalism. If only nature exists, then it turns out that we are merely parts of the machinery in the workings of nature, and we are the unwitting victims of the machinery of cause and effect happening over time without any plan. That robs human beings of their dignity. Clearly, if we are the product of chance, then we have no purpose. It seems hard to argue that we are anything different than anything else on this earth that has resulted from the process of evolution.
>
> The claim that we have some kind of peculiar dignity turns out to be a kind of species-ism. We arbitrarily view our species as qualitatively more valuable than other species, but the fact of the matter is that in nature that just isn't the case. Davies acknowledges that if we are stuck with philosophic **naturalism**, we are robbed of unique value and dignity, and we become one of many living organisms that are qualitatively indistinguishable.
>
> One might argue that we are more sophisticated in our evolutionary accomplishment, but what separates us from the rest? Nothing. That's a value judgment, and there are no value judgments like that that make any sense in nature because **nature is value-less**. Values are a philosophic construct. They are a theological and moral notion and have no place, strictly speaking, in a world that is simply defined by **scientific law** (quoted in *Pushing the Antithesis*, pp. 227-228, emphasis mine).

In other words, billions of years of chance collisions of atoms and molecules cannot produce human dignity. Science deals with empirical observations, and you cannot observe human dignity under a microscope. You can observe human tissue under a microscope, but that observation does not prove that humans have more worth than baboons. We are merely a different arrangement of molecules (Schaeffer and Koop, p. 124). You cannot conduct an experiment to prove that humans have more worth than cockroaches. Cockroaches, according to evolutionists, have been around for millions of

years longer than humans. Therefore, on the evolutionary scheme, they must be more valuable. Oh, but I forgot; value is a "philosophic construct" which cannot be scientifically determined. The concept of value is something outside the dimensions of pure science; it is a purely human convention (cf. *Pushing the Antithesis,* p. 228).

Moreover, you cannot deduce human dignity by carefully observing how humans treat one another, as sociologists do all the time. All you have done is observe specific behavior, but you have not determined whether people **ought** to be treated the way you have observed. Remember, **is** does not imply **ought**. Besides, there is no universal expression of how people are treated by others; sometimes they are treated with dignity and sometimes with the most horrible cruelty. Who's right?

Earlier I mentioned the values clarification ethics being taught in US public school systems. Since the 1950's, students have been systematically indoctrinated with the theory of non-theistic, materialistic evolution teaching them that they are basically accidents of an impersonal cosmos, sophisticated animals having no claim to any more dignity than a snail crawling across a side-walk. Yet, when a teen-aged boy steals his father's automatic weapons and murders his teacher and several of his classmates in cold blood—an incident which occurred in the Columbine high school massacre in Colorado some years ago—secular society demands answers from educators and government officials: How could this happen? And everyone goes weeping and wailing in the streets about how the warning signs of mental disturbance should have been noted and how guns should be outlawed so people like him would not have access to guns.

Seldom, if ever, does the society in general ask the right questions: **What** are we teaching our children? Is non-theistic evolution robbing our children of any reason to believe that they have dignity as persons, and that their fellow classmates are not cattle to be slaughtered? And what about values clarification? Can we use the principles of values clarification to teach this young killer that what he did was unspeakably immoral, when, in fact, we have taught him for years to decide for himself what is right and what is wrong?

Young people in the US are now driven to despair by an educational system which has no answers—and by their parents who have no answers—to the bigger questions of life. Moreover, science has not provided those answers because it can't, a fact which makes the arrogance of the scientific community all the more appalling. The results of this despair are there for all to see. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers in the US, second only to auto accidents. Woody Allen, a famous comedian in the US, faces the desperation of our culture honestly and frankly in an article written for *Esquire* in 1977.

> …alienation, loneliness [and] emptiness verging on madness….The fundamental thing behind *all* motivation and *all* activity is the constant struggle against annihilation and against death. It's absolutely stupefying in its terror, and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless. As Camus wrote, it's not only that *he* (the individual) dies, or that *man* (as a whole) dies, but that you struggle to do a work of art that will last and then you realize that *the universe itself* is not going to exist after a period of time. Until those issues are resolved within each person—religiously or psychologically or existentially—the social and political issues will never be resolved, except in a slapdash way (quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, p. 123, bold emphasis Allen's, underlined emphasis mine).

One would think that Allen had been reading the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible; but I doubt it. He was simply taking a long realistic look at the dead-end conclusions of materialistic humanism. If we are products of chance, and death puts an end to all human accomplishments, even the most notable human accomplishments, then life is meaningless and you and I are meaningless.

Now, I have made these references to the western crisis of moral relativism only because this is the one I'm familiar with. You Africans have your own version of moral relativism manifested in part by parents who put their epileptic children to death because they think these children are possessed by evil spirits. Or maybe this evil-spirit diagnosis is just a convenient way of getting rid of an inconvenient child. You be the judge. But the western version of moral relativism is also becoming your problem. With the increase in educational opportunities in Africa, you are being bombarded with the propaganda that science has all the answers. Science, unlike religion, only deals with the facts and religion deals with faith; consequently, we should keep our religion and our science separate. Well, I've attempted to show that all of our western science has not solved the problem of ethics or meaninglessness, and it will not solve yours either.

But let's take another look at the self-contradictions of humanistic materialism and moral relativism.

IV. The Self-Contradictions of Materialistic Humanism and Moral Relativism

Put simply, no one can actually live a life without meaning. One must live as if life has meaning even if his philosophical system concludes otherwise. He must also live as if human life has more value than animal life even when his world view denies the existence of value. When encountering a car accident, the humanistic materialist or naturalist will not check the scene of the accident to see whether he might accidentally squish cockroaches and centipedes during his rescue efforts. All of his attention will be riveted toward saving the life of the small child pinned down in the back seat. And I would argue that his heroic efforts will have nothing whatever to do with any instinctive drive to preserve a fellow member of his species. Instead, he will see a human being in need of help, and helping will be the right thing to do. He does it because the law of God is written on his heart, and he cannot escape it.

On the other hand, if he decides to play it safe and let the child die, his conscience will haunt him the rest of his life—even if his world view insists that the child's life has no meaning.

Likewise, the philosophers and scientists who believe that we are products of chance do not treat their wives and children as if they are products of chance—at least, we may hope they don't. They love their families, even though they define "love" as nothing more than a biochemical synapse in the brain; and do all within their power to ensure that their children live happy and "meaningful" lives in the midst of a universe which they believe has no meaning. They deny the foundations of right and wrong, but they still teach their children right from wrong and must still live and act as if there is such a distinction. And, I might add, the professors of science and philosophy who loudly proclaim a world without good and evil still forbid their students to cheat on papers and exams. Moreover, when humanistic materialists lose their loved ones to death, they give them the dignity of a decent burial, even spending a considerable amount of money to do so, rather than dumping the body in the

morning's garbage. The inconsistencies of this way of thinking are seemingly endless. Why do we bury people whose lives have no meaning?

In the words of Schaeffer and Koop, "everyone is caught, regardless of his world view, simply by the way things are. No one can make his own universe to live in" (p. 138). Defying the standard of ethics set in motion by an eternal God is no different from defying the law of gravity. If you jump out of a five-story window, you will die. Analogously, "The wages of sin is death", and you cannot change that fact.

What kind of person are you? When you graduate from here and begin your medical careers, there will be thousands of people out there waiting for you, hoping that you did not cheat your way through medical school or sleep with your professors to get a passing grade. They are also hoping that you will give them the free medicines donated by western relief organizations rather than stealing them and selling them at market price in your own private clinics. That's what they hope.

V. Summary Statement

In summary, we can see (I hope) that any theory of ethics without God presents us with insurmountable problems. **Existential** ethics leaves us to the tyranny of the individual who may justify any behavior which actualizes or completes him as an individual—whatever that means. Social anarchy or political tyranny results from teleological ethics in which the goal is either the maximization of personal happiness or the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. The maximization of personal pleasure can lead, logically, to serial murder; and the greatest happiness for the greatest number can lead logically to genocide and euthanasia.

This leaves us with the **deontological** theory of ethics in which ethical norms are based on absolute, universal standards of right and wrong applying to everyone. But as I said earlier, where do we get these standards? Do we get these universal standards from social consensus and the majority rule of society? We have already seen that this doesn't work. Do we get them from political tyrants like Hitler and Stalin? If so, we are then right back where we started from. Society makes the rules and these rules can change from one society to the next and from one generation to the next on the basis of what makes society happy or what makes our political leaders happy.

Indeed, this is what has happened in America concerning abortion which was against the law in most states until 1973. What then, about the killing of old and sick people? Only a few states in the US allow physician-assisted suicide, but this can change if the majority, or a very vocal minority, succeeds in getting national legislation passed to allow for physician-assisted suicide. And then, as society gets accustomed to physician-assisted suicide, the way is open for mass euthanasia, the indiscriminate killing of old people who do not want to die but whose children want them to die, or the killing of deformed or mentally retarded infants—in a word, murder.

So what do we do? Thus far I really haven't said much about a **religious alternative** for an ethical system. The reason I have not done so is that many of you already know that the religious solution is the only solution. But further, I wanted you to see that without a religious solution appealing to a transcendental God who is above man and who has the right to dictate the standards of morality, then the only thing we are left with is a moral system which no one can justify or defend on a rational

basis. Who gave **you** the right, or who gave **society** the right, or who gave the **government** the right, to tell **me** what to do? And while I may be willing to comply with societal and governmental standards through fear of ostracism or punishment, I am still left with the gnawing question: Is this action right or wrong? If you had been practicing medicine in Nazi Germany, what would you have done?

Not one of the three theories of ethics makes any sense in a **closed universe** consisting only of **material** things with man at the top of the food chain of evolutionary biology. **You cannot derive ethics from accidents.** All three theories leave us with moral relativism. It's simply one man's opinion against another man's opinion.

On the other hand all three theories make sense if we believe that there is a God to whom we are accountable. The **deontological** theory of ethics has validity because we have a transcendental God outside of nature and above nature who created the world and who has the right to make the rules and set the standards of morality, a God who has a right to tell us what we ought to do, and indeed, has told us what we ought to do.

If there is a God, the **existential** theory also has some validity because God is not pleased when we only keep the rules externally to avoid punishment. He also wants us to keep the rules **from the heart** because we love Him, and because we love others. Our motives for obedience are also important to God.

The **teleological** theory of ethics is also valid because every action should have a goal, and that goal should be the glory of God and the good of others—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Whatever I do, whether teaching this course or changing the oil in my car, should make God smile. God is the **unifying principle** who brings all these things together—the standard, the motive, and the goal (see Frame, *DOCL*, pp. 28-36).

To sum up: you cannot have a unified, consistent system of ethics, medical ethics or otherwise, without God. Truly, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted," and we might as well dismiss this class on medical ethics as a futile exercise. As a Christian, I would vigorously maintain that the only God who exists is the God of Christianity who has created man in His own image and has communicated His will to mankind in intelligible words (contra post-modernism, which says that words have no meaning). For this reason, and this reason alone, man has dignity and worth. My differences with other theists, Muslim theists, can be taken up at a different time.

But for those of you who are secular, materialistic humanists, I challenge you to construct a unified system of ethics applying to all people in every culture which makes rational sense. I don't believe you can do it. But further, I do not believe that you base your world view only upon verifiable scientific evidence. Fundamentally, you are just as religious as I am. Every theory of origins has to begin with faith simply because the origin of the universe was not observed by any human who ever lived. Consequently, the origin of the universe defies empirical investigation. Some people, like me, believe that in the beginning was God. Some of you believe that in the beginning was matter and energy. So why do you say that I have faith, but that you have the facts? You have no empirical facts about the origin of the universe because no one was there to collect the data. But I would also

like to invite you, the materialistic humanist, to dialogue with me to see if your theories of ethics and the origin of life will stand up to rational investigation.

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