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Two Comments on: *Medicine and Christian Morality*

Thomas J. O'Donnell, S.J.

Alba House, 2187 Victory Blvd., Staten Island, N.Y., 10314, 1976. VI + 329 p., \$7.95.

Father O'Donnell tells us that the title of this work, which was begun as a third revision of his *Morals in Medicine* (Westminster, The Newman Press, 1956), "represents a more honest confrontation with our contemporary scene." I cannot believe it.

Denying the existence of "Medical Ethics" as such, O'Donnell proposes to extend "broader philosophical and theological principles" into the area of medical practice. Mostly he derives such principles from papal teaching and from Canon Law. Where he does reason in philosophical fashion, he normally argues more like a mathematician than an ethicist. Relying little upon experience and paying scant attention to the myriad situations in which human actions must be placed, he prefers time and again to go deductively from unchanging universal principles to equally unchanging particular conclusions. While some of his starting points are indeed basic and far reaching (e.g. the dictum that since we are God's creatures, we do not own ourselves but have even in our own regard at most a kind of stewardship) others (e.g. apparently every statute of the 1918 Code of Canon Law) seem less compelling.

In this last connection, not only does Father O'Donnell ignore the fact that the 1918 Code is presently being revised, but he also shows small knowledge of current medical, philosophical, and theological literature in the field of his concern. In over three hundred pages of text and footnotes, I have counted but *seven* references to material published from 1970 on. In the area of theology, apart from a few nods to St. Thomas Aquinas, the usual authors cited are Scholastic manualists, most of them 19th or early 20th century figures such as Palmieri, Ballerini, Buceroni, Lehmkuhl, Noldin, Tanquerey, and Vermeersch. About the latest writers mentioned are Kelly, Connell, and Connery from the 1940's and 50's. Conspicuously absent from this "honest confrontation" are people like Häring, McCormick, Curran, May, Noonan, Grisez, Ramsey, Gustafson, Springer, Callahan, and Dedek. The only front rank current name which I have found is that of Joseph Fletcher, whose views on euthanasia are summarized and dismissed in one brief paragraph of 13 lines.

As for subject matter, following three chapters devoted to (1) a generally legalistic "Background," (2) "Basic Principles," and (3) "Human Life — Responsibility and Rights," O'Donnell restricts himself to (4) "Moral Aspects of Surgery and Suppressive Therapy" (the keys here are the Principle of Totality and the Principle of Double Effect), (5) "Moral Aspects of Pregnancy and Delivery" (again the Principle of Double Effect), (6) "Medico-Canonical-Moral Aspects of Marriage" (including what every physician should know about the diriment impediments of "disparity of cult," "Sacred Orders," "solemn religious profession," and "spiritual relationship"), and (7) "Professional Secrecy." Subjects I missed were Genetic Engineering, Genetic Coun-

seling, and Homosexuality. Also I would have liked more in depth discussion of the individual humanity of the fetus (here a good place to start would have been Dr. J. J. Diamond's article, "Abortion, Animation and Biological Homini- zation," in *Theological Studies*, v. 36, no. 2 [June, 1975]).

In fine, O'Donnell's book might have been all right in 1956, but for an honest confrontation with the contemporary scene in 1976, it leaves much to be desired.

—John P. Doyle, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy
St. Louis University

The purpose of this book is to select some of the salient features from the three disciplines of ethics, moral theology, and Canon Law as they relate to the art and science of medicine. Ethics, of course, is concerned with the good- ness or evil of human actions in the light of reason. Moral theology deals with the morality of human actions considered in the light of man's supernatural destiny with the added assistance of divine revelation. Canon Law investigates the meaning and interpretation of positive Church Law governing the external conduct of the baptized as members of the Catholic Church. Applying basic principles drawn from these disciplines, the author considers a variety of ethical problems related to the theory and practice of medicine.

After a brief explanation of the Church's understanding of herself, her au- thority, and her mission, the author considers the nature of law, its relationship to the common good and to the individual, and the considerations which enter into moral choice. The inviolability of human life is derived from previous con- siderations regarding the existence of God and the nature of man. Absolute dominion over human life is an exclusively divine prerogative. Among the prob- lems considered in this context are euthanasia, suicide, the prolongation of life in terminal illness, human experimentation and clinical research. In the course of professional practice, the doctor may be called upon to undertake procedures which call for the removal of some organ or the suppression of its function in the interests of the whole body. Most of these procedures are governed by the principal of totality — that is, that all parts of the human body, as parts, are meant to exist and function for the good of the whole, and are thus naturally subordinated to that good. Therefore, the physician can, when the good of the whole demands it, paralyze, destroy, mutilate or separate the members. In this section the author considers such matters as procedures within the generative system, suppression or excision of a healthy organ, ghost surgery, residency training surgery, psychotherapy, hypnotism, determination of clinical death, sterilization and hysterectomy.

Many of the most common and difficult moral problems confronting the physician arise out of complications which develop in the course of pregnancy or at the time of delivery. The inviolability of human life dictates that the destruction of one life cannot be the means of saving another. Frequently, the principle of double effect may be invoked to determine what can be done. Ac- cording to this principle, an action, good in itself, which has an intended and not otherwise attainable good effect but also a permitted evil effect, may licitly be done provided there is a due proportion between the intended good and the permitted evil. This section deals with such problems as abortion, breast cancer, leukemia, psychiatric illness, maternal rubella and others less well-known or widespread. In connection with marriage, certain pertinent moral and canonical concepts are discussed that might prove helpful to the physician. In- cluded in this discussion are certain impediments to marriage, family planning and fertility control and moral aspects of such problems as impotence, sterility,

masturbation, Onanism, artificial insemination, and rape. Finally, the author considers the obligations of professional secrecy and the duty of the physician to help the patient become aware of impending death. The appendix contains the "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Facilities" issued in 1971 by the United States Catholic Conference.

The author, Thomas J. O'Donnell, S.J., is well-qualified in the field of medical ethics having been a professor of Medical Ethics at Georgetown University, School of Medicine, regent of the School of Medicine, a vice-president of the National Society for Medical Research, the National Kidney Foundation and the Transplant Council. This book, in my opinion, would be invaluable to anyone working in the field of medicine or health care presenting, as it does, traditional Catholic doctrine as it relates to the theory and practice of medicine.

—Sister Priscilla Snell, O.P.

Operating on the Mind: The Psychosurgery Conflict

Willard M. Gaylin, M.D., Joel S. Meister, Ph.D., and

Robert C. Neville, Ph.D., editors

Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 10 E. 53rd St., New York, N. Y. 10022, 1976.
VIII + 216 p., \$11.95.

This monograph was developed after a series of seminars conducted by a behavioral control task force of the Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences. Its aim was to present a thoughtful, balanced presentation of the arguments and controversies surrounding brain surgery for behavior disorders. Contributions from dynamic psychiatry, neurology, philosophy and law make this an important book. Although the authors are sometimes critical of neuro-surgical practices, their comments are couched in considerate and rather restrained language, a welcome relief from the emotionally charged and often unsubstantiated rhetoric of other writers.

The critical discussion of certain aspects of this book should not obscure the perspective of this review. The overall impression is favorable, and critical comments are not meant to cast aspersions on any of the authors or their contributions.

Willard Gaylin is an eminent analytical psychiatrist who presents his arguments skillfully and demonstrates that he has put a great deal of thought into the broader problems of ethics and medicine; yet, his chapter is pervaded with an anti-"organic" or anti-medical bias. For example, he feels that the use of an "organic" or medical model as a criterion for brain operations in patients with brain disease and abnormal behavior is irrelevant. He suggests "that it is the functioning of the individual that concerns us, and that we do not treat some theoretical organic integrity." He cites examples of operations on normal tissue to relieve symptoms in a spectrum of medical problems, as for instance the removal of healthy skin from the buttock for a skin graft to a deforming scar of the face, to substantiate his argument. However, he may be confusing the issue by interposing value systems used in dynamic psychiatry into other fields of