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Andrew William Getz

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THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IN PUBLIC MORAL DISCOURSE:  
A COMPARISON OF SELECTED WORKS FROM  
H. TRISTRAM ENGELHARDT, JR., STANLEY HAUERWAS, AND  
RICHARD A. MCCORMICK

A Dissertation submitted to the  
McAnulty College and Graduate School  
of Liberal Arts of Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Andrew W. Getz

August 31, 2006

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To Michael Cahill

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PUBLIC MORAL DISCOURSE

The primary question to be addressed by this dissertation asks, “What is the proper role of the Christian and the Christian community in the ethical arena of a pluralistic society?” The inherently social nature of human beings means that all ethical judgments regarding right and wrong and the good of the human person have social implications. This is no less true of ethical judgments of a religious or theological nature than of any others. But, within contemporary society, particularly the American contemporary society (with its increasing insistence on an overwhelmingly strict separation between church and state), there are many questions regarding how this integration is to be realized. Aside from the pragmatic political questions of how to allow the participation of theologically rooted judgments without thereby endorsing or creating a state religion, there are more fundamental questions. First, there are the questions regarding the impact that faith or religious belief has on ethical judgments. Here one ultimately arrives at the question of “What difference do faith commitments make in the process of making ethical judgments?” Beyond this lies the second set of questions which focus on the role that religiously rooted ethical judgments ought to play in the public arena. These questions culminate in asking “What is the impact of these ethical judgments that are rooted in a particular system of religious beliefs on the larger society that does not necessarily share the religious convictions that ground these judgments?” Thus, to adequately address the question of the ethical role of the Christian and the Christian community one must come to some conclusions regarding both the role of faith commitments in Christian ethics and the impact that these conclusions have on the Christian role in the public moral discourse.

While there have been numerous books and articles addressing the first aspect of the role of faith in ethical judgments, fewer scholars have addressed the later question of the role that these religiously rooted ethical judgments ought to play in society at large. And despite the growing attention to this second matter in the area referred to as public theology, what continues to remain inadequately addressed is the relationship between the answers provided to these two related questions.<sup>1</sup> In contention is whether religiously based ethical judgments function differently inside the faith community than they do in the larger community with a diversity of faith convictions. Upon further investigation, I discovered that this issue was inadequately addressed and that what must be examined in more detail is the relationship between one's understanding of the role of faith in reaching ethical judgments, and one's understanding of how those faith-(in)formed ethical judgments function in a society of diverse faith commitments.

This dissertation undertakes just such an endeavor. To that end this dissertation will examine three Christian ethicists, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Stanley Hauerwas, and Richard A. McCormick, who have different understandings of and approaches to ethics and the role of faith in ethics. This will be done in such a manner as to illustrate the impact that their different understandings of the role of Christian faith in ethics have on the way that they understand Christian ethics functioning in contemporary public moral discourse. As such this will not be an exhaustive examination of the moral methodology of any of these authors. Instead the

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<sup>1</sup> This is even more the case when the field of ethical interest is narrowed to that of health care ethics. Neither the examinations of the role of Christian faith in health care ethics nor the examinations of Christian bioethics as an example of public theology make the necessary and crucial connection. Neither of these approaches to religiously informed medical ethics study the relationship between the role of faith in ethical judgments and the role that those religiously informed ethical judgments play within a religiously pluralistic society.

examination will be complete enough to establish a secure and reliable understanding of each author's methodology and to this end will incorporate the work of other secondary sources.

Chapter one of this dissertation compares these three Christian ethicists by beginning with an examination of their understanding of the nature of ethics. This examination addresses the central concepts of ethics, ethical judgments, and the process of reaching ethical judgments within an individual as well as a social context. In chapter two, after identifying their answers to the fundamental questions of the nature of ethics, the dissertation examines how each of these ethicists answers fundamental questions regarding the role of Christian faith in ethics. Chapter three, the final section of this methodological consideration of the three ethicists, examines their understanding of the notion of "public theology." Following the methodological section, the dissertation examines in turn the approaches to health care ethics taken by Engelhardt (chapter four), Hauerwas (chapter five), and McCormick (chapter six) and in particular the issues of euthanasia and universal health care. The examination of these topics illustrates how the different methodological approaches of these three authors manifest themselves in the actual treatment of contemporary ethical issues.

The ethicists examined were carefully selected for a number of reasons. All three ethicists are recognized and respected Christian ethicists who have significant materials that specifically address both medical ethics and the issue of the proper role of Christian ethics in the public arena. Additionally, all three have addressed the specific issues of euthanasia and universal health care. Also, all three share some fundamental beliefs regarding metaethical questions, such as the rejection of ethical relativism. However, there are some quite significant differences among these authors in how they understand the nature of ethics, the role of faith in ethics, and the role of the Christian community in public moral discourse. Additionally, the

differing traditions of Christianity represented by Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick (Antiochian Orthodox, Methodist, and Roman Catholic respectively) represent a diverse understanding of the Christian faith. And while none of the authors may be considered official spokespersons for their religious denomination, they are at least somewhat representative of their denominational outlook. The shared aspects identified provide a common starting point for the discussion in which there is enough agreement between the ethicists to make comparison of the remaining differences both manageable and meaningful.

The issues for comparison, euthanasia and universal health care, were also carefully selected. In a dissertation such as this it would not be possible to address all common issues addressed by the three ethicists in question. However, consideration of a single issue for comparison seems to be too limited in two respects. First, it would be hard to get a reliable picture of how each ethicist applied his methodological convictions from the examination of a single topic since a particular application may be limited to a specific issue. Second, while there is no sharp line of division, ethical issues in the field of medicine do tend occur at some point along a spectrum between more individually focused issues and more communally focused issues. The treatment of only one issue would automatically exclude any consideration of such variance. In order to overcome the problems presented by selecting only one topic, as well as overcoming the problem of attempting to address too many topics, this dissertation will address two issues. Both euthanasia and universal health care are important issues in the field of medical ethics about which there is significant difference of opinion and ethical controversy.

Additionally, both issues have been treated at some length by the ethicists to be considered, which will make it possible to ascertain both the author's position regarding each issue as well as the aspects common to the author's treatment of both issues. Finally, by selecting both the issue

of euthanasia (which tends to be located on the more individual end of the spectrum) and universal health care (a decidedly communal or social issue) it is possible to examine the authors' treatment of both individual and social issues.

With this in mind, the dissertation will show that it is the faith-(in)formed understanding of the human person that is the crucial link between answering the two questions "What difference do faith commitments make in the process of making ethical judgments?" and "What is the impact of these ethical judgments that are rooted in a particular system of religious beliefs on the larger society that does not necessarily share the religious convictions that ground these judgments?" First, it is each author's faith-(in)formed view of the individual and of humanity as a whole that shapes his understanding of the role that Christian faith plays in the ethics of those individuals that have embraced that faith. Second, it is this same view of the human person that shapes each author's understanding of how those who have not embraced that faith pursue the good in a society of multiple faith commitments. It is these two understandings that serve as the basis of each author's answer to the question "What is the proper role of the Christian and the Christian community in the ethical arena of a pluralistic society?"



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE NATURE OF ETHICS ACCORDING TO ENGELHARDT, HAUERWAS, AND McCORMICK

As indicated by the title, this dissertation will examine the manner in which H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Stanley Hauerwas, and Richard A. McCormick answer the question of “What is the proper role of the Christian and Christian community in the ethical arena of a pluralistic society?” As such, it is necessary to begin by defining certain central concepts and terms. This chapter will examine the concept of ethics from a general perspective while the second chapter will examine the concept of Christian ethics and the impact that Christian faith has on the way ethics is done. Chapter three will then address the specific question of how Christian ethics ought to function within a society of diverse religious convictions. Because a thorough academic investigation of these concepts and their interaction would be beyond the scope of a dissertation, this study is limited to examining these concepts as found in the works of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the concept of ethics as presented in the work of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick. In order to accomplish that task this chapter will begin by identifying the basic aspects of any ethical system. It will then examine the relationship of metaethics and normative ethics as well as several fundamental questions that must be addressed at both the metaethical and normative levels of ethics. Having identified these questions, the third, and most important, section of this chapter will proceed to an examination of the answers provided by Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick. The chapter will conclude with a comparison of points of similarity and difference in their answers.

## Presuppositions Of Engaging In Ethics

According to Steven Luper,

Ethics is the attempt to clarify how people ought to live. It elucidates the nature of the good person and the good life, telling us how to flourish or live well, and it characterizes the obligations we have, enabling us to identify what we must do. Ethics is the wide-ranging study of right and wrong, as well as good and bad, insofar as these pertain to conduct and character. It pays particular attention to clarifying the two most basic moral concepts – the concept of the good and the concept of the right – and figuring out how these two concepts are related to each other.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, ethics involves not only human behavior and choices regarding right and wrong, but a critical (and self-critical) awareness and evaluation of the bases of those choices as well as the process by which those choices are made. The purpose of this critical evaluation is to be able to make better decisions. Therefore, certain presuppositions are made in the very act of engaging in “ethics.” It is important to identify these presuppositions that serve as the common foundation of any ethical system.

First and foremost, any ethics begins with a rejection of determinism. In its study of the decisions made by persons, any ethical system recognizes the ability of persons to make decisions. Humans have the ability to choose their actions; thus their actions are not predetermined by the context or environment within which the action takes place.<sup>2</sup> Ethics presupposes that humans, unlike chemicals or pure physical matter, have some measure of freedom or willed control over how they act. There is an implicit recognition in any pursuit of ethics that there is a certain degree of free will or autonomy present in human persons that enables them to make decisions regarding their conduct and to exercise self-control based on

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Luper, *A Guide to Ethics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Even doctrines of predestination advanced by some religious groups do not consist so much of the denial of human freedom and the human ability to choose specific actions as they insist on divine foreknowledge of those choices.

these decisions. If this autonomy does not exist then any sort of reflection on decisions of right and wrong with the intent of making better decisions is irrational.

This assertion of autonomy should not be understood as a claim of absolute and total moral freedom implying that human persons are completely free to choose to do whatever they want to do. While there is much debate about how much impact certain internal and external elements have on the moral agent, there is universal agreement that all moral decisions occur within both physical and social contexts which provide a framework for these decisions and which therefore impose certain limitations on the decisions that the person may make. Like all other aspects of human existence there is a limited nature to human freedom.

Therefore, human freedom of decisions within a particular context is the beginning presupposition of ethics. Reflection on choices between two or more options, choices of what actions to do, choices of what type of person to be, are meaningless if there is no freedom (limited though it may be) from which those choices may emerge.<sup>3</sup> As noted in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*,

For one cannot be responsible for one's actions if one is incapable of acting freely, which is to say, of one's own free will. The capacity for free action is thus essential to moral agency, and how this capacity is to be explained, whether it fits within a deterministic universe, and if not, whether the notion of moral responsibility should be jettisoned, are among the deepest questions that the student of moral agency must face.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It should be made clear at this point, that the term choices refers not only to individual choices of action or behavior, but also to the choices made by the person regarding habits of behavior and which virtues to pursue. While these choices related to the development of moral character require a more sustained effort over a greater expanse of time, they are manifested and shaped through more specific choices, and are none-the-less the result of the exercise of human freedom. It should be remembered through the remainder of this work, that the word "choice" or "choices" is not limited to a specific behavioral decision or action, but rather to the exercise of human freedom in making a selection between two or more options.

<sup>4</sup> "Ethics," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 289.

Another of the most fundamental aspects of ethics is that it is undertaken with the goal of being able to use one's freedom to make better decisions or to become a better person. This goal can only be realized if some of the available choices are better choices than others. Thus, the second, equally important, presupposition to any pursuit of ethics is the recognition that some of these choices are better than others.<sup>5</sup> If one choice is no better or worse than another, then while we may have the freedom to choose between options, there is no real ethical difference between them. In such a situation no reason could be given for choosing one option over another.

This question of value in ethics asks, "Of all the choices or options possible to embrace, which, if any, is better than some, or all, of the others?" or more succinctly "Of all that could be, what ought to be?" These questions pertain to both the choices regarding particular human action as well as the choices regarding moral character.<sup>6</sup>

By virtue of being able to make judgments as to which of several choices is better ("more good") than other choices, it is possible to ascertain what choice ought to be pursued. Kia Nielsen notes in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Traditionally, moral philosophy had practical purpose; moral knowledge was not conceived as purely theoretical knowledge of moral phenomena but as practical

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<sup>5</sup> To some extent, even cultural relativism regards some choices as better than others in as much as an action is either in harmony with or opposed to cultural norms, though to what extent this is a value judgment of better or worse is a matter of great debate.

<sup>6</sup> These aspects of choices of specific action and choices of moral character are profoundly interdependent since it is choices regarding actions that form moral character and it is this same moral character that influences and often determines which choices of moral action will be made. Thus the question of "value" and of "ought" pertains to both choices of action and choices of character. For a more detailed examination of the interdependency of character and choices see Russell B. Connors, Jr., and Patrick T. McCormick, *Character, Choices & Community: The Three Faces of Christian Ethics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998).

knowledge about how we ought to live. The goal was not that we should simply know what goodness is but that we should become good.<sup>7</sup>

It is here that the link between the right and the good is established. The right choice is the choice that is recognized to be the better option.<sup>8</sup> The concept of “ought” presupposes the possibility of value judgments, of judgments of better and worse. There is, then, a dependence on some criteria or measure of “The Good” as well as the ability of the human person to recognize and utilize those criteria. It is precisely these questions of what criteria or measures should be used to evaluate “The Good” and how the human person can recognize these criteria that constitute some of the central issues of ethics. But regardless of what criteria are selected, it is clear that engaging in ethics presupposes not only the capacity of human freedom, but also the possibility of some choices being better than others and the ability of the human person to recognize which is which. Without acknowledging both human freedom and the possibility of making accurate value judgments, one does not have ethics, but rather has only some form of sociology, a systematic study of human behavior.

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<sup>7</sup> Kai Nielsen, "Ethics, Problems of," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, vol. 3, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & The Free Press, 1972). 117-134, 117.

<sup>8</sup> This statement is not meant to imply that there is only one right choice in any given situation. Often there is no way to recognize the best choice, but moral reflection may discern some choices that are worse than others and thus ought not be pursued. Unfortunately this approach, along with a focus on actions rather than moral character, has often lead to the process of ethics focusing on “the wrong” that is to be avoided and how culpable the moral agent may be for wrong actions or choices. From this perspective it is often easy for ethics to deteriorate into a focus on the “wrongness” of specific acts with the associated question of “Where is the line that distinguishes minimally acceptable behavior and behavior which is morally unacceptable?” In more vernacular terms this is the question of “How much can I get away with before I’m really doing something wrong?” This distortion of ethics has been one of the contributing factors in the growing emphasis on “character ethics” or “virtue ethics,” which focus on the moral agent rather than specific actions or hard choices, with the intent of identifying and developing those skills, characteristics, traits, and habits of behavior that foster the good of the moral agent. In that sense, character and virtue ethics have been a return to the focus of ethics as a process of learning a way of life, or of learning how to live the good life.

## Metaethics, Normative Ethics, and Fundamental Questions

Having identified these presuppositions that are made by any system of ethics, it is now appropriate to identify certain fundamental questions that an ethical system must address. These fundamental questions can be roughly separated into two categories: questions of metaethics and questions of normative ethics. Steven Luper clarifies the difference between these two categories quite well in his book, *A Guide to Ethics*:

The distinction between metaethics and other sorts of ethical inquiry is quite flexible, but we can draw a line between the two. We can say that we are doing normative ethics when we provide answers to the questions, What must we do? and What makes a life as good as possible? We are also doing normative ethics when we justify our answers to these questions. . . . By contrast, we are doing metaethics when we investigate the ontological, conceptual, and epistemological assumptions we make in the course of doing normative ethics. . . . Ethics itself includes both normative ethics and metaethics.<sup>9</sup>

In answering the ontological (“What is the nature of moral properties such as goodness and rightness: in what sense, if any, are they real?”),<sup>10</sup> conceptual (“What precisely do moral claims and moral terms such as “right” and “good” mean?”),<sup>11</sup> and epistemological (“How do we get in touch with these properties; that is how do we discover that they exist and that the claims we make about them are true?”)<sup>12</sup> questions of metaethics, one identifies the assumptions made “in the course of doing normative ethics.”<sup>13</sup> As Nielsen notes,

There are a host of questions here about what is the right, just, or fair thing to do that any sound normative ethic must answer. We cannot here examine them in detail, but it should be reasonably apparent that satisfactory answers to them again

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<sup>9</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 15.

lead to making a decision about appropriate answers to metaethical questions. Can "right," "ought," "just" be defined or explicated in terms of "good"? Is discovery of the criteria for good also discovery of the criteria for right? Are there independent objective criteria for rightness or justice? What is the logic of justification in ethics? What is (are) the meaning(s) of "moral"? This discussion would again show that normative ethics, pursued diligently, naturally leads, when pressed to a certain level of abstraction, to the conceptual inquiry called metaethics.<sup>14</sup>

The answers to these metaethical questions establish the context within which a particular dialogue of normative ethics takes place.

Misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflict in answering questions of normative ethics are often the result of conflicting metaethical assumptions. Without clarifying these assumptions, there will be inevitable, and seemingly irresolvable, disagreements at the level of normative ethics. This is not to imply that clarifying differences in metaethical assumptions will resolve all normative disagreements. But many of the disagreements in matters of normative ethics can be better understood by identifying the underlying metaethical disagreements. Thus, while the experience of ethics usually begins with questions of normative ethics, it is both important and beneficial for this study, as a systematic study of ethics, to begin by identifying the fundamental questions of metaethics.

### Questions of Metaethics

The most basic questions of metaethics are epistemological in nature: "Does ethics have any meaning, and if so, how is that meaning verified?"<sup>15</sup> In answering these questions several approaches may be taken. To begin with one can deny that ethics has any meaning. From this

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<sup>14</sup> Nielsen, "Ethics, Problems of," 124-25.

<sup>15</sup> David F. Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 77. For this portion of the paper, I will be making ample use of both Kelly's and Luper's work in detailing the understanding of both metaethics and normative ethics.

approach the concepts of “right” and “wrong,” “good” and “evil,” have no intellectual meaning. Often referred to as subjectivism, emotivism or non-cognitivism, this approach denies that these concepts have any intellectual or cognitive content. Such an approach regards any ethical discussion as meaningless dialogue about emotional dispositions. These emotions, like any other emotions, are based on the individual’s reaction and have no relevance to the emotions that any other individual may have regarding the same issue. From this perspective “ethical” dialogue is nothing more than an interchange of statements regarding how the participants feel. Epistemologically, the only thing that can be addressed is whether or not a statement accurately communicates the feeling of the individual making that statement. Therefore to debate about anything being “right” or “wrong” is a pointless and meaningless conversation.<sup>16</sup>

A slightly modified version of this approach, metaethical relativism, would allow that the concepts of “right” and “wrong” have some meaning, but that this meaning is assigned rather than discovered. Such an approach, while admitting that ethical claims of “right” and “wrong” have some meaning (some intellectual content) and can in some sense be regarded as true or false, would maintain that there is more than one true morality.<sup>17</sup> The truth of any moral claims depends upon the person or group making these claims. This sort of “ethical pluralism” would then allow for conflicting ethical claims to both be equally true within their context. In addressing pluralism Luper points out that,

Pluralists called *individual relativists* are inclined to think that we each have our own true morality. They say that the standards we accept determine what

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<sup>16</sup> Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics*, 79; Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 28-29; Nielsen, "Ethics, Problems of," 125.

<sup>17</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 40. While quite similar, this is not a denial of the ethical presupposition of value. Instead of saying that no choices are better than others, this approach maintains that it is the individual or culture that gets to assign that value and thus gets to decide which choices are in reality better than others.



we should do, and these vary substantially from person to person. Other pluralists we may call *cultural relativists* maintain that moralities follow cultural lines: Each person's culture supplies the standards that determine what that person should do, and these differ fundamentally across cultures.<sup>18</sup>

Both at the individual and cultural level, this approach results in an inevitable ambiguity in any sort of ethical judgment. The moral norms, because they are assigned, can be whatever we, as individuals or as a culture, choose. "Metaethical relativism claims that there are no objectively sound procedures for justifying one moral code or one set of moral judgments as against another code or set of moral judgments."<sup>19</sup> For the advocate of individual relativism, ethical dialogue is ultimately as meaningless as it is for the non-cognitivist. It may communicate ideas about "right" and "wrong," but because only individual beliefs matter in the making of moral decisions no one can judge my decisions or actions as "wrong." The very fact that I have chosen to regard them as "right" makes them "right for me" regardless of how many other people regard them as wrong.

This same ambiguity at the cultural level is little better. While from this perspective it is a culture that determines "right" and "wrong" for the members of the culture, there are no objective guidelines for this determination. The same action or moral choice may be judged as ethically right by one culture and ethically wrong by another, and both judgments are equally true. The action or choice thus has only the moral "rightness" or "wrongness" assigned to it by the culture. No set of ethical judgments is any better than another. Slavery and racial discrimination, in the pre-Civil War South were merely **different** cultural moral norms and cannot be judged to be any better or worse than our present moral outlook. The Holocaust could thus be regarded as ethical behavior according to a **different** set of cultural moral norms – moral

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<sup>18</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Nielsen, "Ethics, Problems of," 125.

norms which cannot be regarded as any better or worse than a contemporary ethical condemnation.

Secondly, such an approach of cultural relativism would seem to limit, if not eliminate, the possibility of “inter-cultural” ethical dialogue with any sort of resultant progress or development. Since each culture serves as its own ultimate criterion for ethical judgments, there are no criteria for resolving any intercultural ethical disagreements. Any intercultural ethical dialogue is at best one of mutual exchange of information. The two differing ethical languages pose a difficulty for the exchange of information, and are an insurmountable barrier to value judgments. The ethically normative criteria remain fixed for each culture. The information exchanged between cultures continues to be evaluated in terms of each culture’s respective value judgments. While these culturally normative criteria may be subject to change,<sup>20</sup> such change could not be regarded as development or progress since any new ethical value judgments are no better or worse than the previous criteria.

A final, equally problematic, ambiguity with this approach of cultural relativism is that of identifying what culture is to serve as the source of morally normative criteria. “Cultures” are somewhat nebulous with no exact or clear boundaries to delimit one culture from another. Moreover, they overlap and so individuals simultaneously exist in a number of different cultures and cultural groups. One may be Irish and Catholic and American or German and Lutheran and

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<sup>20</sup> In point of fact, from a very strict point of view, such ethical norms and criteria ought not to change, except perhaps to resolve inconsistencies or in light of new factual information. The ethically normative criteria of a particular culture remain the ultimate authoritative moral norm within that culture and so are not subject to being “corrected” in light of being evaluated as false or wrong. At best they can be seen as changing so as to address any aspect of the system that is “incomplete.” Ethical evaluation of newly developed medical techniques or military technology would be a good example. The normative judgments regarding the actions or practices would need to be made, and in that sense the culture’s ethical system would change. But the criteria by which such judgments came to be made would remain constant.

American. Each of these groups can provide a set of moral norms and thus serve as the source of normative criteria for the individual. But it is unclear as to which of these cultures (and their differing moral norms) ought to serve as the ultimate source of morally normative criteria for any individual or group of individuals. There are no ethical criteria for resolving the conflict, and no ethical criteria for the individual to use to determine which culture is “righter” and thus ought to be followed.

A third approach to the metaethical epistemological questions of ethics would be to assert that not only does ethics (“right” and “wrong”) have real meaning, but that this meaning is the same for all people. Such an approach is often referred to as Metaethical Absolutism or Universalism. In his book, Luper clarifies this term of Universalism saying,

Many of us think there is a single true morality, one true view of the right, and perhaps one true view of the good as well, that applies both across cultures and within them and can be called upon to settle ethical disputes locally and globally. This position is called *ethical universalism*.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the approach of metaethical relativists, metaethical absolutists would assert that there are objective criteria for ethical judgments of “right” and “wrong” that are not assigned but discovered. These criteria by which one determines the “right” and the “wrong” are the same for all people. There is in this respect some aspect of human nature that is the same for all people which serves as some common base from which to do ethics. From this approach any ethical judgment or evaluation has an objective nature which makes it the same for all people; ethical judgments may be universalized. From Nielsen’s universalistic perspective,

Moral judgments all make a claim to universality—if I judge that I have a right to disregard a certain regulation or that I ought to do a certain thing, I implicitly judge that relevantly similar persons in relevantly similar situations also have a right to do it or ought to do it. . . . What, exactly, counts as a relevant similarity or a relevant respect cannot be determined apart from the context and nature of what

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<sup>21</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 38.

we are discussing, but what constitutes a relevant similarity is often evident enough in a given context.<sup>22</sup>

Such an approach does not deny that culture has any impact on ethical judgments, but does insist that the differing cultures do not change the criteria for “right” and “wrong.” Instead the duties, obligations and effects, are altered by virtue of the cultural context of the ethical decision that is being made. The “ethical measuring stick” is the same from one culture to the next, but when ethically evaluating an action the actual ethical result that is measured may be quite different as a result of the cultural context within which the action is taking place. The cultural context within which a decision is being made may change the situation in such a way as to make the situations relevantly “dis-similar.” Again this universal “ethical measuring stick” is not known but rather is discerned and discovered.

Moreover, asserting the existence of such universal moral criteria is not the same as asserting that these criteria are known with certainty.<sup>23</sup> Due to the uncertain (or incomplete) understanding of these criteria, there is no absolute measure of right and wrong which can be known in such a manner as to simply be applied. Ethics is not a one way street and a simple matter of applying a set of moral criteria to specific choices, or of using a common “ethical measuring stick” to see what choices measure up. Instead there is a mutually formative relationship (at both the individual and social level) by which the discerned values assist in making ethical choices and the ethical choices made assist in discerning valid ethical value systems.

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<sup>22</sup> Nielsen, "Ethics, Problems of," 127.

<sup>23</sup> An excellent examination of this understanding of the pluralistic nature of contemporary ethics is found in the works of Jeffrey Stout. Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Having taken such a position of universality of meaning, the question that must be answered by metaethical absolutists is how one is to verify the meaning of “right” and “wrong.” Given a disagreement about the ethical principles or norms by which to make ethical judgments, theoretically, it should be possible to determine which principles or norms are ethically better. Again, such a value judgment will require some sort of normative criteria that will serve to evaluate the ethical principles; we must have some way of verifying judgments of “right” and “wrong” as either correct or incorrect judgments. Thus metaethical absolutism can be subdivided based on what is regarded as the source by which such verification takes place.<sup>24</sup>

One such absolutism is supernatural metaethical absolutism, according to which it is God that tells us “right” from “wrong.” This can take place through sacred scripture of some sort, through the religious community, or through personal revelation. In whatever way this revelation occurs, it is a direct revelation by God to the human person and it is one which cannot be achieved by human reason. Thus ethical evaluations of “right” and “wrong” need not be reasonable to be true, and, from some perspectives, need not be consistent.<sup>25</sup> Moreover this also implies that these ethical evaluations can be known with some degree of certainty.

By contrast, intuitional metaethical absolutism would insist that we have some form of ethical intuition by which we know “right” and “wrong.” By some sort of gut instinct we simply have a feel for what is “right” or “wrong.” Again, this need not be reasonable. In the end, this

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<sup>24</sup> Much of this material is based on David F. Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 81-85, as well as on some of his unpublished class notes.

<sup>25</sup> One can see an example of this ethical inconsistency by examining the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. God’s commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac made sacrificing Isaac ethically right. Had God not commanded Abraham to stop and to sacrifice the sheep instead, it would have been right for Abraham to kill Isaac. The single action of killing Isaac was right when God commanded it and was wrong when the command was changed. The only ethical consistency that is necessary is that it be in accord with the will of God.

intuitional absolutism is not significantly different from metaethical relativism, for while intuitional absolutism claims that there is some way to verify ethical judgments as right or wrong, the reality remains that whatever I feel is right is “right for me” while your intuition serves as your moral norm. Any disagreement between the two moral intuitions is irreconcilable since there are no criteria to determine which of our conflicting intuitions is actually right.

The approach of rational metaethical absolutism recognizes the inconsistencies in various “moral intuitions” and makes appeal to universal human reason as the ultimate criterion for ethical judgments. Human reason tells us right from wrong. Thus, when reasonable people agree that something is rationally “right,” it is in fact right. Since human reason is the ultimate moral norm, their rational agreement makes it right. There are two problems with this approach. First, it fails to recognize the possibility of rational people agreeing to a wrong ethical judgment. Second, it makes a claim to “universal” human reason which is difficult to support in contemporary “post-modern” society. While not as pronounced as intuitional or cultural differences, there are differences in what people regard as rational. In the face of such differences, and without any other ethical criteria for right and wrong, rational metaethical absolutism results in conflicting ethical judgments with no criteria for choosing one rather than another.

What David Kelly refers to as empirical metaethical absolutism claims that “people discover right and wrong by using their reason and experience to investigate, individually and collectively, the emergent patterns of creation as God is creating them.”<sup>26</sup> Sometimes referred to as “natural law,” such an approach insists that there is an order to the human person and creation

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<sup>26</sup> Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics*, 84.

as a whole.<sup>27</sup> Human beings, with the use of their reason (very inclusively understood) are able to discern and discover these patterns and what fosters or impedes the development of human nature. This human ability to come to understand “right” and “wrong” (“good” and “bad”) is limited in numerous ways, such as time, space, and the limited capacity of human knowledge and understanding. Moreover, this ability to know the ethical reality of “right” and “wrong” is, like all human ability to know reality, an ongoing process of discovery and discernment. Again, ethical patterns are only partially and imperfectly known and understood thus ethical conflicts often ought to be understood as a call to pursue a further process of ethical discovery and discernment. In this approach, ethical knowledge, like all other human knowledge of reality, is

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<sup>27</sup> This view of natural law at the level of metaethics enables theists to understand God, the creator of all nature, as the ultimate source of right and wrong and good and evil. Thus it is possible for theists to engage in mutually beneficial ethical discourse with non-theists, who by use of their own reason and their own experience of reality, are capable of making correct ethical insights and judgments. Steven Luper’s examination of natural law occurs within his examination of the Divine Command view of metaethics. He critiques a very narrow view of Divine Command metaethics, what has been referred to above as “supernatural metaethical absolutism.” Luper rejects this approach in which something is right or wrong by virtue of God’s declaring it to be so. This means that it is only by knowing this command that we can know if something is right or wrong. However, his analysis of natural law recognizes that the foundation of this metaethical approach, rather than being rooted in a revelation of some sort, rests instead on an understanding of human nature as the ultimate criterion for assessing right and wrong. In this respect Luper and Kelly agree (Kelly, 94). Unfortunately, Luper proceeds with a much more narrow view of human nature and thus his interpretation of “natural law” borders on an approach of physicalism which identifies human physical nature as “human nature.” Luper, after failing to recognize a more inclusive understanding of human nature, then rejects this narrow view of “natural law.” In many respects this limited view of “natural law” as “physicalist natural law” has been very much present in Catholic ethics, and in particular in Catholic medical and sexual ethics, but it is not the understanding used in this dissertation. For an excellent examination of the developing understanding of “natural law,” an understanding more in line with the approach of this dissertation, see Jean Porter’s *Natural & Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

subject to critique, criticism, and re-evaluation in light of new and developing understandings of that reality.

Reason continues to play a crucial role in the recognition of right and wrong, but it is reality, not reason, that is the ultimate criterion for judging something as right or wrong. In such an approach it would be possible for rational people, of a particular time or culture, to agree that some action or ethical disposition is right when in reality it was wrong. And it would be the human ability to discover right and wrong that would enable the process of re-evaluation that would ultimately lead to the change of ethical judgments. Such changes of judgments would be progress in ethical knowledge. While this approach entails a recognition of a certain tentativeness to all ethical judgments, since they remain subject to future critique and re-evaluation, it also provides a universal criterion by which to make ethical judgments that can be at least partially known. This approach also provides the potential for ethical development.

Such an approach sees ethical pluralism as an important aspect of ethics since it is through discussion among people and groups with varying criteria for evaluating “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “bad”, that members of the discussion achieve a better understanding of both ethics and the values to be used in ethical choices. As such, ethics is not a consideration of which ethical systems or choices match up most fully to some check list of moral criteria, set of values or type of character. The “right” ethical system, like the criteria for “right” and “wrong” themselves, is not so much known prior to engaging in ethics as it is discovered in the process of doing ethics – engaging in ethical dialogue with persons of different ethical views.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> But it should also be noted that in order for this process to be a PROGRESS of ethical thought – to be a positive growth achieved by discernment and discovery among differing ethical systems with differing ethical value judgments – for this to be PROGRESS rather than just constant change of view – there must be some common criteria, no matter how vaguely understood, by which those in ethical conflict can make determinations of better and worse.



In some respects this approach results in a more subjective view of ethics. However, the subjective element is not so dominant as to eliminate the existence of some common values which are discovered rather than created. Such an approach admits a degree of pluralism, not because of a judgment of moral or metaethical relativism, but rather because of 1) an uncertainty about moral criteria (which are discovered rather than known) and 2) the possibility of differing approaches to doing ethics being equally valid, though incomplete, understandings of a common ethical reality. This tentativeness ought not be regarded as opposed to the universal claims of absolutism. Luper, who refers to absolutism as universalism, states that

universalism is not committed to the claim that the single true moral standard is so specific that it can be used to settle all possible disputes among people. It might be rather abstract, and too indefinite to solve all of the problems people might face. . . . Moreover, even if there is a single true morality, it does not follow that we know what it is. Most of us will acknowledge that our views about moral truth are at least as fallible as our beliefs about, say, physics and chemistry.<sup>29</sup>

With these various metaethical understandings of the meaning of “right” and “wrong,” its universality, and how we come to know and verify that knowledge, it is possible to examine several of the basic questions of normative ethics.

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Indeed the very process of ethics entails a long term commitment to the ability to discern and discover values and value systems that can be deemed as better or worse than other value systems. Without such an understanding, any sort of agreement between previously disagreeing moral agents is nothing more than an increase in the number of people who agree with one point of view. There is also one other important point to be made. The process is not necessarily inevitable progress. The claim of the possibility of progress (and even the belief in an ultimate fulfillment of that progress) is not a claim that each change in ethical system, beliefs or judgments is progress. There are many situations in which change of ethical beliefs, values and systems are for the worse. But even here the claim that they are worse, rather than just change, necessitates the belief in some sort of objective universal criteria.

<sup>29</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 38.

## Questions of Normative Ethics

In his article on the problems of ethics, Nielsen notes that,

Traditionally, moral philosophy had a practical purpose; moral knowledge was not conceived as purely theoretical knowledge or moral phenomena but as practical knowledge about how we ought to live. The goal was not that we should simply know what goodness is but that we should become good. (Some argued that to know what goodness really is, is to become good.)<sup>30</sup>

It is this goal of pursuing the good that leads to the central questions of normative ethics: What are the proper criteria for determining the Good? Are there Moral Absolutes? What is the relationship between individual and social elements of ethics? Central to the normative level of ethics is not the metaethical question of how we come to know the meaning of “right” and “wrong,” but instead the more applicable questions of whether certain actions, behaviors or virtues are “right” or “wrong.” However, answering these questions inevitably leads to addressing the metaethical questions of “What criteria ought one use to make these ethical judgments?” and, ultimately, to “What makes something right or wrong?” It is clear that the metaethical questions and the answers provided have a profound impact on the manner in which one goes about normative ethics. One can see this, too, in the questions that Luper identifies as definitive of normative ethics, “What must we do? and What makes a life as good as possible?”<sup>31</sup>

Luper points out that if one focuses on the question of living life as well as possible one will tend toward value hedonism, the concentration on the achievement of non-instrumental (often agent-relative) value,<sup>32</sup> or value perfectionism, the concentration on the achievement of

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<sup>30</sup> Nielsen, "Ethics, Problems of," 117.

<sup>31</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 16.

“an ideal human life that includes all final goods, all excellences or perfections.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, focusing on the question of “What must we do?” will tend to result in approaching normative ethics from the methodology of virtue ethics, ethical egoism, utilitarianism, Kantianism, or contractarianism. A full explanation of each of these normative approaches to ethics is beyond the scope of this dissertation, so Luper’s very brief explanation of these approaches will have to suffice.

- § *Virtue Ethics.* A moral exemplar is someone whose character embodies certain excellences or perfections, and we ought to do whatever the moral exemplar would do.
- § *Ethical egoism.* As individuals, we must do ourselves the most good (where “good” is defined narrowly, in terms of the individual’s pleasure, safety, health, and so on).
- § *Utilitarianism.* We must bring about the greatest aggregate good (taking all into account, not just ourselves).
- § *Kantianism.* We must respect moral agency (or, We must act as reason dictates).
- § *Contractarianism.* We must abide by rules that would be adopted by people who want their terms of association to be justified in a mutually agreeable way.<sup>34</sup>

In broader ethical terms one can see that these approaches each tend to focus their attention on a differing aspect of the process of moral decision making: virtue ethics on the moral agent, ethical egoism and utilitarianism on the outcome for the individual or community, Kantianism (and deontology) on the moral rules or authorities, and contractarianism on the

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<sup>33</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Luper, *A Guide to Ethics*, 17-18. Luper’s approach to Kantianism is a narrow understanding of deontology in which the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on how well it accords with moral rules, regardless of its particular consequences. With Kantianism the rules that an action must accord with is the rule of ethical reason. Other more general approaches to deontology also focus on the primary importance of rules and obligations, but the sources of those rules and obligations are not as exclusive as the reliance on a Kantian concept of ethical reason. Instead of the rather narrow understanding of the absolute authority of Kantian reason, the more general approaches include appeals to rules and obligations rooted in the relationships that exist between certain understandings of God, self, others and the world. It will be the more general approach of deontology that is used in the later parts of this dissertation.

mutual agreement of all those involved in the process of moral decision making itself. One should note that while the authors under consideration tend to take differing approaches to normative ethics, these differences have less impact on their understanding of the role of Christian faith and ethics in a pluralistic society than do their metaethical differences. Moreover, as will be seen later, it is their metaethical approach that has the greatest formative impact on both their understanding of the role of faith as well as on their understanding of normative ethics in a religiously pluralistic society. Therefore, it is appropriate at this point to turn to an examination of the ethical systems of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Stanley Hauerwas, and Richard A. McCormick.

### **The Moral Methodology of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.**

In both *The Foundations of Bioethics*<sup>35</sup> and *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*,<sup>36</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., provides an excellent overview of both his ethics and his ethical convictions and judgments regarding certain moral issues. Both books are a good discussion of his moral methodology and promote a consistent ethical position that defends the necessity of a faith conviction as a prerequisite for doing what he refers to as “thick” ethics.

Engelhardt argues that without some moral measuring stick one can't make ethical judgments, and that since there are many competing claims as to which is the right ethical method (the right measuring stick), one has to make an ethical evaluation of the methods, a judgment of which of these methods is better or worse. But to do this one must have some criteria, some measuring stick, for better and worse ethical methods, but here too there are

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<sup>35</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Exton, PA: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000).

competing claims about how this comparison and evaluation are to be done; so the process continues into infinite regress. He rejects reason's ability to be this universally acknowledged measure, because he accepts a postmodern critique (perhaps even a rejection or dismissal) of any such thing as "universal reason" and accepts the notion that all thoughts, including reason, are so culturally conditioned that "cross cultural" communication (including in this sense inter-religious dialogue) is not really true communication.

But he argues that despite the inability to come to some agreement regarding a universal measure for right and wrong, ethics is not relativism. There is a code or criterion that is universal for right and wrong even though not everyone recognizes this and even fewer can reach agreement regarding the content of this universal moral code. His assertion is that the source of this universal moral norm is God, and that to understand morality and ethics properly one must first understand God properly. Ethics is a byproduct of right relationship with God. Thus for Engelhardt one must begin with a proper faith conviction that leads to right relationship with God which provides the criteria, the ethical measuring stick, that enables one to make valid assessments of "better" and "worse." This, too, contributes to his dismissal of inter-cultural communication, because the axiomatic beliefs (especially religious beliefs) that are accepted as self evident (the faith convictions that are accepted without "proof") vary from one community to the next in such a way that any dialogue about any significant matter of disagreement ultimately reaches a stalemate of contradictory fundamental beliefs that cannot be resolved. The explanation in his introduction to the second edition of *The Foundations of Bioethics* is worth quoting at some length.

As a step to dispelling confusion, in this second edition I have rebaptized "the principle of autonomy" with the name "the principle of permission" to indicate better that what is at stake is not some value possessed by autonomy or liberty, but the recognition that secular moral authority is derived from the

permission of those involved in a common undertaking. The principle of permission underscores the circumstance that, when God is not heard by all in the same way (or is not heard by some at all), and when all do not belong to one closely-knit, well-defined community, and since reason fails to discover a canonical, concrete morality, then secularly justifiable moral authorization or authority comes not from God, nor from a particular community's moral vision, nor from reason, but from the permission of individuals. In this deafness to God and the failure of reason, moral strangers meet as individuals.

If one wants more than secular reason can disclose – and one should want more – then one should join a religion and be careful to choose the right one. Canonical moral content will not be found outside of a particular moral narrative, a view from somewhere. Here the reader deserves to know that I indeed experience and acknowledge the immense cleft between what secular philosophical reasoning can provide and what I know in the fullness of my own narrative to be true. I indeed affirm the canonical, concrete moral narrative, but realize it cannot be given by reason, only by grace. I am, after all, a born-again Texan Orthodox Catholic, a convert by choice and conviction, through grace and in repentance for sins innumerable (including a first edition upon which much improvement was needed). My moral perspective does not lack content. I am of the firm conviction that, save for God's mercy, those who willfully engage in much that a peaceable, fully secular state will permit (e.g., euthanasia and direct abortion on demand) stand in danger of hell's eternal fires. As a Texan, I puzzle whether these are kindled with mesquite, live oak, or trash cedar. Being schooled in theology, I know that this is a question to be answered only on the Last Day by the Almighty. Though I acknowledge that there is no secular moral authority that can be justified in general secular terms to forbid the sale of heroin, the availability of direct abortion, the marketing of for-profit euthanatization services, or the provision of commercial surrogacy, I firmly hold none of these endeavors to be good. These are great moral evils. But their evil cannot be grasped in purely secular terms. To be pro-choice in general secular terms is to understand God's tragic relationship to Eden. To be free is to be free to choose very wrongly.<sup>37</sup>

Engelhardt explains the historical development of ethics as follows. Christian confidence in replacing polytheism with authoritative and right monotheism brought with it an expectation of an associated monistic approach to ethics (which had up until that point been, like religious belief, polyistic). With the mushrooming of religious pluralism, as a result of The Great Schism and The Protestant Reformation, people could no longer turn to a single universal religious belief

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<sup>37</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, xi.

as the authoritative ethical norm. Instead ethics chose to turn to "universal human reason" as the authoritative norm in reaching ethical judgments.

As the Western Christian religious synthesis weakened, Enlightenment and progressivist hopes grew that reason (through philosophy or rational reflection generally) could disclose the character of the good life and the general canons of moral probity outside of any particular moral narrative. This hope arose against the background of the Thirty Years' War and the Civil War in England. The aspiration was to discover by reason a common morality that should bind all and provide the foundations for perpetual peace. This has been the modern philosophical moral project: to secure the moral substance and authority that had been promised by the Western Middle Ages through a synergy of grace and reason, but now through rational argument. This hope has proved false. Rather than philosophy being able to fill the void left by the collapse of the hegemony of Christian thought in the West, philosophy has shown itself to be many competing philosophies and philosophical ethics. The attempt to sustain a secular equivalent of Western Christian monotheism through the disclosure of a unique moral and metaphysical account of reality has fragmented into a polytheism of perspectives with its chaos of moral diversity and its cacophony of numerous competing moral narratives. This circumstance as a sociological condition, reflecting our epistemological limitations, defines postmodernity. Secular rationality appears triumphant. But it has become many rationalities. It is not clear whether it can give moral or metaphysical orientation.<sup>38</sup>

For Engelhardt what has happened is that modernism and postmodernism have come to the recognition that there is no such thing as universal human reason. We exist in relationship with one another as moral strangers, and only moral friends (those who recognize a common worldview with a common moral authority) can actually engage in "content-full" ethics. Moral strangers can only focus on procedural "content-less" ethics, and be bound together by the virtue of mutual permission.<sup>39</sup>

The distinction between moral friends and moral strangers can often be captured in a stipulative distinction between communities and societies. In the arguments that follow in this book, community is often contrasted with society. In such contrasts, community is used to identify a body of men and women bound together by common moral traditions and/or practices around a shared vision of

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<sup>38</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> In this respect Engelhardt may be considered a contractarian ethicist. See page 24.

the good life, which allows them to collaborate as moral friends. The moral practices and traditions that bind individuals within a community may be more or less thick or thin. Members of a monastery will be very thickly or tightly bound together with overarching and robust moral traditions and practices. Other communities may not be as tightly joined. Society is used to identify an association that compasses individuals who find themselves in diverse moral communities. Though they can collaborate in a common association, they find their substantive moral location within those communities they share with moral friends. The Amish, the Hassidim, devout Orthodox Christians, or the members of an ideologically unified commune may understand themselves as citizens and therefore members of a larger American society, but their primary moral place and identification will be in a particular community. Others who commit themselves less robustly to any particular moral community will find themselves in overlapping communities to which they give different allegiances and differing levels of moral commitment. Even these individuals, if they look at the larger society, will discover that there are many associates or citizens who are members of moral communities with which they have significant disagreement, but yet with whom they can still collaborate as limited associates or citizens, albeit moral strangers.<sup>40</sup>

This leads him to the position that the correct approach to public ethics is a libertarian one in which people are free to do whatever they want to do, and that as totally free individuals the only basis for social authority is the agreement of a group of people to abide by certain self-imposed rules.<sup>41</sup> But even these are arbitrary and subject to any revision that the group agrees to

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<sup>40</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> According to Engelhardt, contemporary liberal society claims to be tolerant and allow people their freedom of opinion, but, in point of fact, are intolerant of any ethical outlook but their own liberalism, for example the moral outlook of very religious moral conservatives. Liberal society attempts to form a moral community out of society by attempting to implement its own ethical world view through social rules and law. Such an approach imposes the value system of the liberal community upon society and thus attempts to impose it on other communities.

By contrast, Engelhardt's approach of libertarianism reduces social interaction to the minimum necessary for the functioning of a pluralistic society of various communities. Such an approach at the social level leaves the communities to function as the source of moral norms. In libertarianism these communities are free to practice whatever ethical system they want, so long as they do not impose their ethics on other communities. In this libertarian cosmopolitan ethic the only limits to an individual's freely chosen behavior is when the chosen action impinges on or harms another person. In such an approach it is the autonomous choice of the individual that is the cardinal virtue in all ethics. In such a social approach the only moral authority that may be exercised by a community against an individual is possessed by the permission of the individual.



make or abide by. His argument thus leads to his pronouncement that the faith community that he is rooted in is Traditional Christianity (the Antiochian Orthodox Church). He briefly defends this commitment by appeal to the historical continuity of the Orthodox Church with the primary community of Christians. His argument is that it is the lived experience of the faith, the experience of the holy (noetic theology), not reflection on faith (theology), that provides the true measure by which to evaluate "right" or "wrong." Moreover, the focus of this evaluation must be the individual character or moral agent (not acts), and therefore the proper place to turn for guidance and moral example is the lives of holy persons such as the saints. In particular it is the ecclesial leaders that serve as the guides for how to understand and apply this lived form of Christian living in ethical matters.<sup>42</sup>

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Although the exercise of this individual permission may lead individuals to submit themselves to a community with a rigid ethical system, society may not interfere so long as it is the freely chosen action of the individual.

Thus, in Engelhardt's view, liberalism violates the cardinal virtue of autonomous choice when it attempts to impose its own communal value-system upon other communities in society. Contemporary liberal society is intolerant of any but its own concept of autonomous self-determination. It is this intolerance, in combination with its attempt to create a common moral community out of a properly pluralistic libertarian society, that leads to the society's rejection of certain ethical systems. Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 40-45.

<sup>42</sup> Having thus established his method, the remainder of his book, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, is devoted to the treatment of beginning of life issues (Procreation, Reproduction, Cloning, Abortion, and Birth), end of life issues (suffering, disease, dying and death) and social medical issues (providing health care, consent, conflicts of interest, allocation of medical resources and religious integrity). Here his work leaves much to be desired. His appeal to certain saints and teachers as the norm or guide regarding these issues, as well as the manner in which he decides to apply this "guidance" to certain issues, leads him to some questionable conclusions. The conclusions include: offering confession and absolution to a woman who has had a miscarriage for her culpability in a morally evil act (277); the prohibition of suicide in all cases **except those** suicides for the sake of preservation of chastity (328); and that abortion at any stage of pregnancy is always wrong even to save the mother's life, while cloning and IVF are certainly acceptable so long as they occur only between husband and wife (246). He even goes so far as to cite in a seemingly positive tone Father Philotheos Zervakos' position that abortion is worse than giving birth to the child, baptizing it and then killing it because with the abortion the child dies without the reception of baptism (304 n. 133). He recognizes that the conclusions that he reaches will not be accepted by the society in which we

Engelhardt takes the approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism and advances the position that the only way to know the good is by divine revelation. Engelhardt's approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism recognizes the revelation present in the communion of Traditional Christianity as the sole means of knowing the Right. This results in a dual system of normative ethics. The more general system of "thin" ethics acknowledges the impossibility of resolving issues of ethical controversy and so provides a framework for peaceful co-existence in the face of moral disagreement. Here, the framework Engelhardt endorses is one of libertarianism, in which the principles of permission and non-interference take priority. All individuals and groups of individuals should be allowed to pursue the good as they see fit, so long as it does not infringe upon the freedom of others, even though they will often choose to do that which is ethically wrong.

His position regarding the impossibility of any sort of "thick" ethics in the public arena rests on his argument that there exist no common criteria which can be used in moral disagreements regarding what constitutes the good. From his perspective, each person and community comes to a discussion or moral disagreement with an understanding of the good rooted in an acceptance of certain moral presuppositions. Any disagreement regarding what is the right thing to do or the right person to be is essentially a disagreement regarding the ethical understanding of the issues involved in the decision. To ascertain which understanding is better, one must appeal to some more basic criteria of ethical evaluation. When there is conflict regarding these criteria one must appeal to some even more fundamental criteria about which there will inevitably be some disagreement as well. In the end, all moral disagreement rests on a

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live (Liberal Cosmopolitan society). But he asserts that part of the way in which one recognizes TRUE Christian ethics is that it is at odds with society to such a point that society regards the Christian convictions and ethical conclusions as absurd and wrong.

disagreement regarding the moral presuppositions. Any attempt to evaluate the better set of presuppositions is doomed to failure. There is a process of infinite regress unless and until those involved in the moral disagreement make appeal to some moral axiom for which there is no criteria. Such axioms are shared within specific moral communities but not across them. And so it is only within these more limited communities (rather than society) that one may hope to engage in meaningful ethical debate.

It is precisely because of the importance of these convictions which are accepted without being rationally proven, that Engelhardt insists on the importance of religious belief. As a result of this position Engelhardt has, in a sense, two approaches to normative ethics. The first addresses ethics within a pluralistic society. The second identifies normative ethical guidelines within the Christian community. Chapter two will address Engelhardt's understanding of Christian ethics, so only his approach to "public" ethics will be considered at this point.

Engelhardt holds that within a society of individuals and groups who do not share moral axioms, the best that can be hoped for is procedural agreement regarding how to resolve ethical disagreements. Here the disagreement regarding moral axioms prevents any sort of resolution of disagreement by addressing the content of the ethical issue.

A canonical, content-full secular morality cannot be discovered, as we will see in the next chapter. The recognition of this failure marks the postmodern philosophical predicament. It is a circumstance difficult to accept, given our intellectual history and its exaggerated expectations for reason. The failure of the modern philosophical project to discover a canonical content-full morality constitutes the fundamental catastrophe of contemporary secular culture and frames the context of contemporary bioethics. One encounters moral strangers, people with whom one does not share sufficient moral principles or enough of a common moral vision to be able to resolve moral controversies through sound rational argument or an appeal to moral authority. When one attempts rationally to resolve such controversies, the discussions go on and on without a final

conclusion. Rational argument does not quiet moral controversies when one encounters moral strangers, people of different moral visions.<sup>43</sup>

Since the true ethical axioms (those of Traditional Christianity) must be accepted by faith, an action not taken by many persons, there are no common criteria by which to argue for the truth of these ethical axioms.<sup>44</sup>

His position of libertarianism as the normative ethic in the pluralistic society, may best be understood as an insistence on his part that all people have the individual freedom to choose their own ethical lifestyle, which includes the freedom to choose wrongly. He makes it clear that he believes that all of those who have chosen a way of life opposed (in greater or lesser degrees) to that of Traditional Christianity have chosen wrongly and are doomed to hell with their only hope of salvation being the mercy of God.<sup>45</sup> His dual emphasis on the idea of moral axioms as the ultimate foundation of “thick” normative ethics, along with his insistence on the unique rightness of the axioms of Traditional Christianity (which is justified by its faithfulness to the revelation of God), necessarily requires an approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism in which there is only one reality of the good and it is known only by the revelation of the one God as carried forth in Traditional Christianity

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<sup>43</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> As will be seen in chapter two of the dissertation, it is his position that the right moral community, the moral community which accepts the right moral axioms, is that of Traditional Christianity (a term that Engelhardt uses primarily in reference to the communion of Orthodox Christianity.) This moral community is accepted as morally normative based on the recognition of the revelation that occurs first in the tradition of Judaism and that reaches its fulfillment in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This revelation is faithfully nurtured and transmitted through the communion of Traditional Christianity.

<sup>45</sup> As a Roman Catholic theologically trained in both the Lutheran and Catholic tradition, I must wonder about such an approach. It implies that those who act rightly deserve salvation while those who act wrongly must depend on God’s mercy. This would certainly contradict a more “traditional” Christian view which affirms the universal necessity of God’s Grace and Mercy for all salvation.

Before moving to a consideration of Stanley Hauerwas' approach to ethics, it is appropriate to conclude this section with a few brief critiques of H. Tristram Engelhardt's ethical methodology. First, Engelhardt maintains that without a faith commitment to provide us with the right criteria for values, we cannot make correct judgments. But it would seem that unless we have some criteria by which to judge differing and competing faith claims, the choice of what faith to endorse or to commit oneself to is nothing more than a random selection. If there are no valid ethical criteria (which according to Engelhardt there are not prior to our correct faith commitment), then we have no means of determining whether Jesus Christ, Buddha, Jim Jones, or David Koresh ought to be the "right" object of our faith commitment. On the other hand, if we do have some means of determining the rightness or wrongness of religious truth claims, then why can we not use the same means for determining the rightness or wrongness of ethical truth claims?

It seems to me that this would be especially true if, as Engelhardt claims, faith and ethics are two sides of the same coin. If humans have the ability to recognize right from wrong in faith then they have the ability to distinguish right from wrong in general, which it seems would also apply to matters of ethics. Indeed, his assertion that it is "holy people" that constitute the guiding principle for right living would reiterate this since one would have to have some capacity or criteria by which one could recognize these "holy people."

Engelhardt is right in saying that ethics is a byproduct of a right relationship with God, but the recognition part of his method is backwards. He maintains that we observe how "holy people" live, people who exemplify living in right relation with God, and use it as a model for our own capacity to recognize right and wrong. But this only works if we know who is living in right relationship with God. It only works if we recognize a "holy person" as a "holy" person.

In order to make that recognition of who qualifies as a “holy person,” we have to have the ability to recognize ethical right and wrong, good and evil.<sup>46</sup> This ability enables us to see the lived ethical reality of the person's life (i.e. Mother Theresa or Ghandi) and to recognize that it is good and that it is a visible and recognizable sign of right relationship with God. It is by this ability that we are able to recognize the ethical goodness of Jesus as superior to that of Jim Jones. And it is by virtue of this ability of recognizing right and wrong, prior to a specific faith commitment, that we are also able to recognize the rightness of religious truth claims.

Second, Engelhardt has serious problems with his understanding of the relationship between community and society. He insists too much on a radical gap between community and society such that a community can reach ethical agreement, while a society can only achieve social cooperation. According to Engelhardt, members of a community accept common fundamental commitments and share basic moral axioms. Members of such a community understand right and wrong the same way and, as a result, ethical dialogue within the community is “thick” ethics which can result in agreement regarding both ethical process and ethical content. However, Engelhardt maintains that members of society do not accept such common fundamental commitments and thus their ethical dialogue is “thin.” Such “thin” ethics is limited to agreement regarding social procedure; an agreement of how to cooperate socially while continuing to disagree with one another regarding moral content. Lack of shared moral axioms makes it impossible to persuade either side of such a conflict to change their positions about morally normative judgments.

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<sup>46</sup> While Engelhardt may point to the Traditional Christian community and their recognition of saints as a moral source of authority, it only pushes the need for the ability to recognize good and evil upon the individuals in the church responsible for canonizing the “holy persons.”

For persons or groups with conflicting moral axioms, a lack of common basic ethical convictions makes any disagreement regarding content irresolvable. Dialogue regarding conflicting ethical truth claims can reach no conclusion because they share no common ethical criterion for ethical assessment and thus can not ascertain which ethical truth claim is better. Each side is persuaded of its own position by virtue of its own assessment using its own moral criteria. Any disagreement with these fundamental convictions will appear to be not only ethically wrong, but unreasonable as well. Persuasive communication regarding ethical truth claims across differing fundamental commitments is not possible because there is no shared understanding of right and wrong. The attempt to understand conflicting truth claims across differing fundamental commitments results in miscommunication and misunderstanding.

If Engelhardt is right about the impossibility of ethically persuasive communication across different fundamental commitments, then it would be impossible for people to change those fundamental commitments (including becoming Christian). If this were the case then accepting any set of fundamental commitments would inevitably lead to the inability to accept any conflicting truth claim. It would not be possible to change one's ethical convictions. But, in fact, it is persuasive communication and actual understanding of differing truth claims that lead some people to recognize some other truth claim (religious or ethical) as better than the one they currently hold. It is this recognition that enables them to change their mind and their convictions. If any discussion or dialogue between persons of differing fundamental commitments is only miscommunication then it is unrealistic to expect any sort of this

miscommunication to lead to a fuller understanding or acceptance of conflicting ethical axioms.<sup>47</sup>

It seems to me that an additional problem in this approach, that moral strangers cannot share ethical axioms and thus can only cooperate socially, is the failure to take seriously the universal communion of all in Christ. He fails to recognize the Christian claim that through our relationship with God, in particular the relationship manifested through our relationship with God through the presence of God in other persons who are all inherently *imago dei*, there are no moral strangers! There is in fact universal human community, not just society.

### **The Moral Methodology of Stanley Hauerwas**

Having summarized and examined the moral method of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., it is now appropriate to consider Stanley Hauerwas' general understanding of ethics. There is one pragmatic difficulty with such a task. This difficulty, noted by a number of authors, is due to the nature of his writings.<sup>48</sup> In considering Engelhardt, it was possible to focus on his two major works, each of which was a full consideration of his understanding of ethics and bioethics (both general and Christian), his moral methodology, and how these applied to certain issues. This is not the case with Stanley Hauerwas. The majority of Hauerwas' works are much shorter in

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<sup>47</sup> Since he claims that there is this sort of impediment between Traditional (Orthodox) Christians and all other people, including other Christians, one must also ask how specific are these fundamental commitments and how narrow is the ethical community?

<sup>48</sup> James B. Tubbs, Jr., *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics: Four Contemporary Approaches* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996); Stephen E. Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas: Theology, Medical Ethics, and the Church," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 57-77; Paul D Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas: A Question of Method," in *Secular Bioethics in Theological Perspective*, ed. E. Shelp (1996), 159-76; Emmanuel Katongole, *Beyond Universal Reason: The Relation Between Religion and Ethics in the Work of Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).



nature. These journal articles and chapters in edited books tend to focus on a variety of specific topics and are less inclined to address his ethical methodology than to simply engage in ethical evaluation.

This means that in order to consider the moral methodology of Hauerwas it is necessary to consider a large number of his smaller works, consolidate what has been said in a number of differing sources, identify the common themes and approaches, and extrapolate a certain approach to moral methodology that is implicit in how Hauerwas engages in ethics. As this is a rather extensive work in and of itself, this dissertation, rather than undertaking such a task, will rely on the work of secondary sources that have already undertaken this task.<sup>49</sup>

#### Character, Vision and Narrative

The starting point of a consideration of Hauerwas' work is his ethical focus on moral character rather than on specific issues or methodology. In this respect his approach is similar to the ethics of Aristotle. In such an approach the goal of ethics is not using criteria or specific methods to resolve moral dilemmas or to make right ethical judgments regarding specific issues. Instead, the focus of this form of ethics is long term and is directed at developing the virtue of the moral agent's character. For Hauerwas, instilling and developing the right moral character ensures that regardless of what moral situation arises, the moral agent will be able to make the right moral judgment. Thus the moral decisions made by the agent will always be, in a sense, second nature.<sup>50</sup> The agent will instinctively make the virtuous choice without thinking about

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<sup>49</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas."; Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas."; Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*; Katongole, *Beyond Universal Reason*.

<sup>50</sup> In many respects, because of the focus on moral character of the individual as Christian, the right moral decisions as Christian are not so much second nature as they are the only nature of the Christian.

specific moral rules or exceptions or considering in detail the proportionate good or bad that will result from specific choices. Such an approach will ensure a flexibility in appropriate situations and a firm moral resolution in the situations that demand such a response. The individual's actions are less a matter of choice in light of moral reasoning than they are a virtually instinctive response to the situation as perceived by the moral agent. Thus Hauerwas understands the nature of ethics as the development of vision and moral perception.

The goal of ethics, the development of virtuous moral character, is achieved by developing a particular vision, a particular way of seeing things. It is how we see things, our moral vision, that determines our ethical understanding and ethical response. For Hauerwas, "The basis and aim of the moral life is to see the truth, for only as we see correctly can we act in accordance with reality."<sup>51</sup> The beginning point of this concept of vision is the recognition that all people operate, especially in attempting to ascertain right and wrong, with assumptions and presuppositions. These assumptions and presuppositions go largely unnoticed by the moral agent but are always present and, by virtue of the impact that they have upon the way the situation is perceived in the first place, severely impact the choices that are made. Thus, this moral vision functions like a pair of glasses. The way of seeing things is shaded and bent by the unconscious moral assumptions of the agent.

In turn, Hauerwas points out that this vision is structured and formed by one's narrative. For Hauerwas, narrative is the story which imposes meaning and structure on the world.<sup>52</sup> The

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<sup>51</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 102.

<sup>52</sup> Tubbs notes that:

Stories do not just illustrate or symbolize meaning for us; rather, they embody it in their very form. This is a crucial claim for Hauerwas's enterprise because, put in traditional terms, It means that human 'nature' is not 'rationality' itself but, instead, "the

story of one's accepted narrative gives one an understanding of the world around us, our role in it, and the relationship of both the world and ourselves to other people and God. We gain this understanding by being able to fit them all within our narrative. They gain their meaning by the role that they play within the narrative. Narrative, the story within which one exists, is the creator of one's ethical vision. One perceives all of reality, including ethical decisions, through the lens of moral vision formed by one's narrative. Thus it is one's narrative that is the crucial and determining factor in one's ethical vision. "Character is the central concern of morality and is inseparable from the narratives which develop it. Hauerwas does not so much tell stories, as appeal to what he calls the Christian story."<sup>53</sup>

Hauerwas also recognizes that one's narrative is largely formed by the community within which one exists. As one grows and matures, one's understanding of the universe, self, others,

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necessity of having a narrative to give our life coherence." Given this assumption, his arguments against contemporary ethical theory become clearer. For, he contends that our familiar, analytic theories of moral obligation—e.g., teleological and deontological theories, all of which he lumps together as "the standard account"—have sought to make ethics an objective rational science through which we can apprehend universal truth and objective norms (available from any and every person's rational point of view). In the search for 'objectivity' in moral life, however, the presumption is that moral agents must be freed from (or transcend) their own 'subjective' stories - i.e., their own substantive historical, spatio-temporal frameworks for interpreting and describing the world. What the 'standard' account fails to see, in Hauerwas's view, is that all our interpretive notions, including the notion of objective rationality itself, are narrative-dependent. If we try to abstract our search for the right, the good, the ideal, etc. from the stories (and narrative-dependent language) through which we apprehend and interpret reality in the first place, we are in fact attempting to lift ourselves out of our own history (which we cannot do) and we are creating for ourselves an a-historical and character-less isolation of the self. Moreover, the standard account's emphasis on rational judgement in moral quandaries is misplaced, since "it is character, inasmuch as it is displayed by a narrative, that provides the context necessary to pose the terms of a decision, or to determine whether a decision should be made at all."

Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 101, with quotes taken from Hauerwas' *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations Into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN.: Fides Press, 1977).

<sup>53</sup> Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas," 160.

and God is formed by the community in which she or he plays a part. This understanding of narrative ethics results in two corresponding recognitions.

First, the nature of narrative ethics is such that those who live in differing communities will inevitably possess different narratives and thus different moral visions. Each ethical system is unique to its own narrative context. Therefore, there will be inevitable conflict regarding right and wrong, both in regard to character and in regard to more specific moral actions. Hauerwas himself rejects the possibility of achieving some “meta-narrative” that could serve as a context for ethical decisions between those of differing narratives. In his treatment of Hauerwas, James B. Tubbs, Jr., notes,

For morally there is no neutral story that insures the truthfulness of our particular stories. Moreover, any ethical theory that is sufficiently abstract and universal to claim neutrality would not be able to form character. For it would have deprived itself of the notions and convictions which are the necessary conditions for character . . . If truthfulness . . . is to be found, it will have to occur in and through the stories that tie the contingencies of our life together.<sup>54</sup>

There is then an irreconcilable nature to these ethical differences that exist between communities rooted in differing narratives.

A second, somewhat post-modern, recognition brought about by Hauerwas’ narrative ethics is the inevitably historical nature of all ethics. The nature of communities, as well as their narratives, change because of the time and place within which a community exists. As such, the moral vision of such historically conditioned narratives will also be inevitably affected by the temporal and spatial context of the community. The historical context of any community is crucial to the way in which reality is understood. This results in a certain “relativity” between the ethical narrative (and its corresponding vision and concept of virtuous character) and the community’s historical point of view. Again, as in Engelhardt, this approach leads to a certain

inevitable and irresolvable difference between the ethics of one community and another. And again there is a skeptical attitude to any productive result of intercommunal ethical discussion. This focus on the concept of narrative ethics leads to the point that each system of ethics is rooted in a particular context which makes it unique.

All ethical reflection occurs relative to a particular time and place. Not only do ethical problems change from one time to the next, but the very nature and structure of ethics is determined by the particularities of a community's history and convictions. From this perspective the notion of "ethics" is misleading, since it seems to suggest that "ethics" is an identifiable discipline that is constant across history. In fact, much of the burden of this book will be to suggest that ethics always requires an adjective or qualifier—such as, Jewish, Christian, Hindu, existentialist, pragmatic, utilitarian, humanist, medieval, modern—in order to denote the social and historical character of ethics as a discipline. This is not to suggest that ethics does not address an identifiable set of relatively constant questions—the nature of the good or right, freedom and the nature of human behavior, the place and status of rules and virtues—but any response to these questions necessarily draws on the particular convictions of historic communities to whom such questions may have significantly different meanings.<sup>55</sup>

It is his position regarding the interrelatedness of ethical character, vision and narrative that results in Hauerwas' rejection of universal ethics. The unique nature of each ethics, due to its communal context, makes any attempt to achieve some sort of "universal" ethics merely the result of one more narrative with its own presumptions and assumptions, the first of which (and, according to Hauerwas, the most erroneous of which) is the assumption that there is such a thing as universal ethics.

Liberalism as an approach to morality is flawed because it presupposes a universal morality. For Hauerwas, there are moralities only of particular communities; a universal morality is an illusion. Not just liberalism comes under attack here but many Christian approaches to morality as well. Thus, for example, Hauerwas rejects the Roman Catholic understanding of morality based on natural

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<sup>54</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 102.

<sup>55</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 1.

law morality, which assumes that human beings can by reason alone come to an understanding of their central moral obligations. In this view, Christianity adds motivation for fulfilling these obligations but does not add any particular substantial obligations.

Hauerwas finds this claim that Christian commitments function only as motivations for doing what all human beings should be doing anyway to be misguided. He states that Christians have a particular morality because they have distinctive commitments. God has made a covenant with them and leads them on an adventure, and this God also makes particular moral demands upon them.<sup>56</sup>

One can see how such an understanding leads Hauerwas to the conclusion that his self-limitation to doing Christian ethics is not a choice. It is a recognition that it is impossible for him to do anything other than Christian ethics. Any ethics that he does is done with a vision formed by his narrative which has been formed and informed by the twentieth century Christian community within which he exists.

The effects (on both character and actions) of accepting such a Christian narrative as the foundation of a vision will be addressed in greater detail in chapter two. But for now it is important to see how Hauerwas' method of Christian ethics functions in order to ascertain his understanding of ethics in general.<sup>57</sup> In the briefest of summaries, the following is how

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<sup>56</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 59.

<sup>57</sup> Hauerwas would observe that taking this approach to his ethics – of attempting to understand his ethics as a specific approach to ethics within a broader understanding of some sort of universal ethical methodology – has already accepted the faulty presuppositions of the Enlightenment and Kant regarding some illusionary universal ethical truth apart from specific narrative. And by regarding his method as no more valid than other ethical methods Hauerwas would see the acceptance of the most base errors of post-modernism and liberalism. In his *Against the Nations*, Hauerwas makes the point that liberalism is “that impulse deriving from the Enlightenment project to free all people from the chains of their historical particularity in the name of freedom. As an epistemological position liberalism is the attempt to defend a foundationalism in order to free reason from being determined by any particularistic tradition. Politically liberalism makes the individual the supreme unit of society, thus making the political task the securing of cooperation between arbitrary units of desire.” Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and the Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis: Winston-Seabury Press, 1985), 18. Simmons observes that,

Hauerwas sees Christian ethics functioning. The beginning point of this ethical approach is that the Christian community accepts the Jesus Story as its moral narrative. In accepting this narrative, the community accepts the moral vision exemplified in Christ to be the norm of virtuous character. So the goal of ethics is to develop one's moral character, one's virtues, to conform to the character of Jesus Christ. One comes to view the world as Christ viewed the world, and this is achieved through the narrative of the Christian community, in particular the narrative of the Christian Scriptures. This Christian ethics will be examined in the next chapter but for now the point to be examined is the "metaethical" aspects of Hauerwas' approach to Christian ethics.

The first metaethical aspect of Hauerwas' approach is that the Christian narrative is advanced as the right and true narrative. He rejects, in a number of places, the notion of any sort of neutral "ethics" as a starting point from which one can then proceed to Christian ethics. He also rejects the possibility of coming to some sort of universal ethics as an end of ethical reasoning. His insistence on the impossibility of any sort of universal ethics would seem to place

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Hauerwas' approach to Christian narrative ethics thus has no place for dialogue with deliberative ethics, which he rejects as the liberal (secular) influence of the Enlightenment. Secular approaches attempt to establish a framework based on reason and deliberation among people of good faith and sound minds to establish acceptable and/or appropriate options for public policy. The disinterested observer, identifiable principles, and common goals or the public good become important for moral reflection on issues dealing with procedures and/or public policy. Social and religious pluralism are also taken seriously as the context for ethical reflection. This type of "reasoning through" is anathema for Hauerwas. His concern for the distinctively Christian leaves no room for accommodating the secular perspective. It contradicts what he sees as the Christian story that embodies identifiable practices that define both the nature of virtues and the kind of society (community) we are and should be. Open dialogue and mutual influence would be tantamount to sacrificing Christian distinctiveness. Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas," 170.

him in the category of metaethical relativism, but upon closer examination one finds that this is not exactly the case.

Hauerwas admits pluralism but questions its validity. His construal of the Christian story leaves little room for disagreement or variety in the witness of faith. . . . Hauerwas assumes that there is one reading of the biblical story that yields norms (“requirements and prohibitions”) which are incumbent upon all Christians. He thus writes with a fervor on certain topics which seems to betray some of the basic assumptions of the method to which he is committed, that is, what he means by the narrative structure of ethics. What might be construed as deontological rules and principles are given meaning and grounding in a particular context, namely, the community which fashions character.<sup>58</sup>

His argument is not that there are no universal ethical guidelines; this can be seen in his treatment of a number of issues. In the terms examined in the beginning of this chapter, Hauerwas is rejecting the approach of metaethical relativism in favor of metaethical absolutism.

While rejecting the “natural law” as that term is generally understood, he does suggest a qualified acceptance of a “natural law” which he redefines in a way that is not consistent with the common understanding of the term. According to Hauerwas:

“natural law” really names those moral convictions that have been tested by the experiences of the Christian community and have been judged essential for sustaining its common life.<sup>59</sup>

His goal of Christian ethics, as will be seen in greater detail in the next chapter, is to conform an agent’s character and vision to that formed by the Christian narrative. When this conformation is achieved, doing the right and the good is “natural” to the moral agent. There is a virtually instinctive aspect to the Christian’s moral vision and character. Such a conformation of character ensures that acting in accord with a Christian vision formed by the Christian narrative is not “second nature” for Christians, but is actually their primary nature. What Hauerwas

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<sup>58</sup> Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas," 162.

<sup>59</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 120.



advances as “natural” is what he believes to be the nature of true Christians. It is this “natural ethics” that every Christian ought to possess by the very nature of their being Christian. Once this is recognized, one can see that his “natural ethics,” rather than being empirical in approach, it is actually a form of supernatural metaethical absolutism.<sup>60</sup>

There are three problems with Hauerwas’ “metaethical” approach. First, the goal of ethics for the individual is conformity to the communal narrative. This is immediately apparent when one considers that he often opens the semester by informing his students that rather than wanting them to think for themselves he wants them to think like him.<sup>61</sup> Such an approach of conforming individual thoughts, narrative, vision and character to the communal context seems more similar to indoctrination than real ethical education.

Saying, as Hauerwas does, that the community has priority over the individual is another way of saying that conscience has no liberty apart from the permission granted by the tradition. He understandably and rightly challenges the tenets of rugged individualism in ethics. . . .

The problem is that Hauerwas seems to substitute a type of moral imperialism as a corrective to what he perceives as the evils of individualism. Not only is his tone of writing paternalistic and authoritarian, the very structure of his ethics is rigid and unbending. For Hauerwas, the Christian life is not a pilgrimage of faith in which the believer is challenged to walk responsibly and develop skills of discernment and make decisions consistent with the “mind of Christ” and in the fear of the lord (Phil. 2: 5, 12b). His notion of sanctification has certain affinities to heteronomous ethics—moral action guides are imposed upon the believer by those having “superior” moral insight or authority. The Church, he says, aims not at autonomy but at faithfulness.

In short, the Christian life is one of conformity to norms which are community-based. Being faithful is a matter of conforming to expectations and

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<sup>60</sup> It is this understanding of ethics being rooted in character formed by the narrative of the Christian community that leads to Hauerwas’ understanding of himself as not so much an ethicist as a theologian. The ethics and the theology are two sides of the same coin. And it is the theological narrative which, because it forms character, must be of primary importance with the concern of ethics merely being the result of good theology.

<sup>61</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 5.

bending one's will to the stronger willed, or the masters and saints who serve as our source of moral wisdom and our guides through perplexing circumstances.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, this prevents any sort of individual development as well as any change of the communal ethics. If right and wrong are based upon and rooted in the Christian community and its narrative as currently understood, then little other than discovery of new factual information or evaluation of new actions can bring about ethical change. This conformity to communal narrative seems to only reinforce the communal status quo.

The second problem is that despite Hauerwas' insistence on the Christian narrative as the one true vision, there is an implicit affirmation of being able to recognize moral truth outside of the vision of the Christian community. This is evident in two assertions. The first assertion is Hauerwas' presumption of the individual being able to make the right choice of what narrative to accept or pursue. The ability to correctly choose the Christian community as the source of the correct moral narrative must depend upon the ability of the individual to recognize this community as ethically better than others. This would contradict his insistence that one requires a rootedness in the Christian narrative to make right ethical judgments.

The second assertion of the ability to recognize moral truth outside the Christian narrative is Hauerwas' concept of the church as moral example and witness to society. Hauerwas repeatedly affirms that the role of the church is to be the church, and that rather than attempting to reform or renew the world, the church must allow the world to learn from the example of the church.

Hauerwas's approach to Christian ethics has many positives from my perspective. He strongly opposes the individualism of contemporary liberalism and insists on a more communitarian approach. The Duke University ethicist rightly emphasizes the importance of virtue, character, and the role of the Christian community. However, for Hauerwas morality is not universal but is

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<sup>62</sup> Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas," 167.

limited and bound to a particular tradition. Christian morality and ethics must address primarily the church and not directly the world. The church must not try to change the world and the structures of society directly but by its own example, the church does hope to have some influence on the world.<sup>63</sup>

This affirmation of the church as having some influence on the world only makes sense if those communities have the ability to make correct ethical judgments while outside the Christian community. The church's role as example and its associative influence on the world depends upon the ability of the world, of other communities with different narratives from the church, to recognize the actions of the church as morally correct. In turn this understanding depends upon some concept of the universality of ethics, for it is only by such a universality that the world could understand the testimony of lived Christian witness. Without this commonality the lived faith of the church could just as easily be understood as sociological delirium of religious fanatics rather than as true moral witness to the world.

Both assertions depend upon the ability of the individual or community to recognize moral truth prior to accepting the moral narrative of Christianity as the narrative to form their moral vision in order to sculpt their moral character. There is then an inconsistency in Hauerwas' position regarding the inability to ethically evaluate right and wrong regarding moral issues, apart from the Christian narrative, while at the same time maintaining the ability to correctly evaluate moral narratives such as that of Christianity.

This same sort of inconsistency can be seen in the third problem of how Hauerwas addresses certain social issues such as pacifism and medical ethics. Hauerwas addresses these topics with the intent of helping others, others outside the Christian community, to recognize the wrongness of certain things, like engaging in war under any circumstances or allowing severely

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<sup>63</sup> Charles E. Curran, *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 46-47.

handicapped newborns to die. He does so without attempting to change their narrative to the Christian narrative. He intends to show these people outside the Christian community the moral error of these actions without the necessity of them accepting the Christian story or having the Christian community as their ethical guide.

Yet Hauerwas leaves us with a puzzle. As we have seen, his theological approach focuses upon the community—the particular community with its special commitments. This community is the Christian church in the rest of Hauerwas's work. When he turns to medicine, however, his perspective shifts. On the one hand, he discusses the significance of particular Christian commitments on such matters as abortion and technological medicine. He advises that the Christian community might have to practice an alternative kind of medicine if it is to be faithful to its commitments.

On the other hand, he argues that medicine needs a community very much like the church in order to sustain itself. If this is the case, then Hauerwas has, at least implicitly, a set of criteria for good communities. It would be helpful for him to articulate these, and, more important, to tell how he knows of them. In brief, assuming he is doing natural theology when he discusses medical ethics, and assuming that natural theology involves our knowledge of God apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it would be helpful for Hauerwas to articulate his own view of how such a theology is possible, given his claim that theology calls for particularity and Christian theology calls for the particularity of Jesus. Hauerwas might be very helpful to us in our understanding of medicine, but he does not appear to be consistent when he claims to be doing natural theology and a theology based upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Moral Methodology of Richard A. McCormick**

The best starting point for understanding the metaethics and normative ethics of Richard A. McCormick is a full understanding of the concept of natural law, identified above as empirical metaethical absolutism. Therefore, this section will begin with a brief review of the concept of natural law that forms the foundation and framework of his approach.<sup>65</sup> Following the review, this section will proceed to examine the significant ways in which McCormick's natural law metaethics varies from the more traditional methods of natural law, which will lead

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<sup>64</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 74-75.

<sup>65</sup> For the initial treatment of natural law, see pages 19-22 of this chapter.

to an examination of the impact this approach has on his normative ethics. This section will conclude with several critiques of McCormick's approach.

Revisionist controversies notwithstanding, McCormick remains true to a very basic commitment that underlies the Roman Catholic tradition of moral teaching: moral values and obligations are grounded in a moral order known by human reason reflecting on experience. This commitment to an objective and reasonable morality is grounded in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, who in turn drew on Aristotle as well as on Christian sources. Although humans and their abilities are limited, it is at least in principle possible for them not only to become aware of those goods or values which enhance human life but also to consider these goods and values from the viewpoints of persons and groups different in culture, religion, or historical era. Human "nature" is, at least in its essential respects, everywhere the same. To know the moral law, therefore, is not directly dependent on faith or church teaching, nor limited to the Christian tradition. Faith provides confidence in the Creator of human nature, and motivation to obey the natural moral law, but that law is, at least in theory, a common law for humanity.<sup>66</sup>

For natural law it is the order of reality, the nature of creation as a whole and the human person in particular, that serves as the criterion for the discernment of right and wrong. From this it follows that ethics is both real and universal. Right and wrong are the same for all people.<sup>67</sup> This universal ethical reality, this natural order, is able to be discerned and discovered by human persons through the use of human reason and the examination of reality.<sup>68</sup> Thus, this

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<sup>66</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "On Richard McCormick: Reason and Faith in Post-Vatican II Catholic Ethics," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 81-82.

<sup>67</sup> Such a recognition of universality does not refer to some universal code of moral rules and regulations functioning on the normative level of ethics. Differences in context, historical, sociological and physical, will impact the ethical evaluation of human actions. Instead, this universality functions on the level of metaethics with the recognition that this universal right and wrong are manifest in a variety of differing ethical norms which are greatly affected by their socio-historical context. McCormick's treatment of this aspect will be addressed below.

<sup>68</sup> The term "human reason" is subject to various understandings. In a very strict narrow sense, "reason" may be seen to reference the rather distinct process of logical human thought. This understanding results in an approach to natural law that is almost mathematical in nature. From a broader perspective, "reason" may be understood to refer to the entire process of human knowing which includes not only the strict sense of logical thought, but also the knowing that

universal right and wrong is able to be known by all people. In the words of David Kelly, “Natural Law Theory is a metaethical theory according to which people discover right and wrong by using their reason and experience to investigate, individually and collectively, the emergent patterns of creation as God is creating them.”<sup>69</sup>

Christian endorsement of natural law rests on the basic belief that the reality of the world is the creation of God and is fundamentally good and well ordered. Moreover, the belief in the human person as the image and likeness of God, particularly the human *logos* (reason, word), entails a connection between the human person and this natural order that serves as the criterion for right and wrong. Thus, the universality of all persons as *imago dei* serves as the basis for the assertion that all possess the ability to discern and know the good present in creation. Such an understanding recognizes that this ability, though damaged by sin, is still intact and not so marred as to make “natural” knowledge of the good impossible.

Because of this universality of ethics, there is in one sense no distinctiveness to the moral content of any ethics, including Christian ethics. This means that there is no substantive difference between Christian ethics and human ethics. Both have the same ethical content, so that ethical evaluations made using either approach will, if made correctly, arrive at the same ethical judgment. Jesus is the ultimate norm for Christian ethics. Christian belief in Jesus as the full and ideal manifestation of both divine and human nature would mean that human nature, rightly understood, functioning as the moral criterion for right and wrong, would result in the same moral assessment as an evaluation from a Christian perspective. Jesus as Christ is the ultimate model for Christian ethics. Jesus as the truest manifestation of human existence is also

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occurs through the human experience of emotions, intuitions, etc. McCormick’s treatment of this aspect of natural law will be addressed below.

<sup>69</sup> Kelly, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics*, 84.

the ultimate model for discernment of the criteria for natural law. But this human nature that is manifest perfectly in Jesus can be known through other avenues. While the method of coming to ethical enlightenment is different, the ethical content which is discerned in these differing approaches is the same. This will be more fully addressed in chapter two of this dissertation in the examination of Christian Ethics.

This claim of a universal morality, as noted earlier in the treatment of metaethics, entails identifying some criterion that is to be used as a means for identifying the right and wrong. As an advocate of natural law, (empirical metaethical absolutism), McCormick affirms that it is the order of reality that is the source of right and wrong. This order of reality is incompletely comprehended. Therefore, it is the ongoing process of moral discernment and discovery of this reality through life experience that is the criterion for identifying right and wrong. As in the traditional approaches to natural law, McCormick emphasizes the important role that reason plays in such a process of discernment.<sup>70</sup>

However, in two aspects of his metaethics McCormick tends toward a more contemporary understanding of natural law. The first aspect of metaethics in which McCormick tends toward a more contemporary approach is in his more historically conscious view of our understanding of this natural law and in particular our understanding of human nature. Lisa Sowle Cahill maintains that McCormick's "greatest contribution to the natural law method is to tie it more realistically to human experience and to individual and communal discretion, leading to the questions he has raised about the way absolute norms were in the past conceived."<sup>71</sup> Our knowledge and understanding of human nature is, like any other human knowledge, limited and

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<sup>70</sup> Richard A. McCormick (edited with Paul Ramsey), *Doing Evil to Achieve Good: Moral Choice in Conflict Situations* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1978), 224-25.

<sup>71</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 101-02.

incomplete and subject to revision and ongoing development. There is a certain tentativeness to our ethical knowledge that includes an openness to potential change in light of new experience. This mandates that a self-critical element, which enables us to modify our convictions, be active in the pursuit of fuller understanding.

The universal reality of human nature, and of human reason, are profoundly impacted by the socio-historical context from which they are discerned, and within which they are manifested. The differing religious, historical and cultural contexts of this vision of the *telos* of human existence provide numerous perspectives from which to understand the human nature that is the criterion for right and wrong. But, while the perspectives are many, the reality of human nature is unique. Thus cross cultural, cross narrative, cross communal dialogue is not only possible and meaningful; it is also necessary and quite important. It is from dialogue with these differing perspectives that we gain a deeper insight into the common reality and can discover human nature more fully.

The second aspect to be noted is that McCormick's understanding of reason is rather broad. In his treatment of McCormick Tubbs notes,

He is not a 'rationalist' in the sense of claiming that moral convictions are predicated or discovered by reason alone. Instead, he sees reflective analysis as "an attempt to reinforce rationally, communicably, and from other sources what we grasp at a different level."<sup>72</sup>

McCormick's holistic understanding of reason entails all of human understanding attained through experience. Rather than being just logic in the strictest sense, reason is the tool by which we process experience to unearth and discern the natural law. Such a focus on the order of reason broadly understood includes an attentiveness to the special role of human nature

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<sup>72</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 19. Quoting from McCormick's work *How Brave a New World? Dilemmas in Bioethics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 5.



as a guide in moral knowledge. The right and the good is that which is truly human and truly in accord with our human nature. The discernment of a common human nature shared by all serves as the universally normative criterion for right and wrong.

This historically conditioned rational process of discernment can lead to different types of moral insights. McCormick distinguishes between moral values, moral principles and moral norms. The moral values are universal and absolute. The moral principles articulate how these values are realized in human behavior in broad generalizations. These principles are quite general in nature and so do not yield specific moral decisions. Indeed these principles may, at certain times, in certain situations, come into conflict with one another. The moral norms that are more specific, address the rightness or wrongness of certain actions, and are therefore open to exceptions due to the changing contexts of these actions. It is the moral values that are the clearest things that we are able to discern through our process of reflection on the reality of creation.<sup>73</sup> It is these values that are articulated in very broad moral principles. In turn these guiding principles serve as the framework for specific moral norms and guidelines. It is the values, not the specific norms, that are properly exceptionless, absolute and universal. And the

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<sup>73</sup> Tubbs notes that in McCormick's approach to natural law,

We begin our quest for an understanding of definite moral obligations by asking, "What are the goods or values man can seek, the values that define his human opportunity, his flourishing?" And the answer is to be found in an examination of our "basic tendencies" (*inclinationes naturales* in the Thomistic tradition). What are these basic tendencies? McCormick lists at least the following as "basic inclinations present prior to acculturation . . . the tendency to preserve life; the tendency to mate and raise children; the tendency to seek out other men and obtain their approval—friendship; the tendency to establish good relations with unknown higher powers; the tendency to use intelligence in guiding action; the tendency to develop skills and exercise them in play and the fine arts." Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 19. Quoting from McCormick's work *How Brave a New World? Dilemmas in Bioethics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 5.

principles, which serve as general moral guidelines for the attainment of these values, are not so specific as to be directly applicable to particular moral decisions. Their general nature requires that exceptions and adaptations be made in the application of these principles to particular decisions since in many cases two or more principles may be in conflict. Here, again, McCormick's position may be seen as a contemporary development of Aquinas' thought on the primary and secondary precepts of the natural law.<sup>74</sup>

In summary, McCormick's approach to metaethics adopts the traditional aspects of the metaethical process understood as natural law which are: the universality of ethics rooted in the order of nature; the ability of all people to know this order through the experience of creation (especially through human nature); and the special role of human reason in this process of discovery. In addition, McCormick takes a more contemporary approach to natural law in his recognition of the historical nature of all human knowledge and in his broader understanding of reason. Having clarified McCormick's natural law approach to ethics, a fuller examination of his normative ethics is appropriate at this point.

In addition to the metaethical understanding of natural law as the process for discerning the universal right and wrong, there are two other understandings of the term natural law. While the metaethical focus on the process of moral discernment remains the same there are differing understandings of the reality that should serve as the focus of this discernment process.

Within normative ethics, particularly in the work of Thomas Aquinas, the concept of natural law developed two "strands" which, by virtue of their differing emphases, had different understandings of the order of reality that should serve as the ultimate moral criterion. The first

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<sup>74</sup> David Bohr, *Catholic Moral Tradition: In Christ, a New Creation* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990), 148-49.

strand tends to emphasize the order of nature as the ethically normative criteria. This approach of *ius naturale*, often considered more Roman in character, regards the “natural” order of physical reality as the source of human knowledge of the moral order. This approach employs a deontological methodology of normative ethics in which the moral duties and obligations can be ascertained from a thorough examination of the physical activities involved and the natural patterns involved. Such an approach can identify certain actions as intrinsically evil actions regardless of the consequences and without consideration of the context of the action due to their violation of the physical order of nature. This understanding grew to dominate the Scholastic and Manualist approach to natural law with its focus on the order of physical nature as the primary ethical criterion. It tends toward physicalism and an act-centered ethics. And it is this strand that seems to inform the Catholic Church’s approach to many ethical issues on the personal level (i.e. birth control, reproductive technology, euthanasia, etc.).

The second strand, more Greek in character, focuses on the order of reason, *lex naturale*, as the normative criterion for ascertaining the natural law. A shift in focus from the order of nature to the order of reason results in a corresponding shift from a focus on the nature of physical reality to an emphasis on the nature of the human person, as communal individuals created in the image and likeness of God, as the source for ascertaining moral criteria. In this personalist approach to natural law, the human person, as the image and likeness of God and as a rational being, serves the revelatory function more clearly than the physical nature of reality. Thus it is “the human person adequately considered”<sup>75</sup> that is the focus of the process of discernment and the means to a proper discovery of ethical norms. In this approach, the moral

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<sup>75</sup> Louis Janssens, "Time and Space in Morals," 1947, trans. Jan Jans, in *Personalist Morals*, ed. Joseph A. Selling (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1988), 11.

evaluation of a physical action cannot be made with certainty apart from knowledge regarding the context of the action. While it is possible to evaluate some actions as pre-moral evils, it is only after considering the impact of the actions on the human person, or persons, (which cannot be known apart from the historical and social context), that a final moral judgment can be made. As a result there can be no intrinsically evil acts. It is this personalist approach that has reemerged since the Second Vatican Council and that seems to be at the root of much of the contemporary Catholic teaching on many issues of social ethics (i.e. economic justice, labor, armed conflict, etc.).<sup>76</sup>

In the tension between the Greek and Roman understanding of natural law in normative ethics, McCormick focuses more on the order of reason than the order of nature as the means of knowing the order of creation. His emphasis on human nature and the human person adequately considered, rather than physical nature, ensures that his approach to natural law is more personalist and less physicalist. It also removes the possibility of declaring actions as intrinsically evil.

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<sup>76</sup> Bohr, *Catholic Moral Tradition*, 142-51; Jean Porter, *Natural & Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999). In her excellent treatment of the concept of natural law, Jean Porter shows how the concept of natural law changed and developed from a principle of justification which could be used to support a number of allowable conclusions, to an exclusivist principle that would allow only one “correct” conclusion. In her opinion the manner in which “natural law” was used in the recent past is actually contrary to the original intent of the doctrine. In particular this is due to a hubris that presumed that absolutely certain knowledge of physical reality in general (and human nature in particular) was possible. This absolute knowledge, often attained by appeal to a particular interpretation of divine revelation, thus provided absolutely certain answers to moral questions. Only one moral answer would be most in accord with the physical and human reality that was known with certainty. Porter indicates that due to our increased attentiveness to the constantly developing process of human knowledge, such an approach that claims absolute knowledge of reality and of human nature is untenable. Such a more contemporary approach thus eliminates the pretension of being able to apply some eternal absolute code of moral law to all situations and necessitates the recognition that the discernment and application of “the natural law” is a reciprocal process.

In addressing the proper criteria for determining the good, McCormick's approach is one of proportionalism or moderate teleology. Cahill indicates that "Put simply, this moral approach evaluates a moral decision by giving a good deal of attention to the proportion in the concrete act between its good and bad effects."<sup>77</sup> McCormick's attentiveness to the historical consciousness of all human activity leads him to a rejection of the concept of an intrinsically evil act. Aside from the mere physical description of the action it is necessary to know the context and the consequences of an option, how it fosters or impedes the human good, before being able to make a moral evaluation.

Drawing from the traditional Catholic understanding of the principle of double effect,<sup>78</sup> McCormick pointed to the primacy that the concept of "proportionate reason" played in making ethical judgments.<sup>79</sup> He asserted that it was necessary to consider the circumstances and consequences of an action before being able to ascertain its ethical meaning for the moral agent. It is important to note that this is not insisting, as would strict utilitarianism, that all actions are morally neutral apart from their consequences. While the consequences alone do not determine the morality of an action, they are important in the process. McCormick's approach identifies a

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<sup>77</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 81.

<sup>78</sup> In brief, the principle of double effect recognizes that often actions may have two effects, one good and one evil. In such cases the action under consideration may be considered a morally right action provided that four criteria are met: (1) It cannot be an intrinsically evil act. The act in and of itself must be morally good or neutral; (2) The good effect cannot be caused by the evil effect. The evil effect is not a means to the good end, rather both the good and evil effect are caused by the one action; (3) The intent must be the good effect and the evil effect must be unintended. If one could achieve the good effect without the evil effect one would, but since that is not possible the evil effect is permitted; (4) There must be a proportionate reason for allowing the bad effect. The good effect must be a greater good than the evil of the evil effect in order to justify permitting the evil effect.

<sup>79</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 21-28. Much of the material in this consideration of the principle of double effect as well as the concept of "pre-moral" evil is drawn from Tubbs' treatment of McCormick.

distinction between “pre-moral” evil and moral evil. He recognizes that while actions have an inherent tendency of being in accord or contrary to the order of nature, a full evaluation of the action as a moral evil cannot be made without knowing the context of the moral agent and his or her ethical decision (e.g. the moral agent’s knowledge, the moral agent’s freedom, the possibility of other alternatives, etc.) As a result no action could be considered intrinsically evil. Tubbs notes that,

McCormick parts company with those traditional categorizations of intrinsically evil actions which underlie the first condition of the double effect principle. Instead, he begins with another traditionally-accepted distinction: *physical* evil vs. *moral* evil. A physical (or “pre-moral”) evil is an objective disvalue (e.g., wounding, killing, deception), but may be justified for an adequate (proportionate) reason – e.g., in self-defense, protection of the innocent, etc. A moral evil (or *sin*) is a physical evil perpetrated disproportionately or frivolously. Dishonesty, injustice, murder, and infidelity are examples of moral evils and are forbidden by exceptionless moral norms – i.e., they are “intrinsic evils.” However, as McCormick and others have pointed out, these terms describe more than simply an action considered by itself. ‘Murder,’ for instance, specifies not only an act of killing but also the circumstances, object, and intention in the act – all of which have already been adjudged “disproportionate” by the employment of the term ‘murder’ itself. Just as every act which brings about death is not necessarily ‘murder,’ so are other pre-moral evils not necessarily moral evils. Of course, pre-moral evils are not *neutral* in themselves; without proportionate reason they are moral evils as well. But McCormick’s point is that the designation “intrinsic moral evil” cannot consistently be premised upon a description of pre-moral evil alone but must result from a determination of the meaning of the act through proportionate reason.<sup>80</sup>

McCormick’s approach to the second normative question, regarding the existence of moral absolutes, requires recognition of the three different moral levels addressed in the treatment of his metaethics: exceptionless moral values, more specific moral principles which may be in conflict with one another, and moral norms which provide direction for specific moral choices but are often subject to exceptions based on the context of the decision.

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<sup>80</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 22-23.

McCormick also notes that certain moral norms are “synthetic” in nature. Moral norms consist of an ethical evaluation of an action. There must be both a description of the action and an ethical evaluation of that action as right or wrong. But in some cases, as previously noted by Tubbs, the very description of the action is a morally-loaded term. For example the term “murder” includes not only the description of the action of killing another person, but the ethical evaluation of the killing as unjustifiable and wrong. Such a “synthetic” moral norm as “Murder is always and everywhere morally wrong,” is an exceptionless norm by virtue of the fact that the ethical evaluation of the action has already been made in referring to the action as murder. The real ethical evaluation, the application of moral norms to behavior or action, occurs in the process of deciding what is properly designated as “murder.” It is only these “synthetic” moral norms that may be considered exceptionless. All other moral norms are open to the possibility of exceptions based on the context of the moral agent and action under consideration. There are, then, inherent universal moral values, abiding moral principles, and even premoral absolutes, but by the nature of the process of discerning proportionate balance of premoral right and wrong, and the uncertainty of future possible contexts, no specific moral norm can be considered absolute.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, an ethical evaluation of an action as a moral evil requires an attentiveness to the moral agent and the context of his or her decision. This turn to the moral subject also plays a crucial role in McCormick’s distinction between “right and wrong” and “good and bad.”

McCormick’s modified approach recognizes that the identification of right and wrong requires a proper determination of premoral evil, but can only arrive at the judgment of moral evil, right

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<sup>81</sup> McCormick does acknowledge that some moral norms, because of the great importance of their foundational principles, are “virtually exceptionless.” Such “virtually exceptionless” moral norms rest on moral virtues and principles that are so high on the hierarchy of values that they could only be subordinated to another principle or norm in the most extreme context. In typical moral decisions they would function like absolute moral norms.

and wrong, through a consideration of the context. Judgments of good and bad, that is judgments of moral accountability, culpability, and sin require as well a knowledge of the interior disposition of the agent that is inaccessible to other persons.

Determination of what is concretely morally right and wrong is, of course, important. . . . It must be noted, however, that excessive concern with rightfulness and wrongfulness obscures a very important distinction and subsequently a whole area of our moral lives. I refer to the distinction between right and wrong, good and bad. The right and wrong usage refers to what is objectively supportive and promotive of others or conversely what undermines their well-being and even their rights. The good/bad usage refers primarily to the person and to the person's dispositions. Specifically, it refers to the person's desire and intent to do what is supportive and promotive. For example, one who intends to, desires to do what is supportive of another or others performs a good act. That person may actually end up doing what is harmful and thus perform an act that is morally wrong; but it remains a morally good act. On the contrary, one who acts from motives of selfishness, hatred, or envy performs a bad act. Thus a surgeon acting out of the most despicable or selfish motives may perform brilliant life-saving surgery. His act is morally bad but morally right.<sup>82</sup>

It is this distinction between the "objective" right/wrong and the "subjective" good/bad that helps to clarify McCormick's approach to the third question of normative ethics regarding the relationship between the individual and social elements of ethics.

In the later part of his career, McCormick pointed out that the community assists the individual in the process of ensuring that the subjective ethical judgment is closest to the objective judgments of right and wrong. The community assists the individual in verifying that his or her ethical judgment is correct. The community assists in the self critical aspect of ethics and the reevaluation of personal ethical judgments. Like Hauerwas, McCormick recognizes the tremendous impact that society has on the individual in the development of both habits of choice and character.<sup>83</sup> The attentiveness to both the "objective" and "subjective" elements of ethics

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<sup>82</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 56-57.

<sup>83</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 57-63.



requires that one give particular attention to the socio-historical context that frames both the choices and the moral agent. The whole process of moral formation (both choices of actions and development of character) takes place in a given context and it is this social context of the human community that is crucially important. In his treatment of moral communities Tubbs states,

To summarize, then, one of the moral purposes of communities is to inform, nurture, and sometimes correct the determinations of proportionate reason which individuals must make. Individual self-determination is a *bonum utile* (instrumental good) existing both within and alongside the broader *bonum utile* of community reflection and discernment—both of which are in the service of those objective goods which define our 'best interests.'<sup>84</sup>

Additionally, the importance of the relationship between the individual and society also draws attention to the concept of moral character. While the influence of society does affect particular decisions and choices, its continuous influence over an extended length of time has an even more profound impact on the moral character of the individual. The moral character of the individual is formed and informed by the communal context of his or her existence. (But it must also be recognized that there is a degree of reciprocity to this relationship. It is the character of the individuals within the community, expressed through their continued choices over an extended length of time, that shape and structure the community around them.)

McCormick takes the critique of character ethicists quite seriously, especially in his later works such as *Corrective Vision*. He affirms the emphasis on ethical character. It is the human person, rather than the specific act that is being evaluated, that is the proper focus of ethics and morality. McCormick points out that moral actions and moral character are mutually intertwined realities.<sup>85</sup> Who we are, our moral character, is formed by the choices we make. The choices we

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<sup>84</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 31.

<sup>85</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 57-63. McCormick's approach flows from a rather Rahnerian understanding of categorical freedom and transcendental freedom. In such an understanding it is the transcendental freedom that is the condition of the possibility of the

make are rooted in and formed by our moral character. By continually and repetitively choosing the same actions or behaviors we ingrain in ourselves certain habits and values. It is these habits and values that are the categorical expressions of our personal transcendental moral character. The goal of ethics is to instill and develop good moral character, but this is only attained by developing the abilities and habits of making right choices. Moral character and moral choices exist in a mutually interdependent relationship.

With this understanding of McCormick's approach to ethics, it is important to note at least three critiques. These criticisms address the uniqueness of Christian ethics, the existence of universal reason, and the unclarity of the *ordo bonorum*. In *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, Lisa Sowle Cahill identifies the first two of these concerns when she concludes her treatment of Richard McCormick by noting that,

Two critical questions perhaps remain, the first theological, the second philosophical. Can explicitly Christian and biblical moral exhortations be resolved into universal duties without actually being dissolved? Can universal moral values and duties still be credibly affirmed in the face of recent philosophical (postmodern) critiques of ahistorical and universal reason, and in the face of cultural pluralism?<sup>86</sup>

While the first of these two questions must be noted here, it will need to be more fully addressed in the next chapter when examining the concept of Christian ethics in greater detail. At this point it is important to recognize that if the content of Christian ethics and human ethics is the same, then the question arises as to what difference, if any, Christian belief has on ethics

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categorical freedom. The fullest focus of ethics and the ultimate goal of the moral agent, developing a morally good character (a sort of fundamental option for the good), occurs on the transcendental level. But this transcendental goal can only be realized or attained through acts, habits, etc. It is the exercise of categorical freedom through specific acts and choices that manifests the transcendental freedom and also creates the ethical and moral character of who we are.

<sup>86</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 102.

and morality. While McCormick's assertion of the universality of ethics prevents Christian ethics from pursuing a sectarian path, it seems to include the implication that Christian belief has no impact on ethical judgments of right and wrong. Indeed, the insistence on the universality of an ethics grounded on a common human nature would seem to eliminate any sort of qualification of the word "ethics" other than "human." As is the case with math, physics or chemistry, the very universality of this ethics would make it meaningless to use the terms "Christian" or "Jewish" as modifiers. Thus the Christian ethics and moral exhortations have been, in Cahill's words, "dissolved" into the universal duties.

The second critique addresses the claim to universality from a very different angle. Postmodernism points out that all thoughts and concepts, including the concept of reason, are so culturally-conditioned that any claim to "universality" is an illusion constructed within a particular cultural context or narrative. This perspective of postmodernism recognizes the tendency of all various cultures and worldviews to project their culturally-conditioned understanding as universal reality. It denies the possibility of any sort of universal reason or universal narrative. From a postmodern perspective, (which points out the plurality of what people consider to be "ethically reasonable,") the ultimate subjectivity of all knowledge, understanding and ways of thinking makes it epistemologically impossible to appeal to some common "human reason" as a shared criterion for ascertaining right and wrong. The diversity of opinions as to what is ethically right and wrong cannot be resolved by determining which is more reasonable, because there is a diversity of opinions as to what is the correct understanding of reason. The plurality of cultures and ways of thinking, each with its own criteria for right or wrong, reasonable or foolish, prevents the possibility of some common evaluative criteria. Any

attempt to mitigate between conflicting understandings results in a process of appealing to conflicting understandings of some evaluative criteria. It is a process of infinite regress.

Such a critique of the concept of universal reason severely impacts the concept of natural law and especially McCormick's approach to natural law. If a plurality of "reasons" exists, then the appeal to reason as the tool for discerning right and wrong crumbles as a method of achieving common moral judgments. The plurality of "reasons" thus undermines any claim to "universality" in the field of ethics based on a particular understanding of "reason" as the authoritative means for reaching morally normative judgments.

A third critique points to a related but distinct difficulty that persists. Even in the face of resolving the postmodern attack on universal reason, there remains the difficulty of disagreements over what constitutes the *ordo bonorum*. Tubbs identifies the *ordo bonorum* as the key to understanding McCormick's approach of proportionalism.

We have seen in this section that the key to understanding McCormick's ethical method as it relates to value-conflict resolution is his notion of proportionate reason. To summarize, proportionate reason demands that in conflict situations we should always choose to protect the higher value in the *ordo bonorum*. . . . Clearly the *ordo bonorum* represents for McCormick a more-or-less objective system of values for whose protection we are morally responsible.<sup>87</sup>

However, later in the text, Tubbs points out the difficulty that this dependence upon the *ordo bonorum* poses.

But we should also note, in closing, that the hierarchical understanding of values which grounds "proportionate reason" is also the source of its greatest complexity and unclarity as an ethical theory. For, McCormick and other "proportionalists" are attempting to 'update' the notion of the *ordo bonorum* and to clarify for modern understanding the relations of its constituent goods. But the problem this attempt poses for McCormick's ethical method is, in the words of one of his most sympathetic critics, that ". . . in the absence of a classical or medieval metaphysics and anthropology, it is no mean task to discern and agree upon the precise relations of values in the hierarchy upon which the theory depends." McCormick

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<sup>87</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 27-28.

frequently implies that particular conclusions reached theoretically through proportionate reasoning are more immediately available through good moral common sense. This may well be so; but it does not solve the theoretician's problem of finding clear and compelling conceptual validations for those conclusions. Clarity and simplicity are certainly cardinal virtues for a moral theory.<sup>88</sup>

The belief in the existence of a common *ordo bonorum*, combined with the belief in a common human reason by which to discern that order, does not result in agreement regarding the hierarchy of values that is to serve as the evaluative criteria for ethical conflicts. Even if all agree that a universal order of nature exists and can be known by universal reason, it serves little purpose in the actual process of making ethical judgments without an agreement on what constitutes that hierarchy of values.

### **Comparison of Metaethics and Normative Ethics of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick**

Having examined the metaethics and normative ethics of the three ethicists, it is appropriate at this point to identify some points of similarity and difference. This section will begin with an examination of their metaethics and conclude with a comparison of their approaches to normative ethics. Regarding the questions of metaethics all three ethicists take the position of metaethical absolutism. They all agree that there is meaning to the concepts of “the right” and “the Good” and that these are the same for all people. All three reject the approaches of Non-cognitivism and metaethical relativism. For Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick there is one ethical reality, one moral reality, and one ethical criteria of right and wrong whether the focus is on actions, as is the case with Engelhardt and McCormick, or on character, as one

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<sup>88</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 47, quoting from Lisa Sowle Cahill’s “Teleology, Utilitarianism, and Christian Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 42 (1981), 617.

finds in Hauerwas. Both Engelhardt and McCormick directly acknowledge this absolutism as part of their methodology.

Identifying this element in the work of Hauerwas is more difficult and must be done more indirectly. As was seen, Hauerwas' understanding of the nature of the church as witness to the world necessarily entails a recognition of the "brokenness" of the world. This, in turn, requires an implicit recognition of some universal element to ethics which can act as a criterion for making assessments of right and wrong, a criterion that is the same for all people. Moreover, Hauerwas' manner of engaging in ethics, such as his approach to pacifism and certain issues of medical ethics, displays an implicit conviction that this element of ethics applies to all people regardless of their particular religious or social context. For Stanley Hauerwas, while he would reject the term of some sort of universal ethics, there is one right ethical character that is to be the goal of moral development. That should be the one formed by the Christian narrative. All other approaches are rooted in a disordered (to a greater or lesser extent) moral narrative which leads to the distorted or wrong perception or vision which leads to the distorted or wrong moral character.

However, the three authors differ in significant ways when addressing the subsequent question of how one comes to know "the Right" and "the Good." In this area Hauerwas and Engelhardt are similar in many respects. Both take an approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism. Both Hauerwas and Engelhardt rely on revelation as the means for knowing right and wrong. Engelhardt focuses on the Christian community as the source of that revelation while Hauerwas' focus is more scriptural in nature.

For both there is an inability to appeal to some form of common criteria among modern society. Engelhardt articulates this when he identifies the process of moral disagreement as

being one of infinite regress to the point of conflicting moral axioms, assumptions and presuppositions. Right and wrong are universal for Engelhardt, but only those in the right community really know that right and wrong. Since it is a community with shared moral axioms that is necessary to establish common moral norms, there is no way to establish moral norms for a society that consists of multiple communities with diverse sets of moral axioms. No common social criteria for settling moral disagreement among communities are available. This results in a libertarian approach to society in which society operates on the principle of permission.

Stanley Hauerwas is less emphatic (and perhaps less consistent) in this respect. Hauerwas insists on the inability to do ethics from anything but a particular narrative with its own vision full of assumptions and presuppositions—thus his self-limitation to Christian ethics. It is his insistence on the rightness of the Christian narrative in conjunction with his insistence on the inability of non-Christians to recognize the ethical rightness of this approach that bespeaks the inability to appeal to some common ethical criteria. On the other hand, Hauerwas' approach to a number of ethical issues is pursued in such a way that there is an expectation of non-Christians being able to make right ethical judgments.

In contrast, McCormick takes the approach of empirical metaethical absolutism. It is the commonality of creation, especially common human nature, that serves as the means of knowing the right and the good. Thus human beings come to discern right and wrong by virtue of examining reality and how it fosters or impedes human well-being. His natural law approach differs from both Engelhardt and Hauerwas in that it presumes a common criterion for all

persons in the making of ethical judgments.<sup>89</sup> Such a common criterion enables the cross-communal and cross-narrative ethical interchange that the methods of Engelhardt and Hauerwas would disallow. For McCormick, the ability of all to appeal to a common nature, especially human nature, as the means of verifying the understanding of the right and the good, make such interchanges additional sources in the process of ethical discernment.

In respect to their normative ethics, the differences are more significant. The one point of commonality rests in the fact that all three ultimately base their ethical criteria for right and wrong on their theological belief in God as the source of all goodness. For Engelhardt, the criterion for right action and right living is preserved and communicated by the Christian community. But by virtue of the fact that this faith commitment is not shared by all members of society, non-Christian ethics functions in a different manner.<sup>90</sup> In society, the criterion for what is allowed and what is disallowed is set by mutual agreement. Here Engelhardt argues that the principle of permission should take priority so that each individual and each community is allowed to do whatever they would like to do as long as it does not interfere with others. But what is allowed is quite different from what is right. This agreement as to what actions are allowed does not make the actions right. What is normative in society is what we agree to allow

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<sup>89</sup> It must be acknowledged that the very act of belief in this reality of universal human nature is, in a very real sense, an act of faith. It is a product of the belief in the fundamental goodness of all creation, especially the goodness of the human person. It is a product of the belief that human nature, though wounded by sin, remains the discernable *imago dei*. It is this common human nature, and the participation of all people in that nature, that establishes a common community and a common narrative for all people. Contrary to Engelhardt, McCormick recognizes a common community that enables “thick” ethics across socio-cultural boundaries. And it is the common beginning and end provided by this common nature that enables the meta-narrative that Hauerwas denies as a possibility.

<sup>90</sup> Engelhardt shows his belief in the great divide between Christian and non-Christian ethics by separating his major works into *The Foundations of Bioethics* and *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*.



in order to achieve peaceful co-existence of moral strangers. From Engelhart's perspective there is no criterion for right and wrong in society at this normative level of ethics.

Stanley Hauerwas' position also makes a sharp distinction between Christian and non-Christian ethics. But the reason for this distinction, as well as the effects of it in the realm of normative ethics, are quite different than for Engelhardt. For Hauerwas, as for Engelhardt, one can only do ethics from within one's narrative. The Christian narrative and the non-Christian narrative are so fundamentally different that the corresponding ethics are poles apart. The effect of this dissimilarity is that Hauerwas is limited to doing Christian ethics. Therefore he provides no criteria for normative judgments of right and wrong except within the Christian narrative. But, as was noted above, Hauerwas' approach to such issues as pacifism and some medical ethics presumes that there is some criteria for right and wrong that are available outside the Christian narrative. In this regard Hauerwas is less consistent than Engelhardt, who constantly denies the possibility of accurate ethical judgments outside the Christian community.

In contrast to both Engelhardt and Hauerwas, McCormick's criteria for right and wrong are the same for both Christians and non-Christians. He maintains that there is no difference in content between Christian and non-Christian ethics. The order of reality, specifically of human nature, is the proper criterion for right and wrong in both approaches to ethics. That which fosters the development of human nature to its *telos* is right, while anything that impairs that process is wrong. Specific judgments of right and wrong are discerned by examining the premoral values and disvalues involved in a decision and making an ethical judgment based on a proportionate balance of benefit over harm.

In addressing the question of moral absolutes, McCormick and Engelhardt are similar in that both understand the question in the same way. However their answers are opposed to one

another. Engelhardt maintains that there are indeed moral absolutes, but his approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism also holds that these moral absolutes will not be recognized outside of the right community. This ensures that within a society, a collection of disparate individuals and communities, there will be no operative absolute moral norms. The closest thing to a moral absolute in society would be the principle of permission.

McCormick's position regarding absolute moral norms is almost exactly opposite. While McCormick denies that there are absolute moral norms, he maintains that many moral norms function within society as virtually exceptionless, nearly absolute, moral norms. In McCormick's ethics there are absolute moral values. But the possibility of the need to make exceptions always exists because of the impact that context has upon translating those values into moral norms. The only absolute "moral norms" in this approach are synthetic moral norms which have already made an ethical evaluation of something as wrong in the very process of defining that action. However, despite the non-existence of absolute moral norms, McCormick admits that in the practical exercise of normative ethics, the everyday ethics of most people, there are some moral norms that are virtually exceptionless. Theoretically, there could be a context in which one would have to make an exception to these moral norms, but such a context would be so rare an occurrence that in daily ethical judgments no exceptions to the norm are made.

The question of absolute moral norms is much more difficult to answer in the thought of Stanley Hauerwas. The sense, or perhaps senselessness, of the question is quite different in Hauerwas' thought than in Engelhardt's and McCormick's. This is due in large part to his strong emphasis on character rather than actions as the proper focus of ethics. As a result, Hauerwas regards any attempt to establish rules, norms, or guidelines for specific actions as having missed

the point of ethics. The question of the existence of an absolute moral norm is the wrong question.

Again, Hauerwas' self-limitation to Christian ethics makes any attempt to address non-Christian normative ethics, and subsequently the question of absolute moral norms, depend upon an extrapolation of some of his positions. In this regard one may turn to the "moral norms" operative in his treatment of pacifism and some of his medical ethics (both of which make some implicit claim to universality) and see that it is the character of Jesus that functions as the ultimate moral absolute. But here again, the attempt to connect this moral absolute of character with particular absolute moral norms would be difficult, if not impossible.

Finally, in addressing the question of the relationship between individual and social ethics, one sees a greater correlation between Engelhardt and Hauerwas. In both of these authors there is a stronger focus on the communal element of ethics than in the work of McCormick. For both, the emphasis on the Christian community as the source of the proper criteria for making ethical judgments comes with a great deal of attention to the role of community in ethics. In one sense, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., has the strongest focus on community in his ethics, because it is the right moral community, that of Traditional Christianity, that is the source of the proper criteria for making judgments of right and wrong. The community is the vehicle for the individual to accept the correct moral axioms. Thus, one of the most crucial actions of the individual is to choose the proper community, with the proper moral axioms, to serve as her or his moral community. Having acknowledged the importance of community one must also recognize that Engelhardt's approach is also very individualistic. His emphasis on libertarianism is evidence of the priority that he places the individual. In this aspect of his ethical methodology, Engelhardt's focus is on the individual and individual liberty. Even the acceptance of the

community of Traditional Christianity as one's morally normative community is ultimately an individual's free decision.

Hauerwas' emphasis on the communal aspect of ethics is more pervasive. Like Engelhardt, he acknowledges the necessity of the proper community for doing ethics. It is the community that is the source of one's narrative, it is the narrative that shapes one's vision, and it is the vision that molds one's character. The ultimate goal of right character is in one sense individual in nature, but Hauerwas rightly insists that no individual exists outside of a community. Hauerwas' focus on moral character rather than moral actions entails a more complete role for the community in ethics because it is the effect of the community, over the course of time, that has the greatest impact on moral character. In this regard even "individual" choices and actions are expressions of a communal narrative.

There is not as great a focus on the role of community in McCormick's ethics as in Engelhardt or Hauerwas. This is particularly true in regard to the role of the Christian community. McCormick's approach of natural law makes all of humanity the moral community within which ethical discernment takes place. It should also be noted that over the course of his career McCormick's attentiveness to the role and function of community grows, so that his later work addresses the issue of community much more than his early work which tends to be more individually focused.<sup>91</sup> The primary role of the community in these later works is its function in the process of moral discernment. Individuals and human communities jointly discern moral reality in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship. The community is crucial in the process of verifying our individual ethical judgments. But it is also important to note that the

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<sup>91</sup> This same sort of pattern can be seen in his shift of focus from acts and crisis ethics in his early works to an increased focus on character ethics later in his career.

reciprocal nature of this relationship makes the possibility of an individual acting in a prophetic role more ethically appropriate. Since it is reality that is the ultimate moral norm, rather than revelation as conveyed through the religious community, the entire community of humanity is involved in the ongoing process of discerning this moral reality. Therefore, it is often the case that communal development of a deeper understanding begins with the individual's recognition of an error in a communal ethical judgment. For Engelhardt and Hauerwas, the primacy of place held by the Christian community makes such development of, or change in, communal ethical judgments more difficult to justify.

Having completed this broad examination of the metaethics and the normative ethics of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick, as well as a consideration of their similarities and differences, the next chapter will address how each understands Christian ethics. The consideration of their understanding of Christian ethics will lead to the consideration of how those ethics function within society. It will be seen that the differences in their approaches to normative ethics have less impact on their understanding of the role of Christian faith and ethics in a pluralistic society than do their metaethical differences. Their metaethical approach has the greatest formative impact on both their understanding of the role of faith as well as on their understanding of normative ethics in a religiously pluralistic society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CHRISTIAN ETHICS OF ENGELHARDT, HAUERWAS, AND McCORMICK

Having examined the concepts of metaethics and normative ethics in the first chapter, this chapter will examine the concept of Christian ethics as a distinct approach to ethics in the work of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick. It is important to place this examination of the issue of Christian ethics within a broader context of contemporary thought and understanding regarding the nature of faith.<sup>1</sup> Whether posed as the relationship between faith and reason or as that between Church and Society, one of the crucial questions of Christian ethics is the impact that Christian belief has on ethical judgments. Therefore, the first section of this chapter will examine an understanding of faith, in particular the relationship between the concepts of faith and reason. Having completed this preliminary work, the second section will identify some fundamental questions that must be addressed when considering Christian ethics. Each of the subsequent three sections will describe the nature of Christian ethics as understood by

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter includes a great deal of attention to “faith” and “Christian faith.” It should be noted that “faith” should not be confused with any particular religion as such. “Faith” is most fundamentally belief in God. As such it is both more basic and more nebulous than “religion” which can be understood to be a system of faith which is often articulated in certain teachings and doctrines and is manifested in certain practices and behaviors, particularly in worship of some sort. Because of its more general nature, faith need not be related to a specific religion. By way of contrast the use of the term “Christian faith” narrows the concept of faith and specifically associates this faith with belief in Jesus as God incarnate, Lord and Savior. All three authors are Christian and thus, unless otherwise noted are referring to “Christian faith” when using the term “faith.”

For a more detailed examination of the concepts of faith, religion, religious worldview, religious value system, morality, Christian ethics, Church and Conscience see: *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), “Christian Ethics,” 87-90, “Church,” 90-91, “Conscience,” 116-118, “Ethics,” 206-208, “Faith,” 222-224, and “Morality and Religion, Relations of,” 400-403; see also Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism: New Edition* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 19-71, 390-391, 885, 916, 969, and 979.

Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick. The final section of this chapter will clarify certain similarities and differences that Christian faith plays in the authors' ethical systems.

### **A Contemporary Concept of Faith**

One aspect that is key to contextualizing this examination of Christian ethics is a clarification of the term, "faith." The concept of faith is one that has received much attention especially from the time of the Enlightenment to the Postmodern Age. What has been variously described as "The Enlightenment" or the "Age of Reason" placed a great deal of emphasis on epistemology, particularly the work of Descartes and Newton.<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Grenz notes that,

These revolutions in philosophy and science sought to elevate reason over "superstition." As a result, the epoch was appropriately designated the Age of Reason. Reason replaced revelation as the arbiter of truth. It shared the stage with several other principles, forming a unified whole at the center of the Enlightenment mind-set. Significant among these principles are "autonomy," "nature," "harmony," and "progress." But among these, reason remained the first principle of the Enlightenment.

The Age of Reason placed great emphasis on human rational capabilities, but in the Enlightenment understanding, *reason* comprised more than just a human faculty. The concept recalled the ancient Greco-Roman Stoic assertion that a fundamental order and structure lies within all of reality and is evidenced in the workings of the human mind. Enlightenment theorists assumed that a correspondence between the structure of the world and the structure of the human mind enables the mind to discern the structure inherent in the external world.

The enlightenment principle of reason, therefore presumed a human ability to gain cognition of the foundational order of the whole universe.<sup>3</sup>

Nature and the orderliness of creation, that were to be discovered by human persons through the use of their reason, were innate ideas already present in the human mind and lay waiting to be uncovered through interaction with the corresponding reality outside the human

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 67. Much of the examination of the Enlightenment, Modernity and Post-Modernity in this section rests on Stanley J. Grenz's *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) and Paul Lakeland's *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 67-68.

person. Knowledge was the result of an individual's experiential encounter with the world. As Paul Lakeland observes, "The Enlightenment project of modernity was and remains the triumph of reason and the mastery of the human mind over the external world."<sup>4</sup> The understanding of individuals was confirmed by the experience of others who also possessed universal concepts of the good. The pursuit of knowledge was a journey without end that all were called to make. The resultant ceaseless increase of knowledge was of benefit to both the individual and their society.

God, "The Grand Designer," had written the "laws of nature" into the orderly creation in such a way that they were able to be comprehended by all through the use of their reason. The laws of God, innate in persons, were also reflected in the laws of nature. In regard to religion, such an approach recognized a central role of God as the creator and designer of both the natural world and the human person. Moreover, such an approach responded to the reality of a fragmented Christianity (a more and more apparent post-Reformation reality) by advocating a natural religion, which could be ascertained through a reasoned consideration of nature. God was both the God of Nature and the God of Reason. This natural religion provided a unity that the Christianity of that day and age lacked. Such a "religion," accessible to all through the use of their reason, was then regarded as distinct from more "sectarian" religions, such as Christianity, which relied upon some form of specific revelation conveyed by a religious authority. As Grenz states,

During the Age of Reason, autonomous human reason dethroned the reverence for external authority as an arbiter of truth that had characterized the medieval and Reformation period. People were increasingly disinclined to rely solely on the dictates of ancient authorities. In many cases, simple appeals to the Bible, the teaching office of the church, or Christian dogma were no longer sufficient to bring about compliance in belief or conduct. Individuals became increasingly bold in testing all such external claims to authority.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 69.



More and more the term “faith” came to be applied to the action of placing belief in a revealed religion and in this regard faith came to be seen as a form of superstition – a belief that could not be verified by reason and thus was unworthy of epistemological trust. Grenz points out,

As the Age of Reason unfolded, revealed religion increasingly came under attack, and natural religion increasingly gained the status of true religion. In the end, among Enlightenment intellectuals natural religion or the “religion of reason” replaced the focus on dogma and doctrine that had characterized the Middle Ages and the Reformation period.<sup>6</sup>

And subsequently he summarizes modernity by saying that,

The modern, post-enlightenment mind assumes that knowledge is certain, objective, and good. It presupposes that the rational, dispassionate self can obtain such knowledge. It presupposes that the knowing self peers at the mechanistic world as a neutral observer armed with the scientific method. The modern knower engages in the knowing process believing that knowledge inevitably leads to progress and that science coupled with education will free humankind from our vulnerability to nature and all forms of social bondage.<sup>7</sup>

However, by the end of the Age of Reason, the crucial notion of the structured and innate nature of the human mind and its correspondence to reality was undermined. The human mind was seen instead, by thinkers such as John Locke, as a *tabula rasa* which reached understanding through reason’s examination of nature.<sup>8</sup> Knowledge was not a correspondence between the mind and nature, and instead it was a reflection of nature within a neutral human mind that functioned like a mirror to reflect reality. Thus, the concept of Locke’s *tabula rasa* undermined the notion of a mutual nature between the human person and the world at large. David Hume took this one step further and insisted that human knowledge, rather than a correspondence

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<sup>6</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 75.

between reality and the human mind or an accurate reflection of the naturally ordered universe by the *tabula rasa*, is instead the result of certain preconceptions which cannot be demonstrated to be true. The human mind was never a neutral *tabula rasa*. It did not begin empty and discern nature; rather it began with preconceptions which it then imposed on nature. The correspondence between human nature and the nature of the world was no surprise since the human mind fit the structure of the world into its already existing worldview. In particular this skeptical approach questioned the preconceptions of both causality and the structured substance of the natural world. Causality was not so much proved as assumed. The ordered structure of the universe was not so much discovered as it was imposed by the subject.<sup>9</sup>

This was even more so the case in regards to the reasonableness of natural religion.<sup>10</sup> For Hume, all belief in God, even in God as The Grand Designer of the natural universe, fell into the category of superstition and meaningless assertions which were imposed rather than known. As the structure of the natural world was in reality a projection of the human mind, the belief in a God that gave structure to that world made this God an unseen and unproven cause of an uncertain projection.

In response to Hume's skepticism, Emanuel Kant established a distinction between *noumena* (the reality of things as they are in themselves) and *phenomena* (our experience of things.) In contrast to the beliefs of the Age of Reason, knowledge is not correspondence between *phenomena* and *noumena*. Kant accepts Hume's position that we have no way of immediate knowledge of reality. He agrees with Hume that we can't know things in themselves,

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<sup>9</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 76.

the *noumena*; the human mind only has access to the appearance of things, *phenomena*. But Kant responds by saying that the immediate knowledge is not necessary.

Kant's epistemology shifted the foundation of knowledge from the created order of nature to the autonomous individual. The thinking subject became the universal starting point for all human knowledge, including that of human nature and morality, without undermining the reality of that knowledge.<sup>11</sup> The autonomous subject, through the use of his or her reason, was the key for all knowledge. In changing the foundation of knowledge from the nature of reality and the "God of Reason" to the thinking subject, Kant avoided Hume's attack on causality and substance while preserving the essence of knowledge as true, universal and beneficial.

The development of modernity's approach led to a conflict between reason and faith.

Religion, in this system, was divisive, destructive of that which could unite all peoples and nations. Religions – as archaic, as ruthlessly embodied – were best discarded, as they were attachments to the irrational, the superstitious, the ignorant.<sup>12</sup>

In as much as faith explicitly acknowledged God as an external authority, it undermined the authority of the individual and was thus perceived as suspect, or even in serious conflict with reason. Furthermore, religious truths (particularly in the concept of miracles) claimed a degree of immunity from the critique of reason. In this respect, faith interfered with the true way of knowing – namely, the subject's free use of human reason. Thus, in many aspects faith and reason were understood to be conflicting claims of knowledge in opposition to one another.

Faith was seen to be dependent on the non-rational perspective of the knowing subject. The individual brought his or her own beliefs, garnered from external authorities, to the project

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<sup>11</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 75-78.

<sup>12</sup> Dena S. Davis and Laurie Zoloth, *Notes from a Narrow Ridge: Religion and Bioethics* (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999), 257.

of knowing and imposed them on the reality of the experience. Faith, by scripture's own definition, was uncertain ("Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1). Only reason could be certain and proved. Laurie Zoloth's remarks regarding modern medicine can properly be applied to reasoned science in general, "Modern medical science trumped a religious apprehension of the world because it could be, in this important sense, proven, whereas the truth claims of faith could not."<sup>13</sup> Faith was a matter of personal belief with no way of verifying its truth claims and was thus relegated to the subjective realm. Faith was at best an unverifiable subjective truth claim and at worst meaningless propaganda which undermined the authority of individuals and their use of reason. The claim of faith to true knowledge from a source other than that of individuals and their reason posed a fundamental challenge to the epistemology of modernism.

Postmodernism was to pose an even greater challenge. Postmodern philosophy called into question modernism's focus on several things: the subject; modernism's understanding of knowledge as certain, objective and good; and modernism's confidence in universality. As Grenz notes:

At the heart of postmodern philosophy is a sustained attack on the premises and presuppositions of modernism. Postmoderns reject as pretentious the modern focus on the self. They scoff at the modern confidence in human knowledge. And they decry the duplicity inherent in the modern assumption that all people everywhere are ultimately as we are.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the criticisms leveled by modernism against faith, as an uncertain and unverifiable assertion of knowledge, were now brought to bear on "reason" itself. Postmodernism decentered the individual subject as a source of some universal truth or reality.

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<sup>13</sup> Davis and Zoloth, *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*, 255.

<sup>14</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 123.

Modernity's focus on the individual's role in the act of knowing lead to the recognition by Postmodernism that there was also a subjectivity to the "reason" that enabled that act. There was no universal reason. The internal authority of reason was no more universally valid or defensible than the external authorities of pre-enlightenment thinking.<sup>15</sup>

All knowledge is but the interaction between the "knower" and "the known." In this process the "knowers" do not so much use reason to discover the underlying meaning of "the known" reality as they fit this experience of "the known" into a pre-existing structure of meaning which they bring with them to the encounter. In as much as "the known" fits into this structure it is considered by the "knower" to be "reasonable." But this pre-existing structure is not universal and innate in all individuals; rather it is subjective and imparted in individuals by the social context within which they develop and exist.<sup>16</sup> The numerous and various social contexts which serve as the source of these structures result in numerous and various "reasonable" worldviews which in turn preclude any possibility of human universality. Each individual possesses a unique subjective worldview and there is no way to assert the superiority of one worldview over another.<sup>17</sup>

This inescapable relationship between "knower" and "the known" is the same in all forms of knowing whether by reason or faith. All ways of knowing are subjective, uncertain, and relative. Some merely acknowledge this aspect less than others. As faith is uncertain, subjective

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<sup>15</sup> Lakeland, *Postmodernity*, 25. This subjectivity of reason (and the consequent elimination of "universal reason") has been seen in chapter one of this dissertation as particularly important in the ethical approaches of both H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and Stanley Hauerwas.

<sup>16</sup> As will be seen later in this chapter, this focus on the social context as the source for ethical norms exercises considerable influence in the ethical systems of both Engelhardt and Hauerwas.

<sup>17</sup> Lakeland, *Postmodernity*, 25.

and suspect to modernism so too is all “rational” knowledge in the contemporary Postmodern Era. On this subject it is worth quoting at length from Grenz.

Postmodernism has tossed aside objective truth, at least as it has classically been understood. Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty stand against what has for centuries been the reigning epistemological principle – the correspondence theory of truth (the belief that truth consists of the correspondence of propositions with the world “out there”). This rejection of the correspondence theory not only leads to a skepticism that undercuts the concept of objective truth in general; it also undermines Christian claims that our doctrinal formulations state objective truth. . . . Postmodern thinkers have given up the search for universal, ultimate truth because they are convinced that there is nothing more to find than a host of conflicting interpretations or an infinity of linguistically created worlds.

The abandonment of the belief in universal truth entails the loss of any final criterion by which to evaluate the various interpretations of reality that compete in the contemporary intellectual realm. In this situation, all human interpretations – including the Christian worldview – are equally valid because all are equally invalid. (In fact, as adjectives objectively describing interpretations, valid and invalid become meaningless terms.) At best, say the postmoderns, we can judge these interpretations only on the basis of pragmatic standards, on the basis of “what works.”<sup>18</sup>

Such a Postmodern approach poses a very different understanding of the relationship between faith and reason than had modernity.

The late modern approach regarded the two as existing in some form of fundamental conflict. The mutually exclusive relationship between faith and reason entailed regarding faith commitments as invalid and accepting reasoned epistemology as the norm for all knowledge.

Such an approach regarded “religions and acts of faith as irrelevant – or worse, as irrational.”<sup>19</sup>

By the same token a worldview of faith often regarded reason as undermining the convictions of faith regarding truth. Thus, a firm commitment to faith entailed rejecting at least some epistemology of reason. In such a relationship between reason and faith a commitment to the

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<sup>18</sup> Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 163-64. As was seen in chapter one of this dissertation, both Engelhardt and Hauerwas assert that on the level of social ethics (ethics outside the Christian community) something similar to this loss of universal truth has already occurred.

<sup>19</sup> Davis and Zoloth, *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*, 248.

validity of one worldview entailed questioning the validity of the other. Within the modern perspective, matters of faith were subjective and non-verifiable, while matters of reason were able to be judged as universally true or false, valid or invalid.

Within Postmodernism this conflictual relationship between reason and faith dissolves. From this Postmodern perspective, each can be understood to be equally valid within its own context. Rather than existing as two opposite ways of knowing things, one reliable and the other suspect, reason and faith are considered as simply different worldviews which give a different structure to the act of knowing. One position that could result from such an approach would be that of relativism. Since the terms “valid” and “invalid” lack real meaning, the worldviews of both reason and faith are equally “invalid” (or “valid.”) In such a position all knowledge or worldviews are as meaninglessly subjective as modernism regarded faith to be. Like the worldview of faith, the worldview of reason is equally suspect, subjective and non-verifiable.

A rather different second position that could result from such a Postmodern approach would recognize that the subjective element of faith is no longer grounds for dismissing it as meaningless and irrelevant to truth claims. This would reaffirm some validity of faith’s worldview. Such a position would assert that the worldviews of faith and reason emphasize different aspects of the human condition. There is a degree of validity to both worldviews and a certain complementarity between the foci. The worldview of reason focuses on the “Enlightenment narrative that reason and science can solve any conundrum.”<sup>20</sup> The goal of reason is thus an understanding of this world and the subsequent ability to solve related problems. To achieve this goal much of reason’s focus is on fundamental pragmatics of knowledge – thus, a particular emphasis on physical reality, objectivity, technology,

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<sup>20</sup> Davis and Zoloth, *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*, 255.

predictability, consistency and efficiency. Within such a focus, value and worth are measured in large part by utility.

By way of complementarity (not conflict), the worldview of faith focuses on a qualitative evaluation of action in light of an overall understanding of life and its goal. Zoloth points out that,

[R]eligion persists in asking about goal, *telos*, ultimate meanings, and long-term consequence. While religion is not alone in this endeavor, it insists on this, insisting on the question of moral meaning in the way that science insists on the question of replicable physical data. In the context of religion, human persons are entasked or burdened by the obligations that are linked to this goal.<sup>21</sup>

This second Postmodern approach thus minimizes or eliminates the mutually conflictual relationship between reason and faith. Instead, it allows regarding the two as complementary worldviews each with a different focus. Reason focuses on the ability to understand this world and the corresponding ability to achieve what we desire to do in it. Faith focuses on the ultimate meaning and goal of human life in order to appropriately choose what it is that we will do.

It is this second position, and particularly its understanding of faith, that serves as the context for much of the contemporary discussion of the role of Christian faith in ethics. Thus, Christian faith is most properly understood as an expression of a particular worldview and an incorporation of belief regarding the role of Jesus in that world relative to the overall *telos*, goals, meaning, worth, and values in human life. It is this understanding that underlies the work of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick. However, although the approaches of all three authors function with this understanding, the impact that it has on their work is quite different.

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<sup>21</sup> Davis and Zoloth, *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*, 257-58.



## Some Fundamental Issues of Christian Ethics

Both metaethics and normative ethics are influenced by an understood or assumed *telos* of ethics, ethical reflection, and the pursuit of the good.<sup>22</sup> For example, *The Cambridge Dictionary* notes that,

[T]he general study of goodness and the general study of right action, constitute the main business of ethics. Correlatively, its principal substantive questions are what ends we ought, as fully rational human beings, choose and pursue and what moral principles should govern our choices and pursuits.<sup>23</sup>

All ethics requires some sort of goal or *telos* that is more than a pragmatic understanding of how to do something. Ethics entails the questions of “What to do?” and most importantly “Why?” It is a matter of choices. Of all that one can choose to do or to be why make a certain choice? In this respect all ethics is teleological. All ethics involves some *telos*, some goal, some ultimate meaning, some long-term consequence toward which human action is directed.<sup>24</sup>

This, in turn, rests on some understanding of the *telos* associated with the human person and human society. The teleological focus of ethics, especially Christian ethics, rests a great deal on an anthropology. In particular it rests upon the question of “What is the nature of the human person and what is the ultimate goal of human existence?”<sup>25</sup> Faith, with its emphasis on

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<sup>22</sup> For an examination of the concepts of metaethics and normative ethics see chapter one.

<sup>23</sup> "Ethics," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 285.

<sup>24</sup> Davis and Zoloth, *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*, 257.

<sup>25</sup> From a Christian perspective, especially that of Engelhardt or Hauerwas, much of this anthropology is rooted in the understanding of sin. The nature of the human person is corrupted by sin in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of achieving (or even discerning) the *telos* of human existence. Even McCormick's understanding of sin has a significant impact on his ethics though it is quite different from that of Engelhardt and Hauerwas. McCormick's understanding of sin is that the *imago dei* of the human person is not so completely corrupted by sin. Instead the moral nature of the human person as *imago dei* is still intact and active in the person regardless of the person's religious context.

achieving a particular relationship with God as an ultimate goal of human life, is also fundamentally teleological in nature.

Recognizing the teleological nature of all ethics is important to the consideration of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. In *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, while addressing the relationship between morality and religion, William Frankena makes the following observations.

[A] religion typically involves three things: (1) a world view, e.g., a belief that there are one or more gods, that they are important in the affairs of the world, that they command or desire a certain conduct on our part and that we are immortal—let us call this a religious world view (RWV); (2) an associated way of behaving and feeling that is regarded as right or good for us, i.e., what is called its “ethics”—let us refer to this as a religious value system (RVS) or religious action guide; and (3) an associated institution or church.<sup>26</sup>

In Frankena’s terminology, the goal of this chapter is to examine the relationship between the religious worldview of Christianity and Christianity’s religious value system.

Presumably, Christian faith commitments entail some sort of development or change in one’s worldview and one’s understanding of the human person. These changes in understanding will inevitably affect one’s understanding of what constitutes the human good which will, in turn, impact one’s ethical evaluation of actions, behavior, and character. The concept of faith, with its faith convictions and commitments, are all formative of a particular worldview and impact one’s understanding of the *telos* of human existence. The Christian worldview entails (by virtue of its beliefs about God, the human person, others and the world) a certain *telos*. Given

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<sup>26</sup> William Frankena, “Mortality and Religion, Relations of,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and James F. Childress (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 400. Frankena continues to point out that “[M]orality is different from religion. A morality is not as such linked with an organized institution like a church; it may involve only a set of social or individual rules accompanied by sanctions of praise or blame, and feelings of conscience. It does, of course, involve an ethics or value system (VS) and a way of

the teleological nature of both ethics and faith, it is to be expected that faith, of whatever religion or denomination, has a profound impact on our understanding of what we ought to choose and pursue as our goal and thus has a profound impact on our ethics.

Christian ethics can then be identified as an ethical system rooted in a religious worldview within which faith in Jesus as the Christ plays a central role in the associative *telos* of that ethical system.<sup>27</sup> This faith in Jesus demands an attentiveness to his life and message, especially his message regarding the goal of the world and humanity. The message entails a worldview of both this world and the next and in much of the scriptures and Christian tradition this eschatological goal is referred to as the “Kingdom of God.” This worldview entails a particular understanding of the *telos* of man, human society, and creation in general. In this way, Christianity’s religious worldview forms and informs a particular understanding of the good, the right, and the holy, at a metaethical level.

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life; in fact a morality is precisely a code or view about how we should or should not conduct ourselves; in morality this is primary, whereas in religion it may be secondary to a world view.”

<sup>27</sup> Such a consideration of Christian ethics as ethics within a Christian worldview is different than the more typical approach of asking the question, “What is the role of Christian faith in ethics?” To address “the role of Christian faith” in ethics seems to make Christian faith an additive to ethics. This is also the case if, when speaking of Christian Ethics, “Christian” is regarded as an optional adjective. Such an approach, with any religious adjective, implies that ethics exists prior to and apart from faith. This, in turn, would entail regarding faith as a separate entity and a non-essential additive, an optional “luxury” as it were. Hauerwas does well to point out that ethics, because of its relationship with faith systems and their associative worldview, never exists apart from a belief system of some sort. Thus, the term “ethics” must always have a modifier that indicates the context of the set of ethical beliefs. (Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], 1.) As will be seen later in this chapter, this is what Hauerwas asserts happens with most contemporary Christian ethics. He believes this to be particularly true of Christian ethicists who take a natural law approach or of those Christian ethicists who are striving to do “public theology” in such a way that Christian ethics “fits into” the ongoing public discussion. Thus, a better way to conceive of “Christian ethics,” and the approach taken within this chapter, is to refer to it as the relationship between faith and ethics within a Christian belief system. Such an approach recognizes that within the Christian worldview the ever-present aspects of faith and ethics always interact and always impact one another – they are inseparable.

But the religious worldview of Christianity is far from uniform. Various Christian communities operate with differing understandings of God, self, others, and the world, as they relate to the goal of Christian faith. Thus, in considering any approach to Christian ethics it is best to begin by considering the goal of Christianity as understood by the particular ethicist. The remainder of this chapter will use the question of Christianity's *telos* as a starting point for examining the interaction of the faith and ethics within the Christian worldviews of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Stanley Hauerwas, and Richard A. McCormick.

### **H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.**

As noted in Chapter 1, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. views contemporary moral society as irresolvably pluralistic.<sup>28</sup> As a result of having no common criteria for “the Good,” ethical debates between groups or communities (communities with differing moral opinions, with no commonly accepted *telos* to human existence and with no commonly acknowledged moral authority,) are continuing cycles of infinite regress. According to Engelhardt, the best that can be hoped for in such a pluralistic society is some form of peaceful co-existence in which each community is allowed to pursue the good as they see fit (so long as it does not interfere with other people exercising their freedom to do the same.) This “libertarian” approach consists largely of procedural norms which serve as guidelines for safeguarding the freedom of each person (or group) to pursue the good as they see fit; Engelhardt refers to these active social ethics as “thin” ethics. However, he does not take the Postmodern path of ethical relativism and instead insists that one can and should want more.

He maintains that there is a “thick” ethics that includes substantive moral norms in addition to the procedural norms that are present in “thin” ethics. This “thick” ethics can only

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<sup>28</sup> See chapter one.

exist within a community of persons who share a common worldview. Within such a community shared values can be discerned by how they contribute to or interfere with what the community regards as fundamental goods. For Engelhardt, rooted as he is in the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the community of Traditional Christianity is such a community.

In this worldview, right and wrong are absolute despite the inability of demonstrating which is which within a pluralistic society. This “thick” Christian ethics is operative in his book *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* and is the object of this section of Chapter Two.

#### The Christian *Telos* and Ultimate Goal of Human Existence

In examining Engelhardt's Christian ethics, it is important to begin by examining his understanding of the *telos* of Christianity. He states that for the community of Traditional Christianity the focus of all of life, including ethics, is the fostering of the God-human relationship. The *telos* of life and all human activity is for this relationship to develop into a fundamental unity and oneness with God. This end is the goal of holiness to which all of life is subordinated and directed. Engelhardt points out,

Because the goal par excellence of human life is holiness, union with God, then the moral life, the keeping of the commandments, the acquisition of virtue, along with the articulation of a Christian bioethics, are not ends in themselves. They are means to carry us to the other side of natural knowledge. They serve to change the person sufficiently to allow the acquisition of knowledge that goes beyond the person to God.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Exton, PA: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), 179-80. One should also note the clear bifurcation and limitation conveyed by Engelhardt in his reference to the need to be carried to “the other side of natural knowledge.”

All of Engelhardt's ethics and writings are pursued within this context. Engelhardt points out that in medicine “the cardinal considerations are transcendent.”<sup>30</sup> In his discussion of health care he states,

Traditional Christianity announces that the goal [of life] is nothing less than salvation through union with God, theosis or deification. In terms of this transcendent goal, all immanent concerns are reordered. After all, once the prize is not simply immortality but union with God, what else could compare in importance?<sup>31</sup>

For Engelhardt this shared *telos* of the Christian community provides what is unavailable in the pluralistic society. “Thick” Christian ethics is possible because all within the community recognize this communion with God as the ultimate goal of human existence. This most fundamental good of the Christian community enables the community to reach agreement regarding the substantive ethical claims by virtue of having a universal criterion for assessing “The Good.” The Christian community recognizes the achievement of this communion as THE moral criterion by which to judge right and wrong.

A bioethics rooted in the Christianity of the first millennium will understand itself within an all-encompassing way of life aimed at union with God. No decision, no matter how trivial, should lack connection with this goal.<sup>32</sup>

This communion with God is not only the goal of human existence but also the means by which to attain that goal. Through our encounter with God we come more fully into the holiness that is unity with God and it is this encounter with God that is the means by which we come to

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<sup>30</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, "Infinite Expectations and Finite Resources: A Roman Catholic Perspective on Setting Limits to Critical Care, or, Can Roman Catholic Moral Theology Offer More Than Secular Morality Provides?" in *Allocating Scarce Medical Resources: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Mark J. Cherry (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 353.

<sup>32</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, xv.

know the truth of reality, of creation, of human nature, and ultimately of how to live a life of holiness. Engelhardt refers to this encounter with God as the noetic experience, and asserts that within the worldview of Traditional Christianity this noetic experience is the cornerstone of all understanding.

Christian epistemology does not ground its moral and theological claims in either sense experience or discursive rational arguments. The claims are in the end grounded in a noetic experience of God. This epistemology is noetically empirical; it is neither mundanely empirical nor rationalistic. It rests on an experience achieved through an ascetic turn away from oneself to God so as to be open to His grace. It is one with the experience of the Church from the first centuries.<sup>33</sup>

This encounter and this communion with God are respectively the means and goal of human existence. In order to fully understand Engelhardt's Christian worldview and its related ethics it is also necessary to consider the beginning of this journey to the transcendent.

#### The *Status Quo* of Human Existence: Our Broken Human Nature

By way of contrast to the ultimate holiness of humanity's *telos*, Engelhardt sees the starting point of the *status quo* much more pessimistically. Engelhardt affirms the fundamental goodness of humanity and creation but regards that goodness as utterly lost as a result of the sin of Adam.

In the glory of original creation there was a natural openness to the experience of God. The nature of the world and of humans in particular led all persons to be in communion with God. To be in accord with human nature was to live a life turned toward and directed to God. In Engelhardt's thought the Fall entails virtually complete corruption with immeasurable effects. With the first sin, that fundamental goodness of an openness to God is lost. After the Fall, nature

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<sup>33</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 236.

is corrupted in such a way that it hinders rather than fosters that divine communion. Instead of an openness to the Divine communion there exists a “deafness to God.”<sup>34</sup> Now, human nature is turned away from holiness. If followed, it leads us out of right relationship with God, away from true unity and into evil. “[T]he world and human nature incline to evil as the result of the Fall, which involves an intimate engagement with Satan.”<sup>35</sup>

Since the ultimate good of human existence is this union with God, then our corrupted nature cannot even discern the good. The human condition is not merely a matter of knowing what is good and being unable to do it, but is instead an inability to even know what is good and what ought to be pursued. Without God’s self-communication of grace we cannot know what is good because we cannot truly understand what it is that will bring us into communion with God. It is only through our noetic encounter with God that we can come to know what will lead us into fuller communion and thus it is only through this same noetic encounter that we become able to discern the good.

In his treatment of the relationship between bioethics and transcendence Engelhardt gives quite a full explanation of his view of human nature. It summarizes much of his understanding of the near total corruption of this nature after the Fall and thus is worth quoting at some length.

In addition, it is natural for man not only to have spatio-temporal, finite knowledge, but also to have noetic knowledge. Man is naturally a being who worships and turns noetically to know God, although the experience of God is beyond his nature. . . . It is not simply that after the Fall man is subject to the passions and weakness of will, and is therefore unable to carry through by himself the resolution to do the good. It is also the case that his intellect, his noetic capacities no longer without struggle allow him discernment of good and evil undistorted by desire. He also no longer possesses spiritual knowledge. The impact of the Fall is not so much on man's will as often supposed in the West, but upon his intellect, his noetic capacity for non-discursive knowledge.

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<sup>34</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 173.

<sup>35</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 337.



Nature as creation is also now broken. In many ways, what is now “natural” is that which is improper for, and turned against, humans. The nature of man himself as well as the physical and biological nature that surrounds him is deaf to human purposes, if not hostile to them. The curse that comes to Adam with the Fall includes the world's malignancy. “Cursed is the ground in thy labors” (Gen 3:18). Nature is natural in defining our taken-for-granted expectations, though it is not the way nature ought to be. Nature's way of being reator. Everything is marked by the results of man's sin. Man no longer has easy noetic access to the meaning of things, nor can he any longer with facility know as did Adam the appropriate names to give to animals (Gen 2:19-20). Nature has become a limit defined in terms of the sensible, finite, and immanent. Nature is noetically opaque. . . . Worse yet, banished from Eden, man no longer has the taken-for-granted possibility of knowing God spiritually, as did Adam.<sup>36</sup>

Further on Engelhardt continues this line of thought as he states,

In a world defined by sin, the broken character of nature is rendered normative. First, nature is no longer unequivocally good. It is now beset by forces deaf to human purposes. From earthquakes to tornadoes and hurricanes, the physical world is the source of natural evil as well as good. The world of living things is defined by a cycle of conflict, violence, and death. Nature is not just the sphere of the corporeal, finite, and immanent. Nature is experienced as hostile to humans. Second, after the Fall, after being inserted into this cycle of desire, lust, reproduction, conflict, violence, killing, and death, which now frames the natural history of all beings, man apart from God accepts this state of affairs as the moral point of reference. Nature then has its meaning constituted normatively through this web of desires, including inclinations to evil. This context of lust, violence, killing, and death becomes man's “natural” home. The natural world of fallen man is not simply corporeal but interpreted within the passions that embed him in the “natural” cycle of desire, violence, and death which constitutes the “natural” environment of all beings in the fallen world. Third, this broken world is approached through a discursive rationality formed by post-Enlightenment expectations that discount the possibility of grace and the personal presence of God. Seen in these terms, nature and the natural lead away from God, not to Him, as they should. Nature has become a sphere transformed by sin.<sup>37</sup>

Engelhardt's understanding of this as the status of human nature is what makes the concept of natural law apart from Christian conviction such an oxymoron in his thinking. Because of the corruption of the Fall, human nature leads away from rather than toward God.

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<sup>36</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 173-74.

<sup>37</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 175.

This corruption is so complete that persons cannot, without Christian transformation, even recognize the corrupted quality of human nature. Those who fail to transform their lives through repentance and faith will be led by that corrupted nature further and further from God. This is why so many people freely choose to live sinful lives. And it is this same inability to discern the good that leaves nothing but a procedural resolution for moral conflicts among persons who operate with different and conflicting corrupted natures for their moral guides. Trusting our corrupted nature to discern the good will only lead us further from communion with God.

Christians, instead of trusting nature, scripture or philosophy to discern the Good, trust entirely the experience of God as the means for knowing the Good.

The issue of a noetic grounding for morality is crucial. Only if truth veridically communicates with us can we break out of the horizon of immanence. If we cannot experience a particular moral vision as canonical, then we are returned to a libertarian moral perspective with permission as the only ground for moral authority, even among moral friends. This default position can only be escaped if we can have noetic knowledge of the truth. If we cannot have such knowledge, then moral claims will beg the question or engage in infinite regress, leaving permission as the only source of moral authority, even among moral friends.<sup>38</sup>

Grace enables this noetic experience. In this process of developing the noetic experience of God, traditional Christians turn for guidance to the community of believers (those who already live a life of communion with God.) In this way theosis is possible and Christians can come to know human nature as it ought to be. This can only be achieved “through faith, asceticism, and prayer.”<sup>39</sup> This noetic encounter with God is the only means by which to know the true human nature as it should be (and as it was prior to the Fall). And it is only this “pure” nature that can accurately serve as some moral guide.

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<sup>38</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 176.

Natural law properly understood compasses the precepts taught us by God through our being and through the world around us, rendering nature a window to God. *To see that law, one must take on the faith that turns us from agnosticism to an encounter with God.* God then allows us through His energies to grow in knowledge of His commandments. Conscience is the knowing with (i.e., *conscire*) that discloses God's law, not by learning, study, or deep analysis, but spontaneously within us, from our nature through faith, asceticism, and prayer. It is natural in giving us a knowledge we would have had clearly, had there not been the Fall.<sup>40</sup>

This turn to trust in God cannot be forced upon anyone. All that the Christian community can do is to live what it knows to be the right life with God and pray for the conversion of sinners. Because of this inability of fallen human nature to even discern the good, we are left with irresolvable ethical pluralism in society. It is for that reason that Christians must allow the sinners to have their freedom to pursue what Christians know to be sin, so that they will allow Christians the freedom to pursue what we know to be good. The *status quo* then has two realms of ethics. The libertarian ethics of society is one which is dominated by the fundamentally broken quality of human nature. The second realm of ethics operates in communities of common ethical belief within which persons freely accept the values and ethical norms of the group. For Engelhardt it is the Christian community and Christian norms which must be accepted by all people who wish to enter into the noetic experience that leads to the ultimate goal of union with God

#### Christian Morality: The Turn from Corruption to Holiness

The harmony of the holiness of creation with the holiness of God is lost in the sin of Adam and now nature, especially human nature, leads away from God. What is necessary if we are to attain our ultimate goal of union with God is a turn away from corruption to holiness. According to Engelhardt all of the Christian life is this journey of repentance from corrupted

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<sup>40</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 176. Emphasis added.

human nature to holy unity with God, and it is this transformation that is necessary to enable proper moral judgments. Without this turn, our broken nature leads into sin which distances us from God which, in turn, further corrupts our ability to make proper moral judgments. This leads us to make even more sinful decisions that lead us further from God thus corrupting our moral capacities even further. It is a vicious cycle.

If one turns to satisfy oneself and not to pursue God, one follows the evil impulses of broken nature; one's sense of morality becomes further distorted and broken. The natural ability to discern good from evil can then be perverted through desire and sin. Once perverted, . . . , one turns further from God and the ability to appropriately to distinguish good from evil until one repents.<sup>41</sup>

In order to escape such a cycle of sin and moral corruption one must repent.

To see clearly, one must in repentance turn from passions to God's grace. Knowledge of the moral law is acquired primarily through a life of repentance and virtue, not one of discursive reflection.<sup>42</sup>

Later in the same chapter Engelhardt again notes the primacy of this conversion and repentance for all aspects of morality.

Moral health and true philosophical success is secured by repentance, moral behavior, and turning to God. . . . This moral epistemology focuses on the relationship between created persons and their personal Creator. The epistemology of a traditional Christian bioethics must take into account whether the knowers have turned to their Creator or turned away from Him towards themselves. Moral knowledge requires humility and is extinguished by pride. Moral deportment and right worship are needed to cure the intellect of passions so that it can have acquaintance with the Truth, Who is God.<sup>43</sup>

This, then, is the essence of the Christian moral life – a journey of conversion, repentance and transformation from the brokenness of sinful human existence to holy unity with God.

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<sup>41</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 171.

<sup>42</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 172.

<sup>43</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 183.

[M]orality is primarily a discipline for turning to God, so as to love Him with one's whole heart, and then to love one's neighbor as oneself. Once morality ceases to be theocentric, it becomes a puzzle as to why David prays in repentance for adultery and murder, "Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil before Thee" (Ps 50:4, LXX).<sup>44</sup>

With this conversion as the central norm of all Christian life all moral evaluations are made in light of whether something (activity, value, practice, characteristic) fosters or inhibits this unity with God. The role of Christian morality is not one of discerning some universal justice and injustice, right and wrong, or even good and evil. Except in so much as these terms are used to refer to whether something brings us closer to God or drives us further away, these terms are meaningless in Christian morality. Engelhardt notes that,

Christian moral theology aims beyond rights, goods, virtues, and justice to holiness. Because the aim is holiness, union with God Who is One, the very notion of moral theology and Christian bioethics as separate fields can be misleading. Holiness is not discursive and separable into special compartments. It is lived.<sup>45</sup>

For Engelhardt all actions and beliefs are supernaturally teleological. He points out that this is particularly true of Christian ethics.

Its answers to questions about right and wrong conduct should not be understood on the model of juridical determinations of guilt or innocence, but rather in terms of aiming people closer to union with God. The crucial point of focus is not on particular rules but on changing oneself so as to turn from oneself to God.<sup>46</sup>

This goal of conversion and spiritual transformation, while individual in its nature as a changed personal relationship with God, can only occur within the Christian community. It is the community of the faithful that establishes the proper noetic context and enables the individual to truly experience God. Particularly through liturgy, the community enables the

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<sup>44</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 210.

<sup>46</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 236.

change in the person so as to come more fully into communion with God. The holy unity is achieved by living a life of spiritual righteousness, within a good Christian community, apprenticed to spiritual leaders, and obedient to ecclesial authorities.

Christian bioethics finds its foundations first and foremost in the task of freeing the heart from passions, of properly directing energies toward holiness, so that one may worthily enter into the Liturgy within which Christians are united with Christ and with each other. This focus on the Liturgy is central not simply because the Christian moral life is lived with others or because Christians are a people who pray not just alone but together. More significantly, if moral knowledge demands a change in the knower because the knower must for salvation's sake come into union with God, and such a change requires not just a moral life but a moral life embedded in right worship, then a culmination in the transformation of the knower will be found in the Liturgy.<sup>47</sup>

As can be seen Engelhardt's ethical approach is one that places primary attention on the spiritual life of the believer rather than on his or her actions in the world. Since all of the Christian life is centered on the noetic experience of God, moral theology is not a consideration separate or apart from any other sort of Christian reflection. It is simply one more angle from which to consider the relationship of God and the person. As a result, much of Engelhardt's work would be considered by many as more pastorally than theologically focused.<sup>48</sup> Engelhardt notes this himself.

A further warning is also due: as the volume turns to address the foundations of a traditional Christian bioethics, the tone of exposition is often homiletical, if not exhortative. The reason lies in the epistemology of a traditional Christian moral theology. A change of heart, repentance, is integral to an epistemology grounded in a worshipful relationship to, indeed, in a union with, God. If canonical moral knowledge cannot be acquired by analysis and discursive argument, but first and originally through an experiential relationship with God, then the method of this epistemology will be unavoidably tied to living as a

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<sup>47</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 188.

<sup>48</sup> In his review of *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, Gilbert Meilaender makes this observation and points out that, "It often seems that ethics is being reduced to pastoral care." Gilbert Meilaender, "A Texian-Constantinopolitan Bioethic," *First Things* 107 (November 2000): 62.

traditional Christian. To know well, one must be open to God. One must pray well and worship well in order to know God well. Providing an account of a traditional Christian bioethics requires laying out this invitation to an experiential relationship. An exploration of a traditional Christian bioethics must be conducted in a genre of exposition necessarily having some of the characteristics of a spiritual manual. The knower must be spiritually prepared in order to know truly. Only by spiritual preparation can one successfully enter traditional Christian moral theological and bioethical reflection. After all, the claim is that moral and metaphysical knowledge is to be acquired from the religious life one lives. Since the moral and metaphysical knowledge at the roots of Christian bioethics is acquired not by discursive reasoning but from noetic knowledge made possible by an appropriate relationship with God, much turns on the spiritual state of the knower.<sup>49</sup>

An overview of Engelhardt's ethics must be seen in the context of his worldview. Immanent creation, originally good but now fundamentally broken as a result of sin, exists in a state of conflict with the complete holiness and transcendence of God. "Nature," as humans now know it, leads one away from rather than toward God. This is particularly true with respect to human nature. There is a gulf between humans as they are and the ultimate goal of human life, union with God, and Christians depend on the noetic experience of God as the means for bridging this gulf. The Christian life is then one of repentance, conversion, and transformation of human persons in their relationship with God. With this worldview as the foundation of his ethics, Engelhardt regards Christian ethics as one aspect of the Christian life of theosis. In his conclusion Engelhardt summarizes his understanding of Christian morality as an aspect of the holistic experience of noetic encounter, conversion, and spiritual union with the transcendent.

This volume has explored the character of a Christian morality that takes seriously its grounding in an enduring experience of the transcendent, personal God. . . . It has tried taking seriously the consequences of grounding morality in our ascetical pursuit of union with the transcendent, personal being of God. This has involved exploring a mystical or, better put, noetic epistemology that secures its truth in an immediate and enduring experience of God's revelation. Because this truth is pursued first and foremost through changing ourselves so that we can experience God, this epistemology is at its roots ascetic and liturgical. It involves

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<sup>49</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 161-62.

a turning from oneself to God and one's fellowman within the liturgical worship of the Church. Moral knowing is dependent on loving and praying rightly. As a consequence, the bioethics offered is in its roots therapeutic. It is about how one should act in order properly to cure one's soul so that one can approach God.<sup>50</sup>

#### A Brief Critique of Engelhardt

There are some difficulties to note regarding Engelhardt's understanding of Christian ethics. His evaluation of post-fall nature, especially human nature, is extremely negative. His implication is that after the Fall this nature is so utterly corrupted that it is impossible to discern even the presence of God in nature until the noetic experience has resulted in faith. "Without this turn of faith, nature cannot even be recognized as creation."<sup>51</sup> Engelhardt asserts that many people, when left to their own free choice, will choose the blatantly wrong. This would seem to present a difficult problem.

As was the case in critiquing Engelhardt's general ethics, if the noetic experience through the acceptance of the faith commitments of the Christian community is the means for recognizing right and wrong (that which fosters or impedes our relationship with God) then how can persons make the correct judgment as to what community of faith should be embraced? If the noetic experience is the grounding for all morality (as well as the goal of human life), then how can one know what is a true and accurate experience of God and which experiences are misleading? Without such a criterion or ability of discernment it would seem that a turn of faith would be a random choice of one faith community and set of faith commitments over the others. Without such an ability to make "right" ethical judgments, it would seem to be impossible to make "right" decisions between competing claims of noetic experience. Even if one were able to

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<sup>50</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 393. Again one can note that Engelhardt's reference to "cure one's soul" is quite reflective of his understanding of the corrupted nature of the human person.

<sup>51</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 165.



narrow it down to Christianity, there is still the difficulty as to what denomination is the right one. Indeed Engelhardt himself paints such a large difference between “Traditional Christianity” and all other forms of Christianity that choosing the faith community of “Traditional Christianity” would be a randomly lucky choice. So too, choosing other Christian communities, which would damage one’s union with God, would also be a randomly unlucky situation. Furthermore, his insistence on the epistemological norm of the noetic experience as a “direct non-discursive fashion”<sup>52</sup> of morality, to the exclusion of sense perception and reason, is problematic in that all truth is then mystical and, more than likely, irrational.

All of this would seem to imply that he overestimates the corruption of human nature as a result of the Fall as well as underestimates the effectiveness of prevenient grace. In order for the human person to make correct judgments about right and wrong it would seem that there must be some inherent ethical ability within the human nature that remains intact (wounded by sin though it may be). This in turn would help to enable individuals to embrace the authentic community of “Traditional Christianity.”

### **Stanley Hauerwas**

As noted in chapter one, ethics for Hauerwas is about who we are called to be rather than being about what we are to do. In particular, Hauerwas identifies three key elements to Christian ethics: Character, Vision and Narrative. The moral character of who we are called to be is the focus of his ethics. Character is a way of being in the world that is dependent on one’s vision – a particular way of seeing the world. In turn, this particular vision is formed by a particular narrative which is itself the product of a particular community. Within Christian ethics it is the

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<sup>52</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 169.

character of Christ that we are called to be, which we do by adopting a Christian vision which is, in turn, achieved by accepting the Christian narrative as conveyed by the Christian community.

Thus Hauerwas rejects any ethical approach that claims universality. Any such claim depends upon access to some ahistorical ground or universal narrative to serve as the foundation for moral convictions and, since all ethical approaches are formed and influenced by the narratives which serve as their context, no such foundation exists.<sup>53</sup> Hauerwas points out that each narrative is structured by and within a particular community.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the world exists as an irreducible pluralism of various narratives fostering differing visions with each developing a certain moral character. There is no meta-narrative; any attempt to argue for one is simply rooted in another differing worldview rooted in a different narrative. It is the story or narrative of the community that forms the communal (and individual) vision which in turn forms the ethical character of the community's members. This focus on the role of narrative insists that each ethical system is firmly rooted in a particular narrative. Lammers notes:

Probably no single feature of Hauerwas's work causes so much surprise as his emphasis upon stories or narratives. His intentions are quite straightforward. Contrary to those theologians who wish to start with doctrines, he insists that the narratives of God told first by the people of Israel and secondly by the church are the point, that doctrinal formulations are only secondary. Christians learn how to tell a story that includes them in God's life. To tell this story they must learn what it means to be creatures. Most important, they must come to understand their existence – indeed, all existence that we know – as a gift. They must learn to receive this gift, because no other response is appropriate. Hauerwas identifies three claims here: first, we are contingent; second, we are historical; and third, we recognize God's story in the life of Israel and the church. That story demands our transformation, and ethics, he proposes, is the study of that transformation.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 62.

<sup>54</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen E. Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas: Theology, Medical Ethics, and the Church," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 62.

Hauerwas' narrative focus is again dominant in his defining Christian Ethics. Hauerwas makes it clear that as a Christian who accepts the story of Jesus the only ethics that he is capable of doing is a Christian ethics. He states that “Christian ethics begins in a community that carries the story of the God who wills us to participate in a kingdom established in and through Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>56</sup> As such, his narrative ethics “must begin with God’s choice of Israel and the life of Jesus.”<sup>57</sup> This in turn means that the associated ethical thoughts will make a claim only on those that accept (and convey) the story of Jesus as a normative narrative.

There is no point outside our history where we can secure a place or anchor our moral convictions. We must begin in the middle, that is, we must begin within a narrative. Christianity offers a narrative about God's relationship to creation that gives us the means to recognize we are God's creatures. Thus it is certainly true that the God we find in the story of Jesus is the same God we find in creation – namely, the God who wills us to share in his life. We have a saving God, and we are saved by being invited to share in the work of the kingdom through the history God has created in Israel and the work of Jesus. Such a history completes our nature as well as our particular history by placing us within an adventure which we claim is nothing less than God's purpose for all of creation.<sup>58</sup>

#### The Christian *Telos* as the Kingdom of God

It is the centrality of the Jesus narrative that leads Hauerwas to his focus on the “Kingdom of God” as the *telos* for all of the Christian community and the goal toward which all of creation is directed. All moral criteria and ethical evaluations of character, vision and narrative are rooted in and based on the degree to which they manifest this kingdom. Therefore the kingdom becomes the moral measuring stick for Hauerwas, and there is a moral hierarchy

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<sup>56</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 62.

based on how truly a person (or community) realizes that kingdom.<sup>59</sup> In this approach Hauerwas recognizes Jesus as the pinnacle of this hierarchy and the ultimate model for living the life of the kingdom. As this model, it is Jesus that is both the moral and theological manifestation of the kingdom, (though Hauerwas points out that the terms “moral” and “theological” are not really fundamental understandings of God and Jesus so much as they are terms that the community of the church has developed to talk about the Jesus story.)

The narrative of Jesus, as conveyed through the community of the church, is the normative narrative that imbues the right vision necessary for all Christians to develop the right character and as such Hauerwas' ethics is not about individual and communal “discovery” of moral truth. Instead it is about imitation. To be a Christian with such an outlook is to recognize the character and life of Jesus as the ultimate manifestation of living the kingdom of God. Thus Hauerwas' ethics is one of hierarchical imitation with Jesus as the ultimate example. Hauerwas acknowledges and embraces this as his approach when he states that,

Accounts of the moral life associated with honor, of course, are hierarchical and elitist. I have no wish to deny either characterization. I have little use for the democratization of our moral existence so characteristic of egalitarianism. Indeed, I regard egalitarianism as the opiate of the masses and the source of the politics of envy and influence so characteristic of our lives.<sup>60</sup>

We are to make Jesus' story our own so that our vision is like his so that, in turn, our character is like his. Good ethics is about imitation in such a way that our character is as close as possible to the character of Jesus so that we, like Christ, live the kingdom of God while being in this world.

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<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting that one of Hauerwas' earliest books, and the one that embodies the longest sustained consideration of his moral methodology, is *The Peaceable Kingdom*, which he concludes by asserting that the “one thing” that Christians and the Church are called to do is to live non-violently (as a member of the peaceable kingdom) in a violent world.

<sup>60</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 8.

Accordingly, the primary message of Jesus is not so much his teachings and the content of his preaching that are to be learned as it is the living of his life that is to be imitated.

[T]he proclamation of the coming kingdom of God, its presence, and its future coming is a claim about how God rules and the establishment of that rule through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the Gospels portray Jesus not only offering the possibility of achieving what were heretofore thought to be impossible ethical ideals. He actually proclaims and embodies a way of life that God has made possible here and now.

Jesus directs our attention to the kingdom, but the early followers rightly recognized that to see what that kingdom entailed they must attend to his life, death, and resurrection, for his life reveals to us how God would be sovereign. Therefore to learn to see the world eschatologically requires that we learn to see the life of Jesus as decisive for the world's status as part of God's kingdom.<sup>61</sup>

With Jesus' life as both the exemplary manifestation of the kingdom of God and the fundamental ethical norm, Hauerwas identifies certain principle guidelines for the Christian life. First, with Jesus as the normative moral example, Christians will be in the world but not of it. Christians will live a life in harmony with the kingdom of God rather than this world. Second, like Jesus, their lives will be lives that are out of sync with this world. When seen through a Christian vision there is a tension between the world as it is and the kingdom of God that should be. This can be seen clearly in the Gospel narratives which illustrate the tension and conflict between Jesus and the evil powers of this world. Furthermore, following this approach also entails approaching evil the way that Jesus did – so that the third and fourth aspects of the Christian life are a life of non-violent opposition to the forces of evil and an ultimate trust in God even when the forces of the world seem to win the battle.

For Hauerwas, it is the way of the cross that is the central element of the Jesus story. The centrality of Jesus' death brings the focus of Christian character on living the same way. If Christians want to be like Jesus they must imitate Jesus in all ways, most especially through what

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<sup>61</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 83.

the Christian community recognizes as the culmination of salvation. Jesus' passion and death demonstrate his being in the world but not of it. It clearly shows the tension and conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world (especially its religious and political leaders.) And for Hauerwas the most important aspect about Jesus' opposition to the evils of this world is the non-violent approach that Jesus takes. In this approach Jesus places a complete and ultimate trust in God and living the kingdom of God even in light of seeming to lose the battle with evil. The resurrection then is not only a verification of Jesus' message of self-sacrifice and love of neighbor but an affirmation of his entire life and character. Thus, Christians are called to mold their character after Jesus and to non-violently resist the evil of this world while placing their ultimate trust in God even in light of "losing" according to this world's evaluation.

Jesus' cross, however, is not merely a general symbol of the moral significance of self-sacrifice. The cross is not the confirmation of the facile assumption that it is better to give than receive. Rather the cross is Jesus' ultimate dispossession through which God has conquered the powers of this world. The cross is not just a symbol of God's kingdom; it is that kingdom come. It is only by God's grace that we are enabled to accept the invitation to be part of that kingdom. Because we have confidence that God has raised this crucified man, we believe that forgiveness and love are alternatives to the coercion the world thinks necessary for existence. Thus, our true nature, our true end, is revealed in the story of this man in whose life, we believe, is to be found the truth.<sup>62</sup>

The *Status Quo* of Human Existence:  
Living a False Narrative

Hauerwas regards the fundamental nature of human existence today as broken. In this manner his approach is somewhat similar to that of Engelhardt.<sup>63</sup> However, like the rest of his

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<sup>62</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Like Engelhardt, Hauerwas maintains that because of the irresolvable nature of differing claims of "The Good," ethical practices today are pragmatic rather than truly being directed to achieving a goodness. "Plato and Aristotle considered rules to be secondary to the virtues, which served to direct us to their true end, the human good. In our own day, however, questions concerning our ultimate end ('*telos*'), or what characterizes 'the good life' have been dismissed because they are not subject to rational argument. Rules in our society, therefore, are

ethics, Hauerwas' evaluation of the contemporary character of humanity rests in the concepts of narrative and vision. As such, the sinful brokenness of humanity is not so much a quality of human nature as it is the predisposition of persons to reject the true narrative.

The true narrative, as conveyed by the community of Christian belief, paints a picture of a world (including human society) broken by sin, with ourselves as the cause. In large part our brokenness is our predisposition to reject this narrative that proclaims us as sinful in favor of a narrative within which we consider ourselves to be good. Accepting a false narrative as our story results in a false vision of the world, and it is this false vision which will lead to living our lives according to the kingdom of this world rather than the kingdom of God. The culmination of this false narrative and false vision is the formation of a character at odds with the kingdom of God. In contrast to this false worldview the Christian narrative offers a different and disturbing vision.

Our lesson is most disconcerting when the narrative asks us to understand ourselves not only as friends of the crucified, but as the crucifiers. We must be trained to see ourselves as sinners, for it is not self-evident. *Indeed, our sin is so fundamental that we must be taught to recognize it; we cannot perceive its radical nature so long as we remain formed by it.* Sin is not some universal tendency of humankind to be inhumane or immoral, though sin may involve inhumanity and immorality. We are not sinful because we participate in some general human condition, but because we deceive ourselves about the nature of reality and so would crucify the very one who calls us to God's kingdom.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, this predisposition to accepting the false narrative of ourselves as still fundamentally good is so strong that it cannot be overcome apart from being taught by those who have already accepted the true narrative. It is only those with true vision rooted in the true

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not derived from some fundamental conception of the human good. They are the basis of morality only insofar as they represent a consensus about what is necessary to ensure societal peace and survival.” Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 20.

<sup>64</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 30-31. Emphasis added.

narrative that are capable of getting us to recognize the false nature of our own narrative and vision.

Of course, we cannot be brought to understanding without training, for we resist at least the part of the narrative which describes us as sinful creatures. We can only know God by having our lives transformed through initiation into the kingdom. Such a transformation requires that we see the world as it is, not as we want it to be that is, as sinful and ourselves as sinners. Thus the story requires transformation as it challenges the presumption of our righteousness and teaches us why we so badly need to be reborn through the baptism offered by this new community.<sup>65</sup>

This focus on the fundamental need for transformation entails an understanding of the *status quo* as fundamentally broken. What is recognized by the true narrative is that despite the original fundamental goodness of creation, “The Fall” of humanity has resulted in a *status quo* of a tension, perhaps even hostility, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Thus, in Hauerwas' approach there is a strong emphasis on the power of sin and the resultant brokenness of the human ability to recognize and embrace the good.

Insofar as we are his creatures his redemption is certainly the fulfillment of the natural. But unfortunately we quickly trivialize this insight by seeking fulfillment without recognizing that in order to know and worship God rightly we must have our desires transformed. They must be transformed – we must be trained to desire rightly – *because, bent by sin, we have little sense of what it is that we should rightly want.*<sup>66</sup>

For Hauerwas this is not a rejection of the original fundamentally good nature of creation or even an assertion of an originally dualistic nature of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. Rather, it is an acceptance of a narrative that while recognizing the fundamental goodness of creation recognizes the fundamentally broken nature of reality *as it is now*. The false vision fails to see the evil brokenness of reality in favor of falsely affirming a

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<sup>65</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 14. Emphasis added.



fundamentally good nature of reality *as it is now*. Accepting the Christian narrative results in the true vision of humanity and reality at large, while accepting the narrative of this world results in self-deception about ourselves and the world as a whole. As Hauerwas states,

Christians must learn that the world, in spite of God's good creation, is also in fundamental rebellion. Such rebellion includes humanity, but is not limited to it. The revolt reaches to every aspect of our existence, since through humanity's sin all of creation has been thrown out of joint. Any suggestion that the world is sinful cannot be limited to "moralistic" claims about our petty crimes. The Christian story trains us to see that in most of our life we act as if this is not God's world and therein lies our fundamental sin. Moreover, when we so act, we find that our actions have far-reaching consequences, since in effect we distort our own and the World's nature. Therefore sin implies not just a claim about human behavior but a claim about the way things are.

That our existence is sinful adds new perspective to the claim that we must be transformed if we are to see the world truthfully. The new vision afforded us in such a transformation includes the appropriation of a truthful language. If we can see, so we can speak. That does not mean that we do not observe things we sometimes do not know how to describe but that our learning to see them and our ability to interpret and share our vision with others depends on having a language appropriate to what we have seen.<sup>67</sup>

While the *telos* of humanity is the kingdom of God, the *status quo* is the kingdom of this world which is in fundamental conflict with the former. All of this world, especially humanity, is in revolt and rebellion. To achieve the goal of the kingdom of God requires rejecting the false narrative of this world and accepting the true Christian narrative so that our character becomes as much as possible like that of Christ and his living of the kingdom of God. For Hauerwas, it is Christian ethics that enables this transformation of character.

#### Christian Ethics: The Change of Narratives

The corrupt nature of the *status quo* requires complete transformation of character and this is where Christian ethics fits in. For Hauerwas, Christian ethics is most fundamentally concerned with *how to be the kingdom of God in this earthly world*. This focus on the kingdom

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<sup>67</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 30.

of God is why Hauerwas' ethics must be communal rather than individual in nature. Its focus on transforming a character is why Christian ethics and the Christian life (spirituality) are the same.<sup>68</sup> This focus on being the kingdom is also why Hauerwas discounts so many other approaches to Christian ethics, particularly those of “moral theology” and “natural law.” Christian ethics is about seeing the world rightly, not about arriving at correct ethical conclusions regarding specific choices as a result of certain theological beliefs. It is this thinking that leads Hauerwas to say,

Christian ethics, therefore, is not first of all concerned with “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.” Its first task is to help us rightly envision the world. Christian ethics is specifically formed by a very definite story with determinative content. . . . In other words, the enterprise of Christian ethics primarily helps us to see. We can only act within the world we can envision, and we can envision the world rightly only as we are trained to see. We do not come to see merely by looking, but must develop disciplined skills through initiation into that community that attempts to live faithful to the story of God. Furthermore, we cannot see the world rightly unless we are changed, for as sinners we do not desire to see truthfully. Therefore Christian ethics must assert that by learning to be faithful disciples, we are more able to see the world as it is, namely God's creation.<sup>69</sup>

Once the *telos* of Christian ethics is recognized to be living as the kingdom of God in this world, Christian ethics inquires as to how this is to be done and trains those in the Christian community to live as the kingdom of God. Those in the Christian community are trained to recognize Jesus as the fullest manifestation of how to be the kingdom of God while living in the

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<sup>68</sup> In this respect too, Hauerwas' ethics of character is quite similar to that of Engelhardt's ethics of holiness, though Hauerwas' approach is more communal in nature due to this focus on the role of communal narrative rather than noetic experience.

<sup>69</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 29-30. Again it is worth noting Hauerwas' emphasis on the change and transformation that is necessary in order to see the world rightly. Several pages later, on page 33, he again emphasizes this transformation and says, “Ethics, as we have said, is not primarily about rules and principles, rather it is about how the self must be transformed to see the world truthfully. For Christians, such seeing develops through schooling in a narrative which teaches us how to use the language of sin not only about others but about ourselves.”

kingdom of this world. Since ethics is about the type of person we are to be in this world, Christ is the ethical norm. We are to be like Christ. Jesus is the type of person we are to be and when we live as Christ lived we are achieving the *telos* of living as the kingdom of God. Hauerwas notes that, “By learning to imitate Jesus, to follow in his way, the early Christians believed they were learning to imitate God, who would have them be heirs of the kingdom.”<sup>70</sup> And this call to imitation is also a call to perfection. As the pinnacle of the moral hierarchy we are called to imitate Jesus fully and completely. Stout remarks, “For the Methodist Hauerwas, Christian ethics is perfectionist.”<sup>71</sup>

The key to our imitation of Jesus is that we must learn what type of person Jesus was. Here one can see the importance of narrative for the Christian ethics of Stanley Hauerwas. The focus of Christian ethics on narrative is not accidental but is key to understanding Christian ethics. The Christian narrative with its faith convictions establishes the vision and the character for the members of the Christian community.

The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stories that constitutes a tradition, which in turn creates and forms - a community. Christian ethics does not begin by emphasizing rules or principles, but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God's dealing with creation. To be sure, it is a complex story with many different subplots and digressions, but it is crucial for us at this point in the book to see that it is not accidentally a narrative.<sup>72</sup>

Only by learning the Jesus story can we learn about the person of Jesus that is to be our moral norm of how to be the kingdom of God in this world. Jesus' life is THE norm for our own character and thus it is here that the Christological focus of this narrative takes on such great

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<sup>70</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 142.

<sup>72</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 25.

importance. The Christian master narrative, that of the crucifixion and “suffering non-violently on the cross in perfect virtue,” establishes a worldview, particularly of the way God deals with the evil of this world.<sup>73</sup> Christian vision, formed by faith in the master narrative, provides a way of seeing things that is unique and different from other worldviews, particularly that of contemporary society. It is this Christian narrative and this Christian vision that form the particular character of the individual Christian and the Christian community as a whole.

As the source of this Jesus narrative the Christian community exercises a crucial role.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, the Christian community that faithfully lives this narrative is living as the eschatological kingdom of God establishing “its own community of discipleship – *in* this world but not *of* it.”<sup>75</sup>

Hauerwas himself says that,

The church is not the kingdom but the foretaste of the kingdom. For it is in the church that the narrative of God is lived in a way that makes the kingdom visible. The church must be the clear manifestation of a people who have learned to be at peace with themselves, one another, the stranger, and of course, most of all, God. There can be no sanctification of individuals without a sanctified people. We need examples and masters, and if we are without either, the church cannot exist as a people who are pledged to be different from the world.<sup>76</sup>

The Christian community lives molded by the Christian narrative and manifests the kingdom of God, “faithful to the mode of life of the peaceable kingdom” in a non-Christian world.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore there will be a significant difference between members of the Christian community

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<sup>73</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 153.

<sup>74</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 33. It is important to note that to really be the “source” of the narrative means that the Christian community must proclaim the Gospel story through lived actions and not just through “stories.”

<sup>75</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 97.

<sup>77</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 106.

striving to live as the kingdom of God and the other people who are members of the kingdom of this world.<sup>78</sup> It is this difference that inevitably results in a certain tension between the Christian community and all others. As Hauerwas puts it, “‘Being a Christian’ is to be incorporated into a community constituted by the stories of God, which, as a consequence, necessarily puts one in tension with the world that does not share those stories.”<sup>79</sup>

Most notable in the tension with the world is the church’s understanding of peace as it relates to the kingdom of God. With Jesus as its example, the church is called to oppose the evil and the powers of this world *nonviolently*. Nonviolence is one of the primary differences that should exist as a result of Christian faith. Indeed, for Hauerwas, it is this dedication to nonviolence that is the litmus test of being the true Christian community. While those outside the church will seek to attain their goals through the use of worldly power and influence, those who are members of the Christian community will seek the *telos* of the kingdom of God while renouncing force and violence. Their commitment to this nonviolence, even in the face of seeming defeat, indicates their true membership in the kingdom of God.

With the goal of the Christian community being that of manifesting the kingdom of God, the Christian ethics is inwardly focused as a process of discovering how to be that kingdom in this world but not of it. The primary consideration of Christian ethics is the nature of the Christian community and how it can most truly imitate the moral example present in its own

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<sup>78</sup> One difficulty that this presents for Hauerwas is that it often results in his defining the ethical narrative of the kingdom of God by beginning with the ethical norms of this world and then emphasizing the aspects of Christian ethics that are different. This leads to neglecting certain common elements that exist between the two and even a certain amount of defining the Christian ethics of the kingdom of God as the opposite of the ethical norms of this world.

<sup>79</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 137.

narrative. For Hauerwas, the role of the church “is to be the church.”<sup>80</sup> The Christian community must manifest the kingdom without concerning itself with studying those outside the community to determine shared ethical points. The Christian community of the church, rather than acting like a sower of seeds concerned with how and where to sow the seeds, must be the good seed. It must live as the kingdom of God and trust that the Spirit of God will enable that Gospel message to take root where it will and lead others into the Christian narrative. The focus of Christian ethics cannot be that of “converting” the kingdom of this world to the heavenly kingdom.

The task of the Christian people is not to seek to control history, but to be faithful to the mode of life of the peaceable kingdom. Such a people can never lose hope in the reality of that kingdom, but they must surely also learn to be patient.<sup>81</sup>

Any “Christian ethics” that is focused on those outside the Christian community, that attempts to aid those who do not share faith in the same Christian narrative to reach the same ethical judgments and “live rightly” and judges its effectiveness on how well the message is understood by those outside the Christian community (how well those outside the Christian community are persuaded to the same ethical judgment), is actually a corruption of Christian ethics. It fails to trust the power of God as the foundation of the kingdom, believing instead that the manifestation of the kingdom of God depends on the church and its use of power (a worldly means that violates nonviolence) to attain that end. As will be seen in the next chapter this has a tremendous impact on the manner in which Hauerwas deals with social ethics and the role of the church in public moral discourse.

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<sup>80</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

<sup>81</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 106.

Christian ethics is then the pursuit of manifesting the kingdom of God by embracing and accepting the Christian narrative, vision and character as the normative narrative, the veritable vision and the consummate character. This is done to the exclusion, or at least subordination of all other narratives, visions, and characters. It is the Christian narrative, as understood through Christian scriptures and the Christian community that forms the right moral vision, and results in the right moral character and associative virtues. Jeffrey Stout's summary of Hauerwas' Christian ethics is worth citing.

[For Hauerwas] The task of Christian ethics should be to say what difference Christian commitments and practices make to ethics. If Christian beliefs do make a difference to ethics, it should not be surprising that people who are brought up outside the church reach ethical conclusions that put them at odds with Christians. The primary way for a Christian to persuade such people, as Hauerwas sees it, is to preach the gospel and to conduct oneself in a way consistent with the gospel, so that people can see what the Christian way of life looks like.<sup>82</sup>

#### A Brief Critique of Hauerwas

Hauerwas' approach to Christian ethics presents a number of positive aspects, most notably its focus on moral character and the importance of the community in the formation of that character. His focus on being ethical rather than doing ethical things, (moral character rather than rules and principles that can be applied to specific issues) leads to a rejection of “quandary ethics.” And this same focus on character leads to the importance of the individual's community and the crucial role that it plays as the source of the narrative in the formation of that character. His approach does well to evaluate an ethical community through an evaluation of the moral character that it forms in comparison with the ultimate moral example, Jesus.

However, there are also several problems with Hauerwas' approach. First, his designation of what constitutes “quandary ethics” is so inclusive and his rejection of those ethics

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<sup>82</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 146.

is so complete that he seems to reject any sort of questioning of the “tradition” (as defined by Hauerwas) of the Christian community. He seems to refuse the possibility of seeing such questioning as an investigative process that contributes to the understanding and development of the Christian narrative. Contrary to his refusal, it seems that such questioning need not be so hostile that it results in only criticism and rejection of the tradition. Indeed, it should be recognized as a crucial step toward responsibly renewing the Christian tradition without total rejection.<sup>83</sup>

His rejection of the possibility of positive critique contributes significantly to the second problem in this approach, namely the absolute dominance of the community. His rejection of liberalism’s endorsement of “rugged individualism” is a well-needed critique of much of contemporary ethics. But again it seems that this rejection becomes too absolute. Simmons addresses this issue and does well to point out that,

The problem is that Hauerwas seems to substitute a type of moral imperialism as a corrective to what he perceives as the evils of individualism. Not only is his tone of writing paternalistic and authoritarian, the very structure of his ethics is rigid and unbending. For Hauerwas, the Christian life is not a pilgrimage of faith in which the believer is challenged to walk responsibly and develop skills of discernment and make decisions consistent with the “mind of Christ” and in the fear of the lord (Phil. 2: 5, 12b). His notion of sanctification has certain affinities to heteronomous ethics – moral action guides are imposed upon the believer by those having “superior” moral insight or authority. The Church, he says, aims not at autonomy but at faithfulness .

In short, the Christian life is one of conformity to norms which are community-based. Being faithful is a matter of conforming to expectations and bending one’s will to the stronger willed, or the masters and saints who serve as our source of moral wisdom and our guides through perplexing circumstances.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 152.

<sup>84</sup> Paul D Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas: A Question of Method," in *Secular Bioethics in Theological Perspective*, ed. E. Shelp (1996), 167.



In such an approach individual conscience, rather than having the role of discerning and pursuing the right and the good, has the role of discerning what the Christian narrative says regarding the decision at hand and then following that ecclesial norm unquestioningly.

This is particularly troublesome in light of the third problem, that of how to define and choose the right narrative community.<sup>85</sup> There are certain criteria that Hauerwas considers to be non-negotiable criteria for defining the true Christian community, such as an absolute commitment to non-violence. The fact that other Christians define “the church” differently using alternative criteria which also seem consistent with the Christian narrative is rejected without sufficient explanation by Hauerwas. He seems to be unwilling to re-examine or question his ecclesiological criteria.

Such an inflexible approach to ecclesiology in combination with his insistence on the necessity of the community for forming morally right character and making morally right judgments makes the issue of choosing the right narrative community particularly problematic. How, apart from blind luck of birth, does one wind up in a particular faith community? How do those outside the Christian community recognize the Christian virtues as right and choose to embrace the Christian narrative? Hauerwas insists on the necessity of being trained by a community of the right narrative in order to overcome our predisposition to refuse to recognize our own sinfulness and recognize instead our need for transformation. This implies that one is not capable of seeing “the world as it is” prior to one’s transformation and one’s initiation into the Christian narrative community.<sup>86</sup> If recognition of the world as it is, particularly recognition of our sinful character, is not possible apart from accepting the Christian narrative, then it would

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<sup>85</sup> Simmons, "The Narrative Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas," 164.

<sup>86</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 29.

seem to be impossible to ascertain the truth of the Christian narrative prior to our acceptance of it. On the other hand, if it is possible to make this epistemological judgment of the Christian narrative as true, then it must be possible to recognize moral truth from a number of different narrative communities, although one could not say “apart” from any narrative community since we always exist in one narrative or another.

This same inconsistency is present in the notion of the church as a prophetic community. Admittedly, Hauerwas sees this prophetic role as an indirect effect of living the life of the church rather than convincing those in secular society. But it is faithfully living the Christian narrative, not persuasive moral arguments, that exercise a prophetic influence. Thus for living according to the Christian narrative to have any sort of prophetic effect, it must be possible for those who do not currently embrace the Christian narrative to recognize moral truth from within whatever non-Christian narrative forms their moral character.

It seems that much of this third problem can be traced to a fourth problem of Hauerwas' approach, namely his ontological evaluation of humanity. While he clearly emphasizes the goodness of original creation, he places a great deal of emphasis on the impact that original sin has on the whole of the human community. Thus Hauerwas' approach to the human person places a strong emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity. His emphasis on the broken character of the human community results in his regarding the world as primarily sinful, rather than regarding it as primarily redeemed – broken AND restored. Redemption requires the recognition of human sinfulness but makes a stronger claim on restoration than on sin as that which permeates all of human nature. This emphasis on the brokenness of human nature is what leads to Hauerwas' insistence on the necessity of being transformed by the Christian narrative in order to see things

rightly. It is this inability that inhibits the ability to choose the right narrative community and contributes to the problem of the prophetic nature of the Christian community.

Again this seems to be backwards. It is not a matter of being transformed before we can see rightly, rather it is a matter of gradually seeing things rightly that leads us to transformation. It is the gradual recognition of God in and through the world and others that leads people to see themselves rightly in relation to God, others and the world.

Finally, Hauerwas' exposition of Jesus' character, and consequently the Christian narrative, is not entirely balanced. For example, Hauerwas' treatment of the character of Jesus focuses nearly entirely on the passion – Jesus' confrontation with the unjust forces of this worldly kingdom even to the point of non-violently accepting his own death. As a result there seems to be an overemphasis on non-violence as the essence of the Christian narrative. Even in his treatment of Jesus' stricter teachings there is an inconsistency. Some teachings, such as those about non-violence, are regarded as absolute and unbending while others, such as those about remarriage after divorce (or the chances of a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,) <sup>87</sup> are considered to be more flexible in nature. Stout points out that if the character of Christ, as transmitted through the Christian narrative, is to be the moral norm, then it ought to reflect a more balanced treatment of his life and teachings than is present in Hauerwas' work.

Hauerwas's theological ethics can succeed on its own terms only if it faithfully espouses the life and teachings of Jesus in their entirety. With the pacifism in his position receiving the emphasis he has always intended it to have, his main challenge will now be to explain more clearly than before why some apparently strict teachings from the New Testament warrant a rigorist emphasis while others do not. . . . It is hard, at this point, to escape the conclusion that his ethics rests on an extremely selective reading of the Bible. <sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 160.

<sup>88</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 159-60.

## Richard A. McCormick

In one sense, as was noted in Chapter One, there is no unique Christian ethics in the moral approach of Richard A. McCormick. The order of reality (that is to say creation), and most especially the human person as the *imago dei*, is fundamentally good and well-ordered and this goodness and order, though marred by sin, remains even after the Fall.<sup>89</sup> McCormick's "natural law" approach to ethics is one that emphasizes the one universal human nature as the moral and ethical norm so that right and wrong are the same for all people. Regardless of religious commitments, human nature, when integrally and adequately considered, is properly understood as an enduring manifestation of the goodness of creation and is a reliable criterion by which all people can make right ethical judgments. The "right" and the "good" are understood as fostering persons to more fully manifest their rightly created human nature and thus, in this regard, are universal.

### The Christian *Telos* of the Fully Human

McCormick's position regarding human nature is rooted in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Universal human nature includes a common moral *telos*, or end. Thomas identifies this end as the *summum bonum* – the transcendent *telos* of eternal beatitude with God. Human existence is ultimately directed to this union with the transcendent good that is God. Crucial to understanding McCormick's ethical approach is the recognition that, like Thomas, McCormick maintains that there is an innate tendency in human nature that is directed toward this unity.

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<sup>89</sup> McCormick's emphasis on the order of Creation as the reliable foundation of ethics is not a rejection of the impact of the Fall and is not done at the expense of the importance of the order of Redemption. Rather, McCormick regards the order of Creation and the order of Redemption in a fundamental harmony as will be seen below when addressing his understanding of Christian ethics. He roots this approach in much of Karl Rahner's systematic theology.

“Prior to acculturation,”<sup>90</sup> there exists in the fundamental nature of the human person the freedom to enter into communion with God. Rooting his approach in the work of Karl Rahner, McCormick points out that “The object, so to speak, of this core of transcendental freedom is God, absolute mystery, infinite horizon.”<sup>91</sup> McCormick sees this “natural” inclination to Divine union as the universal human nature that is present in all people. “Thus the very constitutive core of the human person is a capacity, a freedom to accept or not the divine self-communication we call grace.”<sup>92</sup> It is this approach to human nature that grounds McCormick’s understanding of all ethics as the pursuit of the fully human.

In this respect McCormick, especially in his later work, participates in shifting the focus of ethical dialogue from an act-centered consideration of doing certain things to a more person-centered consideration of being a certain type of person. Thus, the central aspect of morality is seen not so much as a series of isolated acts as it is a process of becoming a person who manifests her or his nature as communion with God. McCormick attributes the centrality of the human person in his own moral methodology to the impact of Louis Janssens’ work.<sup>93</sup> This approach of personalism asserts that to make a moral assessment of any action one must make an inclusive ethical examination of its impact on persons. Does it foster the human good? Does it

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<sup>90</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 166.

<sup>91</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 60.

<sup>92</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 61.

<sup>93</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *The Critical Calling: Moral Dilemmas Since Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 14-15, 267.

foster achieving Divine communion? Will it “promote or undermine human persons ‘integrally and adequately considered’?”<sup>94</sup>

But McCormick, while emphasizing the importance of moral character, continues to insist on the importance of specific moral choices which are manifested in specific actions.<sup>95</sup> These smaller choices are the means by which all persons more fully realize their human nature. He points out that this fundamental choice of becoming a particular type of person in relationship to God is only realized through a multitude of choices regarding specific actions. Our relationship to God is formed by and manifested in our relationships to others. The *summum bonum* of human existence, a unity with God, can only be achieved through our interaction with our neighbor, for it is through our neighbor that we encounter God.<sup>96</sup> As will be seen in the consideration of McCormick’s approach to Christian ethics, it is this understanding of the goal of human existence that results in McCormick’s insistence on charity as the center of morality. At this point, suffice it to observe with Lisa Sowle Cahill that,

McCormick identifies the good “higher” than human life as the capacity for relationships of love. This good is related to religious commitment because love of God is accomplished through love of neighbor.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 267.

<sup>95</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 56-62.

<sup>96</sup> One may also observe that such a focus on relationships of persons can be seen as yet another characteristic of the human person as *imago dei*. Our fundamental nature as *imago dei* of a triune God is only fully realized in a loving relationship with God in and through other people. In achieving this reality of loving relationship we realize our fundamental nature and are, in some sense, incorporated into the Trinity.

<sup>97</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "On Richard McCormick: Reason and Faith in Post-Vatican II Catholic Ethics," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 92.

For McCormick this ultimate good is the measure of all ethical evaluations and so its nature as a relationship of love with God has profound ramifications on the entire moral method. James B. Tubbs notes this when he states that,

McCormick's theory . . . shares with other Thomistic theories a notion of ultimate good (*summum bonum*) that is non-temporal, unlimited, and unquantifiable. This transcendent *telos* is the standard of all lesser goods, thus restricting their quantifiability as well.<sup>98</sup>

### The *Status Quo* of the Human Person

McCormick's approach to the *telos* of human existence, outlined above, is crucial to understanding his approach to the contemporary reality of the human person. The nature of the human person, in a fundamental relationship with God as the highest good, is not lost with the Fall. McCormick sees as intact: 1) a universal human nature, that 2) enables the possibility of "natural law," which is 3) manifested in certain universal tendencies. As noted above, McCormick asserts that even after the Fall the innate human nature that is directed to the *telos* of intimate union with God remains intact. And it is this concrete human nature, directed as it is to this highest good of union with God, that enables all persons, regardless of historical, cultural, or religious context, to recognize the morally right and good.<sup>99</sup> The right and good is that which is

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<sup>98</sup> James B. Tubbs, Jr., *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics: Four Contemporary Approaches* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 45.

<sup>99</sup> In consideration of this human nature a somewhat similar approach is taken by Norbert Rigali, S.J. The term *humanum* is used by Rigali in his work "Christ and Morality," in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 111-20. Rigali points out that the question of whether Christian ethics differs from human ethics presumes an ontological essence of each and then questions if these two essences are identical. He argues that this view is static and rooted in a classicist worldview that focuses too much on acts and not enough on the overall existence and on human life. The focus of morality is only secondarily acts. Instead the focus must be on the entire person in their historical context. In this approach Jesus is the norm for Christian ethics by virtue of his entire existence, not just his teaching or actions. "That Jesus Christ is the law of morality means that his human life is the standard by which every human life is to be measured." p 115 This leads to the question of what criteria or method can lead one to

in accord with our nature as human persons. It is that which fosters the good of the human person, integrally and adequately considered. The truly human is that which enables us to most fully realize this ultimate goal. And while the transcendent nature of this happiness may not be fully recognized from a non-theist perspective, human happiness is still a result of acting in accord with our universal human nature. It is this acting in accord with our human nature that brings us closer to that transcendent *telos*.<sup>100</sup>

It is the presence of this universal human nature that enables McCormick's understanding of metaethical "natural law." The three key aspects to such an approach to ethics (the universality of ethics rooted in the order of nature; the ability of all people to know this order through the experience of creation [especially through human nature]; and the special role of human reason in this process of discovery)<sup>101</sup> all depend upon the existence of a universal human nature that, even in the contemporary (fallen and redeemed) human state, remains in contact with

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belief in Jesus as the definitive revelation of God and thus as the transcendent definitive norm of human life. "A human life can be reasonably believed to transcend history-in-progress as its absolute, definitive norm only if this life is believed to be a revelation of the *humanum* by the absolute God. On the other hand, to believe reasonably (in line with the Catholic tradition that faith is reasonable) that a particular human life is the absolute, definitive norm of the *humanum*, one must be able to perceive in this human life the quality of absoluteness" (p 115). Rigali maintains that the recognition of Jesus as this definitive revelation of the *humanum* depends on the assent of faith enabled by interior grace, but also on the "natural law" that enables one to perceive the absoluteness of Jesus' life. He concludes by noting that this "natural law" that enables the recognition of the *humanum* is not really *natura pura*, but rather concrete human nature (created, fallen, and redeemed) as transformed by the supernatural existential. Thus the ability to recognize the historical reality of Jesus as the definitive revelation of the *humanum* (which leads one to the reasonable assent of faith) is a possibility only in virtue of the graced existence that is universal human nature.

<sup>100</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 55-68. McCormick's refinement of this understanding includes an incorporation of Karl Rahner's identification of the categorical and fundamental freedoms that are constitutive of any concrete action.

<sup>101</sup> For a more detailed consideration of McCormick's understanding of natural law as it pertains to metaethics see the section addressing McCormick in chapter one.



and directed to the fundamental good that is God.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, in such an approach the ability to recognize the good of the human person depends on the ability to recognize what is, and is not, in accord with this universal human nature. It is this human nature that directs us toward the good and away from the evil. It manifests itself as the primary rule of all ethics and morality, “Do Good, Avoid Evil.”

McCormick explains how these rather general tendencies toward good and away from evil can result in functional ethical guidelines by considering the “natural inclinations”<sup>103</sup> of the human person.

We proceed by asking what are the goods or values man can seek, the values that define his human opportunity, his flourishing? We can answer this by examining man's basic tendencies. For it is impossible to act without having an interest in the object, and it is impossible to be attracted by, to have interest in something without some inclination already present. What then are the basic inclinations?

With no pretense at being exhaustive, we could list some of the following as basic inclinations present prior to acculturation: the tendency to preserve life; the tendency to mate and raise children; the tendency to explore and question; the tendency to seek out other men and obtain their approval-friendship; the tendency to establish good relations with unknown higher powers; the tendency to use intelligence in guiding action; the tendency to develop skills and exercise them in play and the fine arts. In these inclinations our intelligence spontaneously and without reflection grasps the possibilities to which they point, and prescribes them. Thus we form naturally and without reflection the basic principles of practical or moral reasoning.

We have not yet arrived at a determination of what concrete actions are morally right or wrong; but we have laid the basis. Since these basic values are equally basic and irreducibly attractive, the morality of our conduct is determined by the adequacy of our openness to these values. For each of these values has its self-evident appeal as a participation in the unconditioned Good we call God. The realization of these values in intersubjective life is the only adequate way to love and attain God.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 212-13.

<sup>103</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 164.

<sup>104</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 165. Here again one can see that to use these basic inclinations as a basis for ethical values can only proceed if there is a confidence in the nature of these inclinations as a manifestation of the good human nature that remains intact rather than as the corrupted tendencies that are the result of the Fall.

Humans are seen to have a sense of certain instinctive values that are, in some manner, “hardwired” into their existence as human persons and are manifested in these “basic tendencies.” In making moral choices, humans analyze how these values can be realized by potential choices and, through moral discernment, they balance the values so as to achieve the good. Morally right and wrong actions are discerned by how the choices foster or inhibit what humans already know, in a sort of instinctual way, to be good or bad for the realization of the goal of being fully human.

The crucial aspect of this process is the balancing of values. It must be acknowledged that in many situations of moral choice these instinctive inclinations and their corresponding basic values can and do come into conflict with one another. Rather than creating an irresolvable loggerhead of conflicting equally important values, McCormick maintains that there is a certain priority to these values which can be discerned. In discussing this “openness” to basic values Tubbs notes that,

[McCormick] holds that we perceive not just ‘values’ in general, but a hierarchy of goods (the *ordo bonorum*), and that moral choice involves preference for some values over others: morally correct actions realize the highest good available in the situation of choice. Our rationally-derived moral norms generally require or prohibit actions insofar as those actions affirm or deny values in the *ordo bonorum*. ‘Exceptions’ to moral norms apply where a value to be realized conflicts with an equal or greater value.<sup>105</sup>

This universal human nature that is foundational to the natural law, manifested in certain basic tendencies and balanced in an *ordo bonorum*, is realized in and through human experience. It should be recognized that the reality that is the context for all human activity impacts how humans experience the universal human nature. In particular, McCormick notes that such an

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<sup>105</sup> Tubbs, *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics*, 21.

acknowledgement must recognize three aspects of the discernment of the human good: that such discernment is culturally conditioned; that it is limited by human finitude; and that it is a process that is subject to the effects of sin. At this point it is of benefit to examine each of these three aspects in turn.

The study of the impact of culture on human experience and understanding has grown significantly in the past several decades. This has led to a recognition of the presumptuous nature of universal truth claims regarding the good, the right and human nature itself. Along with other contemporary theologians, McCormick has recognized how the inherently social nature of the human person affects the totality of her or his experience, including the experience of human nature. Without abandoning the existence of a universal human nature, McCormick has recognized the inherently cultural and limited nature of any articulation of the human good. Specifically in regard to the basic inclinations that are so foundational to his ethical system McCormick notes that,

Even though these inclinations can be identified as prior to acculturation, still they exist as culturally conditioned. We tend toward values as perceived. And the culture in which we live shades our perception of values. . . . Our way of perceiving the basic human values and relating to them is shaped by our whole way of looking at the world.<sup>106</sup>

All of these perspectives are the product of human understanding rooted in a particular cultural context and no single perspective can validly claim to be the sole inherent criterion for moral truth claims.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 166.

<sup>107</sup> These differing contexts affect not only the comprehension of the values but also the application of those values and the moral judgments that are made. While there is a universal human nature to serve as the moral criterion, there are numerous perspectives from which to discern that nature and numerous situations within which this criterion may be used. The potential for differing situations means that while the natural law yields universal moral values it is incapable of providing universally valid specific moral norms. Instead these values help to

Also there is the acknowledgement of human finitude. It must be recognized that, as a result of human finitude, each perspective is a limited comprehension of a universal reality. No single understanding of human nature, and its orientation to the ultimate good that is God, is comprehensive. The transcendent nature of the goal of human existence, God, makes any claim to complete understanding of the human good untenable and presumptuous. As noted in chapter one, such a position is not a position of utter skepticism or of ethical relativism. It is instead an acknowledgment of the limited nature of all human understanding. This has a very significant effect on ethics. It negates the possibility of any material moral norms being absolute. While the criteria of what fosters or impedes the human good may be fixed, the understandings of that good and its associated criteria are not.

Contemporary understanding of the effect of historical context and the finitude of all human knowledge necessitates a certain tentativeness to all claims of knowledge. This is especially true in regards to claims regarding a human nature that seems to be quite malleable and thus quite difficult if not impossible to know completely with absolute certainty.<sup>108</sup> All such understandings are subject to further inquiry, future critique and deepening understanding. As with all acts of human knowing there is an on-going self-critical evaluation of what is believed to be true.

Finally, it is important to recognize that, in addition to cultural conditioning and human finitude, any understanding of the *status quo* of human experience must also acknowledge the

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identify pre-moral goods and evils which must be evaluated in light of the moral agent and the specific moral context in order to make correct moral judgments based on the proportionate balance of pre-moral right and wrong. It is this lack of universally valid moral norms that eliminates the possibility of intrinsically evil acts.

<sup>108</sup> This concept is examined at length in Jean Porter's *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). Also see chapter one.

impact of sin. While McCormick's approach to natural order maintains a fundamental unity between the order of creation and the order of redemption, he also recognizes the fallen nature of humanity. All moral understanding must be recognized as affected by and subject to sin. He points out that "our reasoning processes are 'obscured by the sin of our first parent.'"<sup>109</sup> And he makes specific note of the consequent impact when talking about "two facts of universal human experience" that make spiritual discernment so difficult.

The first is our lack of freedom. St. Paul stated: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do". . . *Simul justus et peccator* is a lapidary description of the human condition. In summary then, the first fact of our condition is a certain lack of freedom, an inconsistency in acting according to our basic option.

The second fact of our human condition is accurately described as lack of truth. We lie to ourselves and to one another. We turn away from the evil (and the good) in ourselves and in our actions. We prefer not to face it. It is uncomfortable, unflattering, unsettling. We are generous to a fault, especially our own. I have developed my own capacity to rationalize and to self-deceive to a remarkable refinement.

These two facts suggest that our lives are composed of both light and darkness. If we fail to perceive and acknowledge this we connive at the growth of darkness. Spiritual discernment is not targeted at the complexity of objective reality (right or wrong), but at our tendency to complicity in moral evil and our deepening and eager cooperation with the graceful presence and invitation of God our Father (goodness and badness). As Thomas Clarke, S.J. has noted, the enemies of such discernment are addictiveness and illusion. Spiritual discernment is the art of dealing with these moral obstacles in our lives. Such moral obstacles do not show up only or primarily in the big classical moral dilemmas that occupy theologians and keep them off the streets . . .

The obstacles I have noted show up in our attitudes, habits and values that have become a part of our make-up and lead to patterns of action and reaction that reveal both light and darkness in our persons and introduce them into our world. Our attitudes, habits and values show up in small ways. . . . These are the little badges of our illusion and addictiveness, our lack of freedom and our lack of truth. They are the vehicles of our attitudes, habits and values. Spiritual discernment is concerned above all with the imperfectly enlightened and liberated decision-maker, with our habits, attitudes and values.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 171.

<sup>110</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 57-58. One should note that McCormick makes reference to "attitudes, habits and values that have become a part of our make-up" and in this way one can see the shift in his later work to a more character-focused ethics.

Thus, the universal human nature and the good toward which it is directed can be discerned from numerous perspectives, though the understanding and comprehension of it is always incomplete due to both human finitude and the effects of sin. For McCormick, the incomplete quality of this understanding serves as motivation for pursuing ethical dialogue across cultures, narratives, religions and communities. This ongoing process of discernment is fostered rather than impeded by the numerous socio-historical contexts and the diverse points of view which serve as mutually beneficial points of critique. Our understanding of creation, and of human nature in particular, is deepened through our dialogue with those of differing perspectives. Human experience rooted in various contexts leads to different types of moral insights which assist in attaining a fuller understanding of the universal human nature.

#### Christian Ethics: A New Insight into the Good

McCormick's assertion of a common ethics founded upon universal human nature has required that he address the issue of what impact, if any, Christian faith has on ethics. McCormick himself notes that such a consideration of faith in ethics must refer to a specific Christian faith and not on some "implicit or nonthematic," belief. "I say this because there is a sense in which even explicit non-believers can be said to encounter the grace of Christ, be touched by it and therefore be living the life of faith even though it remains un-recognized as such."<sup>111</sup> So McCormick must clarify what difference such explicit Christian faith has on ethics so that Christian ethics is distinct in some manner.

In addressing the issue of Christian bioethics, McCormick quite clearly identifies the two extremes that he finds unacceptable for a consideration of the role of faith in Christian ethics.

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<sup>111</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 157.

I want to reject two possible extremes from the outset. The first extreme is that faith gives us concrete answers to the problems of essential ethics.

The second extreme is that faith has no influence whatsoever on bioethics. It would seem strange indeed if what Sittler calls “the invasion of the total personality by the Christ-life” had no repercussions on one's dispositions, imagination, and values.<sup>112</sup>

To examine this, McCormick refers to four types of ethics as set forth by Norbert Rigali, S.J. Rigali makes two distinctions regarding ethics, the first of which is between essential ethics, which refers to those moral norms that are the essence of morality, and existential ethics, which refers to the specific ethical choices made by individuals. A second distinction that Rigali makes is between ethics in general and specifically Christian ethics. As a result of these two distinctions Ragali identifies four types of ethics: essential ethics – moral demands (apart from application of those demands) that apply to all persons; existential ethics – the specific ethical choices that an individual makes in particular life circumstances; essential Christian ethics – moral demands that are made upon a Christian as Christian (apart from application); and existential Christian ethics – which are the ethical decisions that an individual Christian makes in particular circumstances in which demands are placed on him or her as a Christian.<sup>113</sup>

McCormick points out that it is clear that Christian faith impacts existential ethics, essential Christian ethics and existential Christian ethics. In accord with the natural law approach McCormick maintains that the moral demands at the level of essential ethics can be ascertained through the use of reason to reflect on creation. The question that remains is “What difference exists between Christian moral demands and those of reason?” McCormick asserts that there is a material identity between the two.

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<sup>112</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Theology and Bioethics," *Hastings Center Report* 19 (March/April 1989): 7.

<sup>113</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 158.

[T]here is a material identity between Christian moral demands and those perceivable by reason. Whatever is distinct about Christian morality is found essentially in the style of life, the manner of accomplishing the moral tasks common to all men, not in the tasks themselves. Christian morality is, in its concreteness and materiality, human morality. . . . The experience of Jesus is regarded as normative because he is believed to have experienced what it is to be human in the fullest way and at the deepest level. Christian ethics does not and cannot add to human ethical self-understanding as such any material content that is, in principle, strange or foreign to man as he exists and experiences himself.<sup>114</sup>

If there is such a material identity, McCormick is left with the task of showing what impact if any Christian faith has on ethics. William Spohn examines this in his article “Richard A. McCormick: Tradition in Transition” and his description of McCormick’s approach includes a great deal of reference to narration and stories.

What does the gospel contribute to moral life? It provides the foundational story for discernment, nourishes distinctive attitudes, affections, etc., and provides additional warrants to universal human obligations. “Precisely because the resources of Scripture, dogma, and Christian life (the 'storied community') are the fullest available objectifications of the common human experience, the articulation of man's image of his moral good that is possible within historical Christian communities remains privileged in its access to enlarged perspectives on man.”<sup>115</sup>

As such, while McCormick “affirms the ability of reason reflecting on experience to grasp essential moral obligations,”<sup>116</sup> he maintains that for Christians this reflection occurs “within a life perspective shaped by faith.”<sup>117</sup> As Cahill observes,

In recent lectures, essays, and books, McCormick has become increasingly concerned to show what relation his natural law commitments bear to more

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<sup>114</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *How Brave a New World? Dilemmas in Bioethics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 9.

<sup>115</sup> William C. Spohn, "Richard A. McCormick: Tradition in Transition," *Religious Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (January 1987): 41. Quoting from McCormick’s *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition: Tradition in Transition* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

<sup>116</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 102.

<sup>117</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 102.



specifically Christian ones. He asserts that religious commitment shapes one's perspectives, motivation, and process of reasoning in a general way and that it encourages certain insights. "Religious faith stamps one at a profound and not totally recoverable depth," and this "affects one's perspectives, analyses, judgments." One's conclusions, however, will not be *substantively* different from those yielded by objective and reasonable but nonreligious analysis. "Christian emphases do not immediately yield moral norms and rules for decision-making," nor do they conduce to "concrete answers" unique to that tradition. As McCormick puts it in a volume on bioethics "in the Catholic tradition," Christian insights are "confirmatory rather than originating."<sup>118</sup>

Here again, McCormick's consideration of Christian ethics has a strong focus on moral character rather than on specific moral acts or judgments. Indeed, from McCormick's approach the specific ethical judgments, arrived at in accord with the good, will be the same for all people, both Christian and non-Christian.

In this approach Christian faith provides new insight on a common reality. A Christian life shaped by faith throws a new light on the situation in order to clarify the right and the good. It enables a new perspective through which to discern what is, or is not, in accord with human nature. It makes it possible to determine what does, or does not, foster the development of the human person as *imago dei*. In earlier writings critiquing the work of Charles Curran, McCormick addresses this issue and makes it clear that the material content of human ethics is the same while Christian ethics may provide a distinct perspective.

The light of the gospel does not bring something distinct from the human, but helps us to discover what is authentically human. Perhaps this is what Curran means. But I wonder if he has formulated it exactly. He denies a distinctively Christian ethic "in the sense that Christians would possess a knowledge or a power that other non-Christians would not and could not possess." It seems to me that if the light of the gospel can aid in the discovery of truly human solutions to our problems, then those who have the gospel have a source of knowledge which others not exposed to the gospel do not have. Whatever material content this light

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<sup>118</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 85.

of the gospel leads to, it will always be utterly human, not beyond or at variance with the human and the reasonable.<sup>119</sup>

In a more recent articulation of his position on the relationship of faith and ethics, McCormick roots his position in the teachings of Vatican II.

How, then, does faith exercise its influence? I will take my lead from Vatican II. In an interesting sentence, “The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” states: “Faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total location, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.”

The nature of this “new light” is that it reveals human existence in its fullest and most profound dimensions. The effect of this new light is to “direct the mind.” To what? “Solutions which are fully human.” The usage “fully human” I take to mean a rejection of any understanding of “a new meaning to existence” that sees it as foreign to the human, and radically discontinuous with it.<sup>120</sup>

Here again McCormick’s more recent work, especially as it pertains to the impact of Christian faith on ethics, focuses less on specific judgments or decisions and more on the impact that faith has on the character of the moral agent. Again the focus is on human identity, who we are as *imago dei*, and what impact that has on Christian ethics. It is through the belief in the human person as *imago dei* that faith has its impact on Christian ethics. The role of faith in Christian ethics begins with a belief in a good God and as the human person as the image of that God. As he notes below, McCormick sees this basis of identity as the foundation of Christian ethics and moral theology.

[T]here has been, and still is, a tendency to conceive of Christian ethics primarily in terms of norms and principles that may be derived from Jesus’ pronouncements. There are such sayings recorded in the New Testament. But to reduce Christian ethics to such sayings is to trivialize it. When the Christian thinks of Christian ethics (or moral theology--I treat them as identical here), he or she thinks primarily of what Jesus has done to and for us, and therefore of *who we are*. . . .

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<sup>119</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 Through 1980* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1980), 299-300.

<sup>120</sup> McCormick, "Theology and Bioethics," 7.

In and through Jesus we know what the God-relationship is: total self-gift. For that is what God is and we are created in His image. To miss this is, I believe, to leave the realm of Christian ethics.

To see Jesus at the heart of moral theology is to say that charity is its heart and soul. For Jesus is the charity of the Father enfleshed.<sup>121</sup>

In his consideration of how the transformation of moral decision makers occurs, McCormick expresses it in terms of reason informed by faith. It is interesting to observe that in addition to McCormick noting the transformation of character he also points to the saints as the exemplary models of how to live out such a life of reason informed by faith.

“Reason informed by faith” is shorthand for saying that the reasoner (the human person) has been transformed and that this transformation will have a cognitive dimension through its invasion of consciousness. I think it true to say that the more profound the faith, the greater and more explicit will be the Christian consciousness--which is a way of saying that how faith (and theology) affects ethics can be seen best of all in the saints. But even we nonsaints ought to be able to give an intelligible account of theology's influence. That account is destined to be more or less complete because the transformation worked by faith is at a very profound level not totally recoverable in formulating consciousness.<sup>122</sup>

What then is the role of Christian faith convictions in doing ethics? As he points out in *The Critical Calling*, “(1) Religious faith stamps one at a profound and not totally recoverable depth. (2) This stamping affects one’s perspectives, analyses, judgments. (3) Analyses and judgments of such a kind are vitally important in our communal deliberation about morality in general”<sup>123</sup> Like *Gaudium et spes*, McCormick regards religious belief and faith convictions as casting a new light on everything. This light provides a new way of seeing the common ethical reality. It is a unique perspective that directs the moral agent to ethical solutions that are fully

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<sup>121</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 26-27.

<sup>122</sup> McCormick, "Theology and Bioethics," 7-8.

<sup>123</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 193.

human. Faith “reveals human existence in its fullest and most profound dimensions.”<sup>124</sup> Thus in Christian ethics, human reason is not replaced by faith, nor does it operate without faith, but reason is informed by faith. Such transformation and moral discernment of the “Catholic Christian tradition” enables members of the faith to “[make] explicit these inner dynamics so that we can respond better to God’s daily invitations and approaches to us.”<sup>125</sup>

### A Brief Critique of McCormick

The most prevalent critique of McCormick’s Christian ethics is that it is not Christian. As was noted in the critique of McCormick’s work in chapter one, if the content of Christian ethics and the content of human ethics are the same, then what difference, if any, does Christian belief have on morality.<sup>126</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill hints at this critique when she questions, “Can explicitly Christian and biblical moral exhortations be resolved into universal duties without actually being dissolved?”<sup>127</sup>

As has been seen, McCormick roots the universality of ethics in the universality of the human person integrally and adequately considered, though he acknowledges that the understanding of this universal reality is limited by culture, human finitude, and the effects of sin. As a result of this universality “[T]here is a material identity between Christian moral demands and those perceivable by reason.”<sup>128</sup> McCormick points to a material identity between Christian morality and human morality and insists that we believe Jesus’ experience to be

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<sup>124</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 140.

<sup>125</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 58.

<sup>126</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>127</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 102.

<sup>128</sup> McCormick, *How Brave a New World?*, 9.

normative because “he is believed to have experienced what it is to be human in the fullest way and at the deepest level.”<sup>129</sup> Such a mutual identity means that “Christian ethics does not and cannot add to human ethical self-understanding as such any material content that is, in principle, strange or foreign to man as he exists and experiences himself.”<sup>130</sup>

While such an ethical universality provides a common criterion for moral judgments and a common “language” for moral dialogue, it seems to leave open the question of what difference Christian belief has for the discernment of right and wrong. McCormick’s focus on human nature is what grounds his understanding of Christian Ethics as the pursuit of the “fully human.” From his perspective, McCormick would point out that Christian belief in the human person as the *imago dei* (that is not fundamentally corrupted or completely lost through original sin) entails a confidence in this universal human nature as a reliable criterion for moral discernment. It is his understanding of the human person as *imago dei* that has such a profoundly Christian impact on ethics for McCormick. It can be seen that it is his Christian faith in the human person as the image and likeness of a good God, most particularly the person of Christ, that provides McCormick with a foundation for all of the ethics that he does.

If this is the role of Christian faith in ethics then it is difficult to see what role faith has on actually doing ethics. Aside from reassurance that his trust in the fundamental goodness of human nature as the *imago dei* is well founded, some critics say that it is difficult to identify the purpose that Christian faith serves in McCormick’s ethics. In such an approach, Christian faith, while it provides a foundation for McCormick’s convictions regarding the nature of ethics, seems to have no impact on the ethical convictions and judgments regarding moral norms or moral

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<sup>129</sup> McCormick, *How Brave a New World?*, 9.

<sup>130</sup> McCormick, *How Brave a New World?*, 9.

character. While he argues that faith transforms the moral agent at a profound depth, it would also seem that the mutual identity of Christian and human ethics means that there should be no moral difference in ethical judgments or character between an ethically good Christian and an equally ethically good non-Christian both of whom are at the same stage of realizing the *telos* of the fully human.

For those who would grant that McCormick's approach does allow for a distinct Christian ethics there is a second criticism, namely that it reduces Christian ethics to no more than yet another worldview from which to do ethics. Christian ethics becomes one more ethical voice among many. McCormick's approach understands Christian ethics as casting a new light on areas of ethics that are common to all humanity. Because Christian ethics has a unique perspective that is often unfamiliar to other ethical outlooks, Christian ethics can serve an educational role as it interacts with other non-Christian ethical approaches. But, while reliable, Christian ethics does not possess all ethical answers.

Nor, from McCormick's position, is Christian ethics inerrant. He acknowledges the possibility of this Christian ethical perspective being mistaken. And his recognition of the limitations of the human person and the effects of sin carries with it the recognition of the possibility of ethical error even within Christian ethics. Through its participation in ethical dialogue with non-Christian sources, Christian ethics is subject to correction and enlightenment from different non-Christian ethical perspectives. What is unclear is how this prevents Christian ethics from becoming simply one ethical voice among many in the cacophony of contemporary ethics.

Such an approach seems to reduce Christian ethics to simply one more school of thought within ethics, even for Christians themselves who must remain open to the possibility of being

wrong. Like all other schools of thought it has its own ethical structures and presuppositions. It provides those who adhere to it a context for doing ethics, a manner in which to approach ethical questions and a possibility for ethical understanding on their part. But, in the end, Christian ethics is only as good as it is effective in fostering ethical development among its adherents. How well does it foster the realization of the fully human? Different ethical approaches provide other people with differing means to nourish and foster ethical development and thus Christian ethics becomes one method among many. And like all other ethical methods, it is no better or worse than it is effective.<sup>131</sup> What Christian faith contributes to ethics is not any new ethical material, but rather a conviction to Christian ethics being the fullest and best articulation of that common ethical material. Any increased effectiveness of Christian ethics is due to the vast historical and cultural experience that serves as its foundation and context. From the position of this critique while McCormick's approach maintains a distinctive Christian identity, it loses any claim of that approach being inherently or fundamentally unique.

### **Similarities and Differences**

There are quite a number of similarities in the Christian ethics of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick. All three of the authors focus on the notion of becoming a particular type of person as crucial in the concept of morality. Morality is not just about acts of doing, but about the overall process of becoming. And for all three the good and the right are about what bring us into that personhood that puts us in right relationship with God. All three share a fundamental starting point in their understanding of the nature of the human person and the ultimate goal of

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<sup>131</sup> In order to judge effectiveness of the ethical method one must have some concept of the ethical goal toward which ethics is directed. If there is disagreement between methods regarding this goal of what constitutes being fully human, then it is necessary to ascertain what is the right goal to be pursued before being able to judge the relative effectiveness of the differing

human existence. All three begin with the Christian conviction of the human person being created fundamentally good in the image and likeness of God. Similarly all three recognize the ultimate goal of human existence as a fundamental unity and communion with God, though the manner in which each of them articulate that communion differs slightly.

Additionally, for all three ethicists, the ability to make proper ethical judgments, regarding both actions and character, depends on interaction with and experience of God.<sup>132</sup> Engelhardt roots this process in the Christian noetic, almost mystical, experience that results in a deepening theosis of the moral agent. It is the ecclesial community of Traditional Christianity, most notably the saints, that provide an example of and access to this experience and thus enables proper ethical judgments. Hauerwas' approach is more attentive to the social nature of the human person and roots this true experience of God in the Christian narrative. It is this narrative that forms the worldview of the human person and is provided by the communal context of the moral agent. Thus, it is the narrative community of Christianity that enables proper ethical judgments. From McCormick's approach the interaction with and experience of God occurs through human nature as *imago dei*. For McCormick this human nature, while wounded, is not as completely corrupted as Engelhardt and Hauerwas maintain and thus the experience of God in others (Christian and non-Christian alike) enables proper ethical judgments.

For all three ethicists, it is the religious concept of "The Fall" that informs their understanding of the brokenness of human nature. All three recognize the role that Original Sin

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methods. Here one encounters Engelhardt's concept of infinite regress in ethical conflicts between differing communities.

<sup>132</sup> One should also note that as Christians all three authors identify Jesus as a unique and authoritative manifestation of God.



plays in disrupting the relationship between human beings and God as well as the long term negative impact that sin has on the nature of all human persons and human society. However, one of the major differences in their ethical outlooks can be seen in the extent of the impact that each of the three attribute to that fall.

For both Engelhardt and Hauerwas the brokenness of human nature is quite extensive. There is such a profound corruption of human nature that both individual persons and society as a whole are basically oriented away from unity with God. It is this orientation that Christian faith and belief must overcome in order for persons to make right decisions and live good lives.

Engelhardt sees this corruption as so complete that the faith community which recognizes and embraces the ethics of theosis withdraws from society. There seems to be no hope for the Christian community to exert a positive impact on society so as to change society for the better. Because of his metaethical approach of the impossibility of communicating or convincing across differing concepts or understandings of “The Good,” the best that the sectarian Christian community can hope for is to emphasize society’s protection of individual human freedom so that persons of Traditional Christianity are free to live the good life that they know to be truly good.

With Hauerwas too there is a rather sectarian approach. The Christian community is to be in the world but not of it. There is an inability to understand Christian ethics apart from and outside of the narrative of the Christian community. Within the Christian community, faith in Christ and the kingdom of God, particularly the message of peace, is what leads to a fundamental commitment to non-violent living. It is the dependence on and trust in God as the ultimate power of manifesting the kingdom that is emphasized when Hauerwas articulates how a Christian should behave while suffering the effects of an evil and corrupt world. Christians who

make Christ's story their own, must, like Christ, non-violently suffer the evil of the world with a fundamental faith in non-violence as God's means of attaining the kingdom even though worldly evaluation regards such action as a loss. This rests in the conviction that outside the Christian narrative an incorrect and sinful understanding of human nature is operative. Therefore his focus is on change of and redemption from the fallen human social narrative to that of the Christian narrative which is faithful to creation prior to the Fall and includes a fundamental commitment to non-violence. There is however an inconsistency presented by his notion of the prophetic role of the Church. While, for Hauerwas, this prophetic role is a side effect of living life as the Christian community (that is the community cannot see this as its primary or even a part of its primary mission), he still sees this as an effect of the Christian community on non-Christian society. Again the prophetic nature of the Christian community, which depends on the ability of those outside of the Christian narrative to recognize the rightness of Christian belief and practice, seems inconsistent with his conviction of the inability to recognize the right and the good from outside the Christian narrative.

McCormick sees the fundamentally good human nature as wounded by sin but still essentially oriented to a graced communion with God. The human person by her or his very nature as *imago dei* is called to exist in loving communion with God and others. The more the human person's fundamental nature as *imago dei* is realized and functions as the norm of ethics, the fuller the attainment of human well-being will be. The good and the right is realized by acting in accord with well-discerned human nature. Therefore, Christian ethics grants and reaffirms insights into that nature, but these understandings are not exclusively attainable through the Christian community or the Christian narrative. Christian insights are "confirmatory

rather than originating.”<sup>133</sup> Human nature, even apart from Christian conversion, is still oriented the way it was created, namely toward the *telos* of communion with God.<sup>134</sup>

The broken and wounded quality of human nature results in the concept of grace being key to all three ethicists. All emphasize grace as the initiative that is taken by God in order to make this goal of communion with God possible. The difference between the authors is the means that each sees for the communication of this grace, particularly as it relates to Christian belief and the role of the Christian community in ethics. As a result, faith functions quite differently in Christian ethics. This difference is quite significant when addressing the question of how one comes to know “the Right” and “the Good.”

Hauerwas and Engelhardt are similar in many respects. Both rely on Christian faith convictions as the only means for knowing right and wrong. Indeed, one cannot properly recognize right and wrong apart from the acceptance of these Christian faith convictions. A positive aspect of this, in both Engelhardt and Hauerwas, is the recognition of the importance of the Christian community in doing ethics so as to result in significantly different ethical judgments. This difference is more difficult to ascertain in McCormick’s work. In contrast, McCormick asserts that it is the commonality of creation, especially common human nature, which serves as the means of knowing the right and the good. Thus, human beings come to discern right and wrong by virtue of examining reality and how it fosters or impedes human well-being.

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<sup>133</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 59.

<sup>134</sup> It is worth noting that, for McCormick, while the ability to recognize the values and judgments that lead to this *telos* is not lost through sin, the ability to fully realize this *telos* is.

Engelhardt sees the means of this grace as the Christian community (specifically that of Traditional Christianity), while for Hauerwas it is the Christian narrative as conveyed by the Christian community that functions in that capacity. There is a similarity in these approaches that results in a certain “one way” quality to the communication between the community of faith, the source of correct ethical knowledge and values, and those outside that community, that need to recognize and accept the ethical knowledge and values communicated to them by the faith community.

There is, however, a difference between Engelhardt and Hauerwas. Engelhardt is consistent in maintaining the human inability to recognize the good apart from Christian faith convictions. Thus there is a hopeless inability of the Christian community to function in such a manner as to lead society toward the good. The only possibility is to operate for the betterment within the sectarian community of faith and for that community to be open to incomers. (Of course this leaves open the question of what will impact or influence people to make that choice or commitment to enter the community.)

Hauerwas is slightly less consistent. His emphasis on the fundamental mission of the church, “to be the church,” is in harmony with his focus on the goal of making Christ’s narrative our own. However, while he rejects understanding the mission of the church as that of restoring the world, he still insists on maintaining the prophetic nature of the church actualized by living as the peaceable kingdom of God. Hauerwas asserts that living as such a community of the kingdom of God, in the world while not of it, will have a positive prophetic influence on those outside of the community. This implies that there is some source for accurate concepts of “the good” and “the right” available prior to incorporation into the Christian community and acceptance of the Christian narrative.

For McCormick the means of the communication of this grace are more extensive. Christian faith reaffirms the belief in the good God of creation. While the Christian community is recognized as a unique means of grace (perhaps more profound and extensive), McCormick also emphasizes the possibility of other “natural” avenues of this grace. It is this possibility that enables McCormick to see other sources outside the church recognizing “the good” and “the right” prior to embracing the Christian faith. There is a graced quality of nature that is not forfeited by sin and it is this quality that makes possible the knowing of the good apart from faith convictions. For McCormick, Christian faith provides a new light and a unique perspective on a common ethical reality.<sup>135</sup> Thus, Christian faith seeks to confirm what is known of that common reality. His natural law approach differs from both Engelhardt and Hauerwas in that it presumes common criteria for all persons in the making of ethical judgments.<sup>136</sup> Similarly this “natural

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<sup>135</sup> In her chapter on Richard A. McCormick, Cahill compares this aspect of Hauerwas and McCormick and states that,

Hauerwas would insist that to follow Jesus means to live a life that is demonstrably different from that of non-Christians. Nonviolence is the key to the uniqueness of the Christian moral life, but it can also be seen in stances like resistance to a cultural ethos of individualism or domination, support for children and the family, and willingness to care for the handicapped, elderly, or retarded. McCormick, as a representative of the natural law tradition, would not reject these ideals but would qualify them in two ways. First, McCormick maintains that the moral ideals of the Christian are shared by other reasonable people. Second, despite its strong biblical grounding, even the ideal of nonviolence is not an absolute moral norm to which exceptions can never be made. In a just war or in personal self-defense, even the Christian must interpret reasonably where the higher duty lies. Thus even killing might be justified in a conflict. A more biblically based author like Hauerwas would respond that the life of the disciple is a life of witness, however foolish the Christian stance of self-sacrifice for others might appear to outsiders. From this perspective, McCormick could be accused of not permitting Christian faith to transform “natural” morality extensively enough. Cahill, “On Richard McCormick,” 86-87.

<sup>136</sup> By way of contrast to an approach like McCormick’s, Engelhardt sees Christian faith as an essential pre-requisite to any sort of natural law. Nature is so corrupted that it must first be renewed by faith before it can be trusted. He specifically addresses this matter in his book, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*.

When the heart turns toward God, the boundary between natural revelation and supernatural disclosure gives way before the presence of the Creator. To consider natural

law” is what enables non-ecclesial ethical sources to serve as a valid means of critique of the Christian church which can, in turn, lead to a better understanding of the right and the good within that community. Ethical dialogue serves to enlighten and teach both the Christian community and non-Christian society.

What makes the ethics of all three ethicists Christian is the manner in which their ethical worldviews are shaped and formed by their Christian faith. All three maintain a Christian worldview that insists on the importance of the kingdom of God as revealed by Christ for making judgments regarding the good or the right. Engelhardt and Hauerwas are quite similar in addressing this aspect. For both, redemption is emphasized as the means by which the kingdom of God is manifested. From this approach the kingdom of God is emphasized as a radically different reality, the attainment of which can only come about as a result of profound healing and change. Such an approach entails a prior emphasis on the brokenness of the *status quo* due to sin. For both, redemption is a matter of a fundamental turning away from a radically corrupted contemporary world and toward the kingdom of God. It is this worldview that leads them to a

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revelation as simply natural is to assume that God will not respond personally to those who turn to Him. It is to act without taking account of God as personal. When one turns to nature and sees God's presence, one begins to go beyond nature. When God turns back to His creatures through nature, more is said than mere nature can reveal and provide as content for a bioethics.

Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 166.

Second, exaggerated expectations regarding natural theology can also lead to exaggerated expectations (indeed, pride) regarding moral philosophy by suggesting that the nature of the moral life and the content of a Christian bioethics can be secured through discursive arguments, rather than from turning to God.

Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 167.

To perceive the natural law, one must turn to God. . . . To have moral knowledge, one must act with worshipful propriety. Moral action, faith, and knowledge are intimately interwoven so that a Christian bioethics requires for its mastery more than intellectual engagement or even clinical practice. It requires faith.

Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 168.

view of Christian ethics as being in fundamental disharmony (or even conflict) with any sort of non-Christian ethics. Moreover, for both, it is only Christian faith that can serve as the means to recognize and pursue what is truly right and good.

By way of contrast, McCormick's approach to ethics is Christian not because he sees Christian faith redeeming an otherwise common and corrupted human ethics, but because his worldview has as its foundation a Christian faith. In particular his Christian worldview is one that emphasizes the continuity between the goodness of creation and the world as it exists. For McCormick the kingdom of God is seen as a continuation and fulfillment of the original creation and its goal of human *telos* is possible despite sin. Thus his Christian worldview of contemporary reality, and its continuity with the original goodness of creation, results in a "faith" in the goodness of human nature as *imago dei* of a good God. It results in a faith in the goodness of human reason, in the goodness of the human ability to discern right and wrong apart from a specific belief in Jesus as God, and in the ability to choose it. Irregardless of specific Christian faith convictions it is possible to make right ethical judgments based on an understanding of what is and is not in accord with human nature – natural law. It must be acknowledged that McCormick's very act of belief in the reality of a fundamentally good universal human nature is, really, a proclamation of Christian faith. It is a product of the belief in the fundamental goodness of all creation, especially the goodness of the human person. It is a product of the belief that human nature, though wounded by sin, remains the discernible *imago dei*.

As we have seen in this chapter, it is the worldview that results from the faith convictions of each ethicist that structures and molds his understanding of what constitutes Christian ethics and how ethics function within the Christian community. In the next chapter we will examine

how these same faith-formed worldviews structure and mold the ethicists' understandings of how the Christian ethical convictions examined here operate within the larger public society.



## CHAPTER THREE

### PUBLIC THEOLOGY: THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH IN PUBLIC MORAL DISCOURSE

The inherently social nature of human beings means that all ethical judgments regarding right and wrong and the good of the human person have social implications. This is no less true of ethical judgments of a religious or theological nature than of any others. However, within contemporary society, particularly contemporary American society, there are many questions regarding how this integration is to be realized. One thing that must be considered is how one's understanding of the role of faith in reaching ethical judgments impacts one's understanding of how those faith-informed ethical judgments function in a society of diverse faith commitments.

Having examined, in chapter 2, each author's understanding of Christian ethics, this chapter will examine the role of these faith formed ethics within the larger context of contemporary American society. Thus, this chapter will begin with a brief examination of American society that will draw on Jeffrey Stout's work *Democracy and Tradition*.<sup>1</sup> In particular it will draw on his distinction between secularization and secularism and will use his understanding of American society as a society which, while secularized, does not embrace secularism. The second section of this chapter, in its consideration of "public theology," will consider the questions that must be addressed when considering the role of Christian ethics in a religiously pluralistic secularized society. The subsequent section will examine the answers given by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., and the manner in which his understanding of Christian ethics impacts his understanding of how those ethics ought to function within the public arena. Sections four and five will make the same examination of the works of Stanley Hauerwas and

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Richard A. McCormick, S.J. The final section of this chapter will compare a number of similarities and differences between the approaches of the three authors.

The primary question addressed by this chapter is “What, according to each of the ethicists under consideration, is the proper role of the Christian and the Christian community in the ethical arena of a religiously pluralistic society?” This chapter will show that, while the difference in their normative approaches has a significant impact on their ethics, it is each author’s approach to metaethics that has a more profound impact on the manner in which each sees faith functioning in “Christian” ethics as well as on how those “Christian” ethics function within the religiously pluralistic society of contemporary America. Specifically, it will show that the theologians’ positions regarding “public theology” are grounded in their understanding of the role of faith in Christian ethics.

### **Contemporary American Society**

In order to examine the role of Christian ethics in society it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of the society in question. In his book *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeffery Stout provides a good overview of some of the key aspects of contemporary American society. In order to identify the character of the country, as well as significant recent changes, his introduction provides a thorough consideration of contemporary American society and America’s self-understanding as a democracy. Stout writes this book to counter the claim “that the moral and spiritual core of our society is empty.”<sup>2</sup> He points out that such claims are often rooted in a worldview of “New Traditionalism” that sees modern democracy as having abandoned the fundamental traditions that form the foundation of American society.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 2.

This worldview of “New Traditionalism” sees contemporary liberal society as having exerted such an insistence on **nation-state neutrality** in its equal treatment of all citizens, that the result is a society of **value-neutrality** where there is no unifying concept of “the Right” or “the Good.”<sup>4</sup> “New Traditionalism” would argue that such an approach of value-neutrality will inevitably lead to ethical relativism and that the only solution to such a social pitfall is to recover fundamental traditions, religious in nature, which will provide the necessary framework for a coherent understanding of “the Right” and “the Good.” In this worldview, an ethically coherent society depends on a tradition that accepts certain values and certain understandings of “the Right” and “the Good” as axiomatic. When the voices of tradition, and specifically religious tradition, are excluded from social discussion and debate one is left with a “naked public square.”

In contrast to this position Stout argues that the “public square” is not “naked,” though it has undergone, and is undergoing, a significant amount of change. The ongoing change is the inclusion of more and more people of different backgrounds and worldviews. The need for American society to include people with a growing diversity of values may appear to some as

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<sup>4</sup> One of the key aspects that “New Traditionalism” sees as problematic is an overemphasis on the role of a “universal reason” in making ethical decisions. Often John Rawls is cited as an example. By way of contrast, such traditionalists insist that there is no such universal reason and that the only way to make ethical decisions is from within the framework of some tradition with its own set of values. Such values are axiomatic within the tradition and thus a degree of faith is necessary for good ethical decisions but not clear and certain to “universal reason.” This approach ends up putting a rationalistic value-neutral modern society of ethical relativism in tension with the need to reclaim tradition. It is argued that a re-appropriation of faith based tradition (seen by many as unreasonable) is what is necessary to reclaim a society of shared values and firm ethical commitment. Such an approach results in a sort of irreconcilable tension between faith and reason as well as a view of the faith community as existing in a state of irreconcilable conflict with contemporary society. It will be seen later in the chapter that this is quite similar to the approach taken by both Engelhardt and Hauerwas.

value-neutrality, but Stout argues that this is not the case. In his book Stout advances the concept of democracy as a tradition in itself with certain qualities, characteristics and values.

Democracy, I shall argue, *is* a tradition. It inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes toward deference and authority in political discussion, and love for certain goods and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond to certain types of actions, events, or persons with admiration, pity, or horror. This tradition is anything but empty. Its ethical substance, however, is more a matter of enduring attitudes, concerns, dispositions, and patterns of conduct than it is a matter of agreement on a conception of justice in Rawls's sense. The notion of state neutrality and the reason-tradition dichotomy should not be seen as its defining marks. Rawlsian liberalism should not be seen as its official mouthpiece.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of value-neutrality, Stout sees the United States as “committed to substantive values.”<sup>6</sup> As an example of one place in which such values are most clearly expressed he cites *The Preamble of the United States Constitution*, in which are expressed the desires to “establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.”<sup>7</sup> To acknowledge, without a systematic justification by use of ethical and moral reasoning, the values expressed in this Preamble as certain primary goals toward which the government of the United States is directed, is to understand those values as inherently good. Moreover, the emphasis on the democratic process as the means for pursuing such social goals is not simply a pragmatic resignation to a functional procedure for government.

Stout points out that while the “conception of the civic nation is pragmatic in the sense that it focuses on *activities* held in common as constitutive of the political community,” they are

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<sup>5</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 3. It is of interest to note that in the course of public education one thing that is required of the students in many school systems (usually sometime between 4th and 6th grade) is the memorization of the Preamble.

activities that should not “be understood in merely procedural terms.”<sup>8</sup> The “rules” of the public debate of issues, and the public activities themselves, are more than just a context for ethical debate of values, “they are activities in which normative commitments are embedded as well as discussed.”<sup>9</sup> The value of individual freedom and commitment to social dialogue are what underlie the evaluation of the democratic process as the ethically right approach to government.

Additionally, there is a substantive nature to the issues under discussion within this democratic process which results in a type of cyclical relationship. The implicit values and commitments that serve as principles and guidelines for structuring the social order as a democratic process are values and commitments subject to influence and change as a result of the democratic discussion of various other issues. While the political character and commitments of the society influence the social decisions and actions, it is also true that the social decisions and actions influence the political character and commitments of the society. There is a reciprocity to the relationship. It is democracy, with its emphasis on public discourse of these commitments, “that would allow such commitments to be held self-consciously and self-critically.”<sup>10</sup>

This social emphasis on public debate, mutual accountability and holding one another responsible, says Stout, is one way in which it is clear that American society is not value-neutral. American society inculcates “a tradition of democratic reasoning, dispositions, and attitudes that

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<sup>8</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 8.

people have in common.”<sup>11</sup> But it should be made clear that this tradition is not a tradition aimed at mutual convergence, agreement, or conclusions on issues of disagreement.

Particularly, in regard to religious commitments, one should see that the goal of social dialogue is not to convert those of differing religious commitments into a different set of beliefs. Stout acknowledges that this “sometimes leads to discursive impasse in political debate,” but insists that “religion is not essentially a conversation-stopper, as secular liberals often assume.”<sup>12</sup> Instead, Stout insists that conversation, in which respective parties “try to make sense of each other’s perspectives, and expose their own commitments to the possibility of criticism,” is the means to “work around the impasses when they arise.”<sup>13</sup> Such an approach does not endorse the *exclusion* of religious beliefs and commitments from the public conversation (an outright attempt to institute secularism), but instead emphasizes that the “entitlement of individuals to accept religious assumptions”<sup>14</sup> fosters contributions to the dialogue. He points out that “Part of the democratic program is to involve strangers and enemies, . . . in the verbal process of holding one another responsible.”<sup>15</sup>

To understand Stout’s approach to the role of religion in the public arena (and especially his critique of “New Traditionalism”), one must recognize the distinction that he makes between “secularism” and “secularization.” The approach of “New Traditionalism” bemoans the *status quo* of the United States of America as having abandoned the country’s firm foundations which

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<sup>11</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 13.

were, in fact, Christian. Freedom of religion has become freedom from religion. This “New Traditionalist” approach sees this abandonment as the result of a conscious effort to exclude all religious convictions from any role in public dialogue. From this perspective, today’s American society is “secular” precisely because of its commitment to the limitation on and the elimination of the role of religious beliefs in the public arena. American society can be called “secular” precisely to the extent that it succeeds in excluding religions and religious beliefs from the public square. It is this sense of “secular” that Stout labels “secularism.” Stout acknowledges that there are members of contemporary American society that fully embrace secularism, but he insists that “secularism” is not a fundamental part of what it means to be a secular society. Instead, Stout insists that the “secularization” of American society is the result of not sharing the same presuppositions about God, religion and the world. This “secularization” is not a goal toward which America is directed, but is the result of an increase in religious diversity. Because of this diversity, individuals share fewer and fewer religious presuppositions or fundamental beliefs with others in the society. Less and less can be “taken for granted when exchanging reasons in public settings.”<sup>16</sup> America is “secular” in this sense not due to a commitment to eliminate religion, but rather because there are fewer matters, especially regarding religion, that can be assumed to be matters of common presupposition. As Stout states,

What makes a form of discourse secularized, according to my account, is not the tendency of the people participating in it to relinquish their religious beliefs or to refrain from employing them as reasons. The mark of secularization, as I use the term, is rather the fact that participants in a given discursive practice are not in a position to take for granted that their interlocutors are making the same religious assumptions they are. This is the sense in which public discourse in modern democracies tends to be secularized. Notice that secularization in this sense does

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<sup>16</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 97.

not reflect a commitment to secularism, secular liberalism, or any other ideology.<sup>17</sup>

In addressing the lack of shared presuppositions, Stout points out that it is common to talk about a lack of such “justified” presuppositions, and states that they can be considered “justified” in two different senses. In the first sense it is *the person* who holds a presupposition that is “justified” and the word is used to indicate entitlement. In this sense, *the person* is justified if they are entitled to hold the presupposition that they do. In the second sense it is *the claim* of the presupposition itself that can be considered “justified.” This occurs in the dialogue “if everyone in that context is justified in believing it (either because they have no relevant reasons for doubting it or because it has already been successfully defended against all relevant reasons for doubting it.)”<sup>18</sup> In this sense the word “justified” is used to indicate that the claim under consideration has some degree of default authority.

Ethical discourse in religiously plural modern democracies is secularized, according to my account, only in the sense that it does not take for granted a set of agreed-upon assumptions about the nature and existence of God. This claim pertains to presuppositions in the second sense. It means that no one can take for granted, when addressing a religiously plural audience, that religious commitments have default authority in this context. It does not entail any limitation on what an individual can presuppose in the first sense. To the contrary, the discursive practice in question is secularized, according to my theory, precisely because many of the individuals participating in it do have religious commitments that function as presuppositions in some of their own deliberations and pronouncements. It is because these commitments vary from one citizen to another that they cannot qualify as presuppositions in the second sense. But this leaves open the possibility that citizens who hold one or another set of religious commitments could be rationally entitled to those commitments.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 97.

<sup>18</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 99.

<sup>19</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 99.



It is this nation-state neutrality that ensures that religious beliefs are not “justified” in the sense of possessing any default authority, thus protecting a diversity of religious (and atheistic) beliefs and thereby protecting the people who are committed to those beliefs. As a result, religiously based voices will be “justified,” in the first sense, to express ethical commitments that are rooted in religious beliefs and commitments which can not be assumed as presuppositions with all interlocutors.

However, religion’s lack of default authority in the process of social interaction should not be understood as a commitment to secularism, “because a religiously plural democratic culture no more shares atheistic commitments than it shares theological ones.”<sup>20</sup> The lack of authoritative role for religious belief in the functioning of the state is not a foundation for the exclusion of religious belief from all of public society. Religion *is* “justified” in the sense of the entitlement of individuals to hold such beliefs. The commitment to nation-state neutrality has as its goal the inclusion of a diversity of religious worldviews into the social dialogue, with the expectation that the inclusion of that diversity fosters the achievement of basic values intrinsic to the society. This goal is achieved by the inclusion of religiously based voices in the public dialogue regarding “the Right” and “the Good” that ought to be pursued by society. It is this sort of public religious dialogue that can be referred to as “public theology.”

### **“Public Theology”**

With an increasing number of references to “public theology,” it is important to clarify the term. The understanding of “public theology” adopted by this chapter is rather inclusive in that it refers to the way in which faith, religious belief and religious reasoning function within a

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<sup>20</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 112.

public forum.<sup>21</sup> The topic recognizes that many people regard any ethical judgment rooted in or informed by a religious belief or faith conviction as anathema to public dialogue in American society. The American commitment to freedom of religion has come to be seen, by many people, as the exclusion of any religiously informed opinion from the public dialogue on any topic. In considering the role of faith-based ethical judgments in the public dialogue two options exist. One option is to exclude any religious language and faith-based ethical judgment from the public ethical dialogue. The other option is to find some manner to allow such religious language to function in the pluralistic society despite the diversity of religious convictions.

The first option of exclusion, similar to the approach taken by John Rawls,<sup>22</sup> attempts to minimize the “language” used to discuss ethical issues to only that “language” which is universally accepted by reasonable persons. This commitment to the elimination of or limitation on religious beliefs in the public arena (referred to by Jeffrey Stout as “secularism”), can be recognized in many contemporary approaches regarding the extreme separation of church and state.

This first option of exclusion seems to present some difficulties. To begin with, the criterion of universal recognition by all reasonable people is too strict a limitation on ethical

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<sup>21</sup> A good examination of the numerous ways in which the term “public theology” is used may be found in E. Harold Breitenberg, Jr., “To Tell the Truth: Will the Real Public Theology Please Stand Up?” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23, no. 2 (2003): 55-96.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Stout gives an excellent examination and critique of Rawls’ methodology as it relates to public ethical dialogue. Rawls’ concept of the veil of ignorance, the original position and social contracts is based on justice and on a particular understanding of the normative nature of public reason. He defines as reasonable that to which all reasonable persons can reasonably agree. It would exclude from public dialogue anything which reasonable people could reasonably reject. It thus excludes any religious premises from the public forum, since reasonable people often disagree about both these premises as well as their underlying religious beliefs. For an analysis of the concept of reason as a “weak” or “strong” ethical norm see Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 65-77.

claims advanced within public dialogue. Indeed, Rawls' own convictions regarding the normative nature of his ethical system would fail to pass this criterion, since it is something that some reasonable people reasonably reject. Moreover, all "ethical systems" that advocate some understanding of "the Right" and "the Good" ultimately rest on some set of beliefs. For example, America's recognition of and commitment to freedom, individuality, and rationality (with the understanding that they are better than their alternatives), ultimately rests on a belief in their inherent value. These beliefs about human beings, human nature, and the world are ultimately acts of faith.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to overly strict requirements of reasonability, and a failure to recognize *all* convictions regarding "the Right" and "the Good" as acts of faith, such an approach minimizes ethical language and impoverishes the tools available to the participants in "public" ethical discussion. Particularly with regard to the United States, such elimination would seem to be contrary to the intent of both the freedom of religion and the freedom of speech which are endorsed by our society as a means of discerning right social policy.<sup>24</sup>

The second option, to allow religious language to function in the pluralistic society despite the diversity of religious convictions, is the approach advocated by Stout. This would

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<sup>23</sup> It is this recognition that is made by ethical relativism. The diversity of ethical worldviews, none with a clear claim to universal validity, excludes any from being authoritative. In its recognition that all ethical commitments rest on acts of faith, such ethical relativism regards none as having any more or less claim to being the normative criteria for ethical judgments in a society of various ethical commitments and worldviews. However, if none of these sets of belief (including that of secularism) can be normative for all of society, there can be no reason to prejudicially exclude ethical language rooted in religious belief. As will be seen later in the paper it is this approach to American society that is accepted by Engelhardt.

<sup>24</sup> Stout also points out that such an approach of exclusion would condemn many public interactions which we as an American society hold in high esteem, for example much of the public interaction of the Abolitionists, the works of Martin Luther King, Jr., and, in particular, he notes Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 69.

allow participation by all with the recognition that ethical judgments rooted in any unshared ethical authority would not function as normative claims for other people. Rather than secularism, with its commitment to exclusion, this option recognizes the *de facto* secularized nature of contemporary American society as a religiously pluralistic society. Fewer and fewer presuppositions or fundamental beliefs regarding ethical worldviews (that is to say our understanding of the world and the human person as they relate to “the Right” and “the Good”), can be taken as a presumed common starting point in an ethical dialogue. There are fewer shared ethical axioms and norms. Thus, ethical discussion in a secularized society consists not only of shared ethical norms, but also of the interaction of unshared ethical norms.

Some, such as Richard Rorty, while not arguing for the exclusion of faith-based ethical language, argue that faith-based ethical claims bring an ongoing ethical dialogue to a dead-end and are thus counter productive to the advancement of ethical dialogue.<sup>25</sup> Others, such as Stout, acknowledge the secularization of contemporary society, but regard the introduction of unshared ethical claims, including those of a religious nature, into the public dialogue as not only unavoidable but as a positive contribution to the ethical dialogue. Such an approach asserts that it is one thing to recognize the non-normative nature of faith-based ethical claims within a secularized society, and it is quite another to exclude these non-normative faith-based ethical judgments from public dialogue. Such an expression of faith-based ethical judgments in the public forum is understood by many as “public theology.”

Stout himself examines the term “public theology” and states that

The recent debate over “public theology” is beset by confusion over what this phrase means. There is clearly little hope for public theology if this means the attempt to bring into expressive equilibrium the theological commitments all

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Rorty, “Religion as a Conversation-stopper,” in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 168-74.

members of our society share, for there are no such shared commitments. A theologian can give up this ambition as unrealistic, however, without giving up the hope of addressing a public audience—an audience that includes citizens who are outside the church.<sup>26</sup>

Instead, Stout indicates that one is doing theology publicly whenever one expresses “theological commitments in a reflective and sustained way, while addressing fellow citizens as citizens.”<sup>27</sup> In any society it is people’s ethical convictions that serve as the bases for judgments regarding social well-being and the goals toward which society ought to direct its efforts. And it is the nature of ethical participation in a democratic society to act publicly in such a way as to direct or influence other members of society in such a way as to achieve those goals. This is equally true of individuals’ ethical convictions that are formed or informed by religious commitments. Such religiously rooted ethical convictions are as entitled to the participation in such social dialogue as the ethical convictions rooted in any other non-universal set of commitments. When people communicate their religiously rooted convictions to other members of the society with an acknowledgement of those persons’ responsibility for the common good, one is engaged in “public theology.”

Therefore, any examination of religious ethics in such a secularized society requires that four questions be addressed. One must begin (as was done in chapter two of this dissertation) by addressing how faith convictions function within the system of religious ethics. Subsequently, one must address the fundamental question of “What is the role of religiously rooted ethical convictions within a community that does not share the same faith commitments?”<sup>28</sup> Third, one

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<sup>26</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 112-13.

<sup>27</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Or put another way, “What impact ought faith convictions about the good, the right, and the human person, have on ethics done within a religiously pluralistic society?”

must ascertain the goal of participation for both the religious community and the society as a whole. Finally, one should identify the response taken by religious ethics in the face of “irreconcilable” ethical differences. The remainder of this chapter will examine the answers to each of these later three questions as proposed by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Stanley Hauerwas, and Richard A. McCormick .

### **H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.**

For Engelhardt, as seen in chapter two of this dissertation, the faith convictions of “traditional Christianity” function as the sole norm for the true Christian community. These Christian faith convictions set the God-human relationship as the goal and norm of all of human existence. The focus of all of life, including ethics, is the *noetic* experience—the human relationship with the radically transcendent God. Ethics and morality are really about how to achieve this relationship. It is the role of ethics, through its operation in the tight community of “traditional Christianity,” to foster and develop this relationship. This *noetic* experience, as guided by the traditional Christian community, is the axiomatic foundation of Christian ethics. The right God-human relationship is achieved by living a life of spiritual righteousness, within a good Christian community, apprenticed to spiritual leaders, and obedient to ecclesial authorities. The faith convictions that Christians learn from this community of “traditional Christianity” are what form and inform their ethical norms. Since there are many people who do not share these fundamental faith convictions, one should expect traditional Christian ethics to be different from, if not in conflict with, much of the rest of society. One should also expect that these differences and conflicts with other groups will be irresolvable since these other groups do not use the *noetic* experience as either the foundation or the goal of their ethics.

Because the morality of contemporary life is this worldly, a traditional Christian bioethics discloses concerns out of harmony with the secular world. Moral

theology and bioethics set within the Christianity of the first millennium will be one with an all-encompassing, transcendentally-oriented lifeworld, regarding which only limited instruction can be given from the outside.<sup>29</sup>

Due to Christian faith convictions, there is, and should be, a big difference between secular and Christian ethics in the two crucial points of goal and method. First, Christian ethics has a fundamentally different goal.<sup>30</sup> Christian ethics is radically personal in nature as it focuses on the God-person relationship and stands in stark contrast to a “this worldly” ethics. Such a Christian ethics does not make the mistake of making its goal the achievement of some social reality. It recognizes that an ethics with a goal of a fundamentally just and good society really seeks a utopian earthly kingdom that can never be achieved. And Christian ethics does not make the mistake of much of contemporary ethics that focuses solely on the human person and achieving their “good”. While radically personal in nature, the focus of Christian ethics is primarily one of relationship. The goal of Christian ethics (as with all other aspects of Christian life) is union with God.

Traditional Christianity announces that the goal [of life] is nothing less than salvation through union with God, theosis or deification. In terms of this transcendent goal, all immanent concerns are reordered. After all, once the prize is not simply immortality but union with God, what else could compare in importance?<sup>31</sup>

Second, in addition to this fundamentally different goal, one must also note the fundamentally different method operative in Christian ethics. Rather than beginning with claims to universal moral norms to be applied by all people in all places, Christian ethics is rooted in

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<sup>29</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Exton, PA: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), xv.

<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed examination of Engelhardt's understanding of the goal of Christian ethics see the third section of chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>31</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 353.

particular experience—most importantly the *noetic* experience.<sup>32</sup> Since the goal of Christian ethics is union with God, it is only through our experience of God that we can evaluate what fosters or impairs that relationship. The this worldly ethical guides of sense experience or human reason cannot be the foundation to any Christian ethical method. Instead, it is the community of traditional Christianity that serves as the foundation of ethics. While the goal is strongly focused on the individual person, the method is strongly focused on the particular community. It is the *noetic* experience, as understood and conveyed by the faith convictions of the traditional Christian community, that serves as the foundation of Christian ethics and the method by which that ethics achieves its goal.

Christian epistemology does not ground its moral and theological claims in either sense experience or discursive rational arguments. The claims are in the end grounded in a *noetic* experience of God. This epistemology is *noetically* empirical; it is neither mundanely empirical nor rationalistic. It rests on an experience achieved through an ascetic turn away from oneself to God so as to be open to His grace. It is one with the experience of the Church from the first centuries.<sup>33</sup>

Engelhardt himself details the nature of the fundamentally different Christian goal and its impact on the method of doing ethics.

In all of these matters and more, this chapter has shown a traditional Christian bioethics to be of quite a different character. The primary focus is not on moral controversies. The focus is not on resolving through discursive rationality disputes among conflicting stake-holders. Attention is not on how to mediate among competing understandings of the good, the right, and the virtuous. One is invited through prayer, asceticism, and worship towards unity with God. Because traditional Christian bioethics is focused on the experience and pursuit of holiness, its challenge is not from moral diversity but from temptation. Its attention falls on what separates from holiness, what seduces from holiness, and what restores to its pursuit and experience. This spiritual therapeutic character of traditional Christian bioethics must be understood not just in terms of aiding in

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<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed examination of Engelhardt's approach to Christian moral methodology see the third section of chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>33</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 236.



better hitting the mark or in restoring wholeness to the broken character of human life, but also in how Christian bioethics aids us in turning away from evil, which evil in the end is always ultimately personal. The language of such a bioethics is therefore strikingly different from that of a secular procedural bioethics, or of a bioethics of any sort that would attempt to layout an immanently directed morality in terms of purely discursive considerations. A traditional Christian bioethics deals with the relation of human persons with the Persons of the Trinity. In such a context, morality is a truth that out of an experience of the transcendent securely binds across history. Here one encounters the most fundamental difference defining a traditional Christian bioethics. Its morality is radically personal. There is no moral truth outside of persons and their relations. As a result, traditional Christian bioethics appropriately has the character of a cosmic narrative, a story into which persons are placed on their way to or away from God.<sup>34</sup>

These differences from secular society, in both “radically personal” goal and “distinctly communitarian” method, result in extremely different ethical judgments. Outside of the approach of “traditional Christianity,” one is unable to make accurate ethical judgments regarding specific ethical questions or actions. As one should expect, this is true not only of assessing specific ethical judgments, but also of assessing any ethical system as a whole. Thus, it will be impossible for those outside the Christian community to come to recognize the ethical rightness of Christian ethics and Christian ethical judgments without first recognizing: the human relationship with a transcendent God as the goal of life, Jesus Christ as that God incarnate, and “traditional Christianity” as the true and faithful Christian community.

According to Engelhardt, secular morality is “framed by the immanent”<sup>35</sup> and begins with claims to universal moral norms and methods, and the goal of achieving some sort of an ideally just and good society.<sup>36</sup> Engelhardt sees that conflicting claims to such universal moral norms

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<sup>34</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 285-86.

<sup>35</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, xv.

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed examination of Engelhardt’s understanding of the moral methodology operative in and goals of contemporary social ethics see the third section of chapter 1 of this dissertation.

(and their associated moral methods) result in a sort of ethical relativism in society at large. Since ethics is pursued with the goal of establishing some sort of society that is fundamentally just and good, the situation is further complicated by disagreement regarding the goal toward which society should strive. The utopian nature of such a social goal is evident not only in the disagreement about how to realize justice and goodness in society, but also in the basic disagreement about what constitutes “the Just” and “the Good.”

As a result of this inability of varying communities in ethical conflict to reach some agreement about a common moral “measuring stick,” public ethics must be a “thin” ethics that allows each person (or group of people) the freedom to pursue “the Good” as they see fit.<sup>37</sup> The best that can be hoped for in such a situation of irresolvable disagreement is a sort of peaceful co-existence. What is necessary to enable this co-existence is a maximization of individual liberty. Aside from the value of liberty (the liberty of persons to pursue their “Good” so long as it does not impede on the liberty of others to do the same), such a social ethic is value-neutral. The social structure will, of necessity, include some procedural agreement regarding how to resolve the conflicts from resulting ethical disagreements, but will do so without attempting to achieve ethical agreement. These “thin ethics” are the best that should be expected in the public realm of a religiously and ethically pluralistic society.

In many respects, Engelhardt’s view of ethics is one of supernatural metaethical absolutism within the religious community (his “thick” ethics) that decays into functional metaethical relativism in contemporary society (his “thin” ethics.) No ethical system can be shown to be authoritatively normative without the individual accepting the underlying

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<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed examination of this approach in Engelhardt's work see the section on Engelhardt in chapter one of this dissertation.

convictions. In the ethical diversity of modern society, all judgments regarding the right and wrong for the human person are acts of faith that can neither be proved nor disproved.

### Engelhardt's Role of Christian Ethics in Society

Engelhardt's approach to secular-ethics focuses on individual freedom for self-direction. He calls this "libertarianism." Such secular ethics can only function as a "thin" ethics and consists of a minimum of norms, agreed to by all people, in order for society to function in such a way as to maximize individual liberty. While this "thin" ethics can be considered universal, it has little content. Few, if any, ethical norms can be "imposed" upon others.

By contrast "thick" ethics, such as that of "traditional Christianity," function within communities of mutually accepted worldviews and ethical authorities. By exercising their individual liberty, people can make commitments to fundamental beliefs that entail certain normative ethical judgments. Such commitments must be freely made by individuals and entail the acceptance of certain ethical norms as authoritative, despite the unacceptability of imposing these norms on others who have not made similar commitments.<sup>38</sup> Ethical content and universality exist in an inverse relationship. As Engelhardt states in "Whose Religion? Which Moral Philosophy?"

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<sup>38</sup> In this analysis of the acceptability of norms, Engelhardt is using much the same approach as Stout. There is a distinction in the way that moral norms are "justified." For Engelhardt nearly all moral norms are "justified" by individual acceptance of certain ethically axiomatic commitments; they are "justified" in the sense that individuals are entitled to believe them. (For Engelhardt this is as true of ethically wrong norms as it is of ethically right norms.) However, for Engelhardt the nature of the "thin" ethics operative at the social level means that aside from the ethical norms of libertarianism no moral norms can be "justified" in the sense of an obligation on the part of all persons to accept them. It is because of this lack of "justification" as an obligation to embrace certain moral norms—it is not possible to force people to accept these moral norms as true—that individuals are as "justified," in the former sense—people are entitled—to believe and live by ethically wrong norms as they are to believe and live by ethically right norms.

Ethics thus encounters a choice between ever more universal moral norms that are at the same time ever more impoverished in content, or moral norms that maintain content at the price of being parochial. Universality involves a loss of content, despite ecumenical desires to the contrary. Content involves particularity. Moreover, content divides. It separates communities whose content-rich moral claims differ from those of other communities.<sup>39</sup>

The Christian community must exist as a “content rich moral community” separated from other moral communities and society at large by its firm faith commitments to particular moral content.

Traditional Christians in a post-Christian world are cultural deviants. They approach everything out of joint with the society around them. Everything is set within an all-encompassing project: salvation.<sup>40</sup>

The existence of the Christian community as a separate community provides an option for free individuals to freely embrace its beliefs and ethical norms and thus to become part of the Christian community. Any attempt at unification with society, by making the moral message of Christianity more palatable to those outside the community, is a betrayal of the moral heart of the community which will eventually lead to Christianity’s moral decay and dissolution into the ethically bankrupt society. Moreover, any attempt to impose the norms of the “traditional Christian” community on society violates libertarianism and the primary universal norm of individual liberty.

The Christians must not seek to integrate Christian ethical convictions into secular guidelines or to “Christianize” society at large. Such an approach would involve the attempt to make some norm other than liberty the norm in the public social structure and would require enabling society to impose some norm upon individuals. “Traditional Christians” (those rooted

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<sup>39</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., "Whose Religion? Which Moral Philosophy?" in *Notes from a Narrow Ridge*, ed. Dena S. Davis and Laurie Zoloth (Hagerstown, MD: University Publishing Group, 1999), 115.

<sup>40</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 391.

in the *noetic* experience and working toward union with the transcendent God) are of such a minority (even among those calling themselves Christian) that any such democratically established norms that were imposed would hinder rather than foster true Christian living. For Engelhardt, Christians cannot pursue making Christian norms the social norms since to do so would be unjustifiable according to the thin ethics operative in public society.<sup>41</sup> “Traditional Christians” would become a persecuted minority, forced to choose between living a life in conflict with the imposed secular norms, or living a life in conflict with the morally true norms of Christian ethics. For traditional Christians to be able to freely pursue “the Good,” there must be an ethical dualism between Christian ethics and secular ethics.

#### Engelhardt’s Goal of Christian Ethics in Society

According to Engelhardt, Christian ethics must function in a sectarian manner.<sup>42</sup> Within the community of traditional Christianity it functions as a “thick” ethics in a normative manner with the goal of salvation. Outside the community of traditional Christianity the goal of Christian ethics is much more limited. The *ad extra* goal seeks only the liberty and freedom for members of society to live according to the ethical norms they choose for themselves. For

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<sup>41</sup> If Christians were able to do this, others would also be able to impose unjustifiably their ethical norms and make them the social norms. Such an approach would open the possibility of making living a good Christian life much more difficult—especially given the fact that “traditional Christianity” is such a minority.

<sup>42</sup> In his book *Democracy and Tradition*, Stout makes a critique of “traditionalists” and their tendency to pursue such a sectarian relationship with the rest of civil society. While his comments are not specifically directed to Engelhardt or his work, they do an excellent job of describing the approach of such sectarian traditionalists to a democratic society. “Traditionalists claim that democracy undermines itself by destroying the traditional vehicles needed for transmitting the virtues from one generation to another. . . . Because they suspect that moral discourse not grounded in true piety is actually a form of vice, they are tempted to withdraw from democratic discourse with the heathen. Some traditionalists actively foster alienation from the citizenry’s public discussion of divisive ethical questions while promoting identification instead with premodern traditions and religious communities.” Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 12.

traditional Christians this would mean being able to live according to the traditions and moral principles of Christianity. The freedom accorded to individuals to pursue “the Good” as individually understood is the freedom necessary for traditional Christians to live like true Christians in a non-Christian society. It is this freedom from social constraint that enables these Christians to function as a community committed to the truth within a larger society that is blind to that same truth. The community will live a sectarian existence within a society where each person is free to pursue “the Good” as he or she understands it.

Engelhardt points out that contemporary society claims to be such a social structure founded on value-neutrality. Today’s liberal society claims to be tolerant of and open to all various worldviews and ethical convictions, but in reality it is quite intolerant, operating instead according to a “liberal cosmopolitan ethic.” Liberal cosmopolitanism is not value-neutral as it claims to be, and it does not respect the freedom of all people and all groups to adhere to their own ethical convictions. Instead, it attempts to impose its conviction of ethical relativism on all the members of society. According to Engelhardt, liberal cosmopolitan ethics is hostile to, prejudiced toward, and intolerant of any ethical worldview with firm moral convictions.

[T]he secular civil society within which traditional Christian physicians, nurses, and patients find themselves is not merely neutral to their commitments. It endeavors to be subtly if not overtly corruptive of authentic Christian belief, always inviting Christianity to restate its commitments in general secular terms. Everything, including belief, is relocated within strong moral and political constraints, which in secular terms are morally primary.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than focusing on individual ethical freedom, liberal cosmopolitanism actually focuses on ethical relativism. So it is that ethical relativism becomes the social norm. Any ethical worldview that is not relativistic as to ultimate moral truth and to the certainty of moral norms is not recognized as a valid ethical conviction and is therefore not respected as a relevant

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<sup>43</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 371.

ethical voice within society. Because this is particularly true in regard to groups that are religious in nature, there is a refusal on the part of liberalism to respect the freedom of traditional Christianity in society. “Of course, the difficulty arises in that traditional Christians are not committed to the liberal cosmopolitan ethos, but to the pursuit of holiness.”<sup>44</sup> Because of this, traditional Christians will be regarded as “morally disruptive” by liberal society.<sup>45</sup> Contemporary liberal cosmopolitanism, that claims to be neutral about moral convictions, is, in reality, anti-Christian.

It is important to note what Engelhardt is saying—that in contemporary liberal society, Christians are not free to live a morally righteous life without being in conflict with the norms endorsed by society. He argues that this is contrary to what ought to be the true foundation of American society—Libertarianism. It is this libertarianism that endorses the individual freedom of all people in society without trying to impose on them the ethical relativism of liberal cosmopolitanism. Libertarianism and its value neutrality would guarantee the right of individuals to make their own convictions and live accordingly. Aside from the value of liberty (the freedom of individuals to pursue “the Good” that they believe to be normative), libertarianism is value neutral. It results in a “thin” ethics within which traditional Christians can pursue “the Good” that they know to be right regardless of any contrary view of others. Christians cannot expect or seek a secular society that fosters Christian truth. But neither should that secular society persecute or impede Christian truth. Christians should have the right to be left alone to pursue Christian truth. They should expect that that right should be respected by society. Therefore, as its role in the larger society, Christianity should attempt to foster “thin”

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<sup>44</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 377.

<sup>45</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 379.

social ethics in order to allow individuals to enter freely the “thick” ethical community of their choice. And, according to Engelhardt, the goal of traditional Christian ethics in the larger secular society is to promote a libertarian society.

While the ultimate goal of Christianity (and of Christian ethics) is “salvation through union with God,”<sup>46</sup> the goal of Christian participation in secular society is much more limited. “Libertarianism,” with its maximization of individual liberty in all matters, especially ethical matters, is the goal. To foster the possibility of pursuing traditional Christian life, the Christian community should promote libertarianism, thus allowing all people the freedom to act according to their own ethical judgments. Such a social structure of true value-neutrality, as opposed to the pseudo value-neutrality of liberal cosmopolitan ethics, is the end toward which the Christian community should work in secular society. The achievement of this goal would ensure that the Christian community had a space within which to live the life that they know to be right.

#### “Irreconcilable” Ethical Differences between the Church and Society in Engelhardt’s Thought

Unfortunately for Christians that space, within which to freely live the life known by them to be right, is not the social *status quo*.

For the time being, we must live within a society that is both post-Christian and neo-pagan. This will require not just courage. It requires peaceable endurance in the face of the postponement of one's hopes. Christians will need to learn to be Christian in a world growing ever more hostile to their way of life. It is not just that Christianity is disestablished and traditional social structures brought into question. Many of the Christian religions have fallen into internal chaos, and the relevancy of their religious bioethics has been radically brought into question and then transformed in the image and likeness of liberal cosmopolitan moral commitments. This religious faith and its bioethics have been largely immanentized. Traditional Christianity finds itself surrounded by a culture that is pagan, even when in Christian trappings. Unlike the ancient paganism in which

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<sup>46</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 353. This salvation is realized by living a life of spiritual righteousness within a “thick” ethical community of “traditional Christianity.”



Christianity first preached the Gospel, the contemporary neo-paganism is dialectically set over against the Christian past. It is specifically and consciously post-Christian. It seeks to set traditional Christianity aside. As a consequence, traditional Christians find themselves in a society bent on inducting them and their children into an all-embracing, liberal, post-Christian, cosmopolitan ethos. When they resist, they will be found intolerant, fundamentalist, and opponents of the core values shaping the dominant culture.<sup>47</sup>

In respect to ethical differences in such a society, Engelhardt's approach entails not only a tolerance for but an expectation of irreconcilable ethical differences. These irresolvable differences accompany his concept of "thin" ethics in the social arena, and without a common moral measure for the "right" and the "good" all such ethical differences are irresolvable. Each community in the larger society makes its own justified moral judgments, which are binding within its own ethical framework but which carry no ethical leverage for those within a shared society but outside that community. Irreconcilable differences are the nature of Engelhardt's understanding of ethics in the secular arena.

The insistence on individual liberty for Christians to live rightly comes with the liberty for non-Christians to live wrongly. Secular society's protection of liberty includes the protection of liberty wrongly used. Given his understanding of the fallen and sinful nature of human beings, Engelhardt expects that many people will make those wrong choices. But for Engelhardt it is not the role of secular society to prevent them from doing so. The role of secular ethics is to ensure peaceful co-existence of those with fundamentally different ethical opinions in such a way that each is able to pursue the "good" as he or she understands it. In Engelhardt's own words, "I am of the firm conviction that, save for God's mercy, those who willfully engage in much that a peaceable, fully secular state will permit (e.g., euthanasia and direct abortion on

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<sup>47</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 394.

demand) stand in danger of hell's eternal fires. . . . To be free is to be free to choose very wrongly."<sup>48</sup>

Christians must seek to live righteous lives, not to force all members of a society to live righteous lives through public rules or laws. The Christian community ought not seek to change the many fundamental ethical differences between it and the rest of society. Any attempt to do so will fail to change society. Instead, the community will change itself in an attempt to make its message more palatable to society and the only result will be the loss of the true nature of traditional Christianity. (It is precisely this that Engelhardt believes happened to the Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council.)<sup>49</sup> The Christian community must expect itself to be a sectarian community of holiness within a larger society of evil.

The most appropriate response of the Christian community to the public evil permitted in a secular society is to provide alternative social structures that will assist those who recognize the evil as evil to live ethically right lives, even when surrounded by an evil secular society.<sup>50</sup> However, as Engelhardt notes, contemporary society is not simply one of peaceful toleration between communities of irreconcilable ethical differences. Instead, Engelhardt sees today's society as actively hostile to Christianity. "[C]ontemporary neo-paganism is dialectically set over against the Christian past."<sup>51</sup> Christians who live rightly will live not only differently from, but in conflict with the rest of society. Christians' commitments to non-negotiable ethical norms will make them unwelcome participants in the public ethical dialogue, and the Christians

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<sup>48</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, xi.

<sup>49</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> This approach leads to his advocating separate Christian hospitals, health insurance plans and nursing homes.

<sup>51</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 394.

themselves, with their claim of the existence of moral absolutes, will be seen as a threat to the rest of the liberal cosmopolitan society. Society will isolate persons of such religious commitment and insist that actions rooted in religious belief occur privately and apart from the rest of society.<sup>52</sup> Society will attempt to impose as universally binding its own non-universal position of religious and ethical relativism, “first rendering [religion] a private matter and then requiring even matters of private life to conform to the canons of secular morality and justice.”<sup>53</sup> Through its notion of privacy, liberal cosmopolitan society will not only isolate and exclude religion and religious people from exerting any influence on society, but will also attempt to undermine religious belief itself as irrational and contrary to the public good.

In this sense, religion is to be a private matter that does not have a standing on its own and should not be allowed to intrude into public life. . . . This sense of privacy circumscribes religion and reinterprets its meaning within the requirements of secular public reason. The claim is robust. Religion may offer a historical source of orientation or morality. However, the liberal cosmopolitan ethos cannot tolerate religion as a source of transcendent claims over against secular justice, civil society, secular morality, or public reason. Such a religion would advance non-negotiable claims contrary to its foundational commitments. It is out of such considerations that liberal cosmopolitan societies oppose the role of religion in public life. The position usually is that if religious concerns cannot be articulated in terms of public secular reason, which reason is to be understood fully through the assumptions of a secular, democratic polity, then they should not appear in the public forum.<sup>54</sup>

This understanding of secular morality and justice rests on an ethical worldview of “value-neutrality.”<sup>55</sup> Liberal society, while claiming to be devoted to individual liberty and

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<sup>52</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 369-70.

<sup>53</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 370.

<sup>54</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 370.

<sup>55</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 377. It is worth noting that this term of “value-neutrality” is also used by Stout and is addressed in this chapter’s consideration of Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition*.

neutral to judgments of value, is really acting from and endorsing a position of “value-neutrality” in which “value-rich”<sup>56</sup> positions of ethical commitment are regarded as worthless. It seeks to eliminate from the social dialogue any position that affirms judgments of ethical value to be the proper exercise of individual freedom. The liberal cosmopolitan ethos seeks to impose its position of “value-neutrality” as the norm for all ethical dialogue insisting that such “value-neutrality” is the “neutral” context for social decisions. There is a fundamental conflict between the liberal cosmopolitan ethos of liberty and the community of traditional Christianity.

“Commitments to a liberal cosmopolitan understanding of liberty bear against claims of religious integrity grounded in a mystical apprehension of a transcendent God, because these claims cannot be expressed within the public discourse required by social democratic moral rationality.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, firm religious commitments and values will be excluded from all social interaction, including matters of health care.

The intrusion of religious values of Christian health care professionals will be regarded in general as immoral in being exploitative, and as unethical in particular in being contrary to an emerging commitment to professional value neutrality. Traditional Christian physicians and other health care professionals in such circumstances will endanger the neutrality of health care decision-makers.<sup>58</sup>

But, when reading Engelhardt, one finds that it is not exclusively the liberal cosmopolitan society that possesses such an attitude of hostility in the conflict. In Engelhardt’s position traditional Christianity seems to be hostile toward contemporary liberal society. Engelhardt lists many actions of a “traditionally Christian health care professional” that such a liberal society would suspect or condemn. One is left with the impression that, to one extent or another, they

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<sup>56</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 378.

<sup>57</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 376.

<sup>58</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 377.

are actions that Engelhardt would endorse as the morally right thing for a traditional Christian to do. He points out that supervisors of Christian health care professionals will recognize the authoritarian role of the health professionals “as giving them an opportunity to direct patients away from sin and toward salvation.”<sup>59</sup> And he states that,

Any attempt by Christian physicians and other health care professionals to bring patients to avoid choices whose moral harms can only be appreciated within a religious perspective (e.g., to choose not to have an abortions[sic] or to use physician-assisted suicide) are considered inappropriate violations of professional value neutrality from a liberal cosmopolitan moral perspective. These intrusions of guidance violate the canons of professional value neutrality because the potential patient choices are not considered truly harmful.<sup>60</sup>

From his material throughout the rest of the book, especially in justifying libertarianism as the right moral method at the secular level, it is clear that his emphasis on individual liberty excludes the legitimacy of coercion and mandates that all personal interaction within the society be consensual in nature. But short of this sort of coercion, Engelhardt would seem to regard as moral nearly any activity on the part of the Christian health care professional so long as it was directed at the patient’s transcendent goal of union with God.

On the one hand, employing force to achieve conversions has from the beginning been forbidden. On the other hand, peaceable deception to bring another to the point of beginning to accept salvation has been regarded as relatively unproblematic, if not praiseworthy. Violence against another is recognized as highly improper, especially on the part of the clergy. However, one may meet misconceptions and passions with therapeutic responses that may appropriately include deceptions aimed at redirecting the one deceived towards God and towards important duties, including duties to accept needed and appropriate medical treatment.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 376.

<sup>60</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 377.

<sup>61</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 363.

Engelhardt even becomes more explicit in justifying the possibility of traditionally Christian health care professionals behaving in what may be believed, by many, to be ethically wrong. His position is that the assessment of their being “ethically wrong” is being made from within the “value-neutral” worldview of liberal cosmopolitanism. He insists that their identity as traditional Christians means that they will be acting in society according to a set of moral norms that is unlike that of liberal cosmopolitanism. “Of course, the difficulty arises in that traditional Christians are not committed to the liberal cosmopolitan ethos, but to the pursuit of holiness.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover,

[c]ommitted traditional Christian health care professionals will find themselves twiceover going against the grain of a public reason which is largely in the image and likeness of John Rawls. On the one hand, traditional Christians by their conscientious objections to particular medical interventions will impede access to health care services, which many as a matter of justice will claim as a basic secular right. On the other hand, in terms not open to general secular public reason, they will condemn the availability and use of such services. Where in terms of an account of public reason à la Rawls one would be forbidden to advance religious claims unjustifiable in social democratic secular moral terms, traditional Christian health care professionals, following the holy unmercenary physicians of the first centuries, will properly look for opportunities to bring their patients to salvation. At the very least, they will always be required to confess their faith when asked about the roots of their moral commitments. . . . Traditional Christians will be morally disruptive. Contrary to the liberal cosmopolitan ethic, they will indeed seek opportunities for converting others and directing them away from sin, as did the holy unmercenary physicians of the first centuries. The liberal cosmopolitan is right in discerning a real conflict between the duties of physicians as citizens of a social democracy and physicians as committed traditional Christians. The religious moral integrity of the traditional Christian will be expressed both in stepping back from any involvement in forbidden activities (e.g., abortion, artificial insemination from a donor, physician-assisted suicide) and in providing a witness to the truth of Christianity, which is always an invitation to repentance and conversion.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 377.

<sup>63</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 378-79.

With this understanding of the conflictual relationship between Christianity and society, a relationship consisting nearly completely of irreconcilable ethical differences, Engelhardt endorses a sectarian status for traditional Christianity. In concluding his book, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, Engelhardt clearly sets forth what he believes this means for traditional Christians living in a contemporary society hostile to the faith. Christians must resist the neo-pagan culture hostile to Christianity and seek to foster a libertarian culture in which they will be as free to live a life of holiness as others are free to live a life of sin. This passage paints such a complete picture of how Engelhardt envisions the Christian community's functioning in secular society that it is worth quoting in length.

In this neo-pagan culture, traditional Christians will survive as Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Christians have known to survive over the ages in the face of persecution: they will have to be different from the core and strictly observant. They will have to transform every moment of their lives with their peculiar love of God and of their neighbor. Their love must be peculiar, for they must understand that many of what the liberal cosmopolitan ethos takes to be loving acts are indeed harmful. Traditional Christians will not be value-neutral in the ways in which the surrounding culture demands. Namely, they will not have a neutrality over against the possible range of choices acceptable within the liberal cosmopolitan ethos. Instead, they will recognize this supposed neutrality as fraudulent. They will recognize the domain of acceptable choices as framed by the values of the liberal cosmopolitan ethos. Through sharing this recognition with others, they will be critics of the fundamentals of their surrounding culture. Such critics will be seen as disloyal provocateurs. When they are health care professionals, they will be found to be unprofessional. Such conduct can only make them the enemies of the liberal cosmopolitan culture.

To be the enemy of the dominant culture is to be called to martyrdom. It requires witnessing against that which is generally accepted, against that which frames the very logic of the emerging global civilization. It means to act on behalf of a truth which that culture rejects. This is a life of conflict. It is also a life of temptation, the temptation to abandon one's difference and to be absorbed into the surrounding ethos. If one resists this absorption, the temptation is to respond with hostility, indeed violence, rather than with patience and love. This last temptation is as profound as it is evil. To face this temptation, traditional Christians must remember the Christian calling to change the World through the force of holiness, not through violence. This is not to deny that the Christian emperor may use coercive state force. But in his absence, we are called to endurance, remembering that we may not take the law into our own hands. The only law we can justify

with moral strangers is that sparse fabric of a libertarian cosmopolitan ethic. If accepted, this ethic will give space for traditional Christians to live in peace. From the outside, its justification will be in the permission of those who collaborate in a polity. This will secure the moral place within which traditional Christians can peaceably turn in love to God and to their neighbors. It will provide the peaceable domain in which the Gospel can be preached. From the inside, it will be justified within a thick commitment to love. It will be integral to a traditional Christian way of life.<sup>64</sup>

### **Stanley Hauerwas**

According to Hauerwas, what is the role of faith convictions in Christian ethics? For Hauerwas, ethics is about who we are called to be not what we are to do. It is this moral character, particularly the moral character of the Christian community, that is the focus of his ethics. As noted in chapter one, character is a way of being in the world that is focused on a particular way of seeing. In turn, this vision is formed by a narrative. Hauerwas points out that each narrative is structured by and within a particular community. Therefore, there is no universal ethic, since each ethic is rooted in some particular community. The world exists as an irreducible pluralism of various narratives fostering differing visions and each developing a certain moral character. There is no meta-narrative; any attempt to argue for one is simply rooted in another differing worldview rooted in a different narrative.

As noted in chapter two, faith convictions form and establish the narrative, the vision and the character for the members of the Christian community. The Christian master narrative, that of the crucifixion and “suffering non-violently on the cross in perfect virtue,”<sup>65</sup> establishes the Christian worldview, particularly of the way God deals with evil. Instead of an intellectual pursuit of distinguishing good from evil, Christian ethics is the process of living the life of faith as Jesus did. This means that Christian ethics is not about how to solve the moral problems that

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<sup>64</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 394-95.

<sup>65</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 153.



occur when one encounters evil, but about how to suffer non-violently in perfect virtue. The Christian vision, formed by faith in the master narrative, provides a way of seeing things that is unique and different from other worldviews, particularly that of contemporary society.

It is this Christian narrative and this Christian vision that form the particular character of the Christian and the Christian community. Christian ethics is then the pursuit of completely embracing and accepting the Christian narrative, vision and character as the normative narrative, the veritable vision and the consummate character. In so doing the Christian community more and more fully manifests the kingdom of God. This is done to the exclusion, or at least subordination, of all other narratives, visions, and characters. As a Christian, one's core identity is that of being Christian. It is the Christian narrative, as understood through Christian scriptures and the Christian community, that forms the right moral vision, and results in the right moral character and associative virtues.

#### Hauerwas' Role of Christian Ethics in Society

What then is the role of Christian ethics within a pluralistic society? From such an approach as Hauerwas' there is a fundamental conflict between how one lives in the world as a Christian and how one lives in the world committed to some other fundamental narrative. According to Hauerwas "the language of liberalism, insofar as it presents a coherent alternative to Christian convictions, is a language that is foreign to the commitments of the Christian community."<sup>66</sup> To be a Christian one must choose to embrace the Christian vision. To do so is to actively reject the worldview of contemporary society and much of its structures and values. Moreover, this rejection is made on the basis of commitments unacknowledged by others in

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen E. Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas: Theology, Medical Ethics, and the Church," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 59.

society. The rejection of contemporary society is, from that perspective, irrational and unwarranted.

In many respects, Hauerwas' approach adopts the view of dualistic kingdoms—the kingdom of this world against the kingdom of God. In the process of doing this, he combines John Howard Yoder's church/world dualism with Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of modern liberalism in opposition to virtuous traditionalism. The resulting ecclesiology is one that seems to fall in Niehbur's category of Christ against culture. According to Hauerwas, to live as a Christian in contemporary society is to live as a member of a tradition-rich eschatological Christian community that exists in tension with the modern liberal world. Christians are to live as members of the peaceable kingdom of heaven while living in the kingdom of this world. Thus, to live as a Christian within the community faithful to the gospel is to be in conflict with society.

Therefore the question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics—or as I have put it, the insistence on the significance of the qualifier—also involves questions of the relationship of church to world. Indeed, how the task of Christian ethics is to be conceived is as much an ecclesiological issue as an issue having to do with nature and grace, creation and redemption. In fact, the issues are closely interrelated, since often how church is understood in relation to world follows from how nature and grace are thought to be related.

Of the two, however, the issue of the relation of church and world is more primary. By virtue of the distinctive narrative that forms their community, Christians are distinct from the world. They are required to be nothing less than a sanctified people of peace who can live the life of the forgiven. Their sanctification is not meant to sustain the judgment that they are "better" than non-Christians, but rather that they are charged to be faithful to God's calling of them as foretaste of the kingdom. In this sense sanctification is a life of service and sacrifice that the world cannot account for on its own grounds.<sup>67</sup>

By contrast, Hauerwas sees much of contemporary Christianity as guilty of “watering down” its message in order to engage society. Like all other worldly ethical positions, this

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<sup>67</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 60.

contemporary church possesses a vision of the world as it should be and is willing to use its resources to bring that world into existence even to the extent of attempting to conquer evil. In this attempt to use power to conquer evil, the Christian community has betrayed the central message of the gospel—that the proper Christian response to evil is to act as Christ acted and suffer non-violently in virtue, trusting that it is God that will deal with evil. When this true gospel message is lost, the voice of Christianity loses its unique claim and becomes indistinguishable from any other voice in the ethical dialogue. In so doing, the contemporary church loses its real claim to being the church in the world and becomes instead a “voluntary association” seeking to work through the social structure in order to bring about some ideal. But Hauerwas counters:

[T]he church is not simply a "voluntary association" that may be of some use to the wider polity, but rather is that community constituted by practices by which all other politics are to be judged.

Of course such a strategy is also designed to make us reconsider what we mean by politics. Politics in our society is often associated with bargaining between interest groups necessary to secure a relatively fair distribution of resources. Such an understanding of politics is what we should expect in a society shaped by liberal theory and practice. In contrast I try to help us see that politics is about the way we learn to speak about ourselves and the world. Accordingly the church must be understood as an alternative politics to the politics that so dominate our lives.

Which explains why those who describe my position as "sectarian" are at once partly right and partly wrong. They are wrong just to the extent they accept the politics that produces the description "sectarian." I certainly am not suggesting that Christians must "withdraw" from the world. Yet those who describe me as "sectarian" are right to sense that I am trying to find ways for Christians to recover the church as the locus of habits of speech to sustain our lives in service to the world. For that to happen the church must be reclaimed from the politics of liberalism that would make the church part of the "private" realm. In short the challenge before us as Christians is to be a politics that is an alternative to the politics of exchange that otherwise dominates our lives.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave If Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 6-7.

Unfortunately the church's current way of "being in the world" is one that betrays what should be the fundamental narrative—the Christian commitment to the gospel. Contemporary Christians make the mistake of "fitting" themselves into a society that they have erroneously accepted as the society most favorable to their being Christian. The liberal democratic society, with its claims of religious freedom, is seen by many Christians as the ideal social context for freely living a life according to the gospel in such a way as to work against evil. Many Christians believe that they can seek to combat evil and begin the kingdom of heaven by seeking to establish justice within the liberal democratic society. Many Christians endorse and support such liberal democracy as the social ideal, but they do so at the cost of losing their true nature as Christians. In order to insure the security of contemporary society, and thus to preserve their nominal "religious freedom," they voluntarily refrain from introducing their religious language or beliefs into the public dialogue of society. To assert their beliefs as Christians would be to appear intolerant of those of other religious convictions and thus, while many Christians may have religious freedom, it is a freedom which they can never use for fear of offending others in the religiously pluralistic arena. Hauerwas addresses this issue as he critiques Keck's unification of Christianity and democracy saying,

Accordingly, Christians have learned to police their convictions in the name of sustaining such social orders. They cannot appear in public using explicit Christian language since that would offend other actors in our alleged pluralist polity. But if this is genuinely a pluralist society, why should Christians not be able to express their most cherished convictions in public? If we are in an age of identity-politics, why does the identity of Christians need to be suppressed? Pluralism turns out to be a code word used by mainstream Christians to the effect that everyone gets to participate in the democratic exchange on his or her own terms, except for Christians themselves.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 93.

From such a viewpoint, there is a hostility on the part of society directed toward the Christian community. Like Engelhardt, Hauerwas concludes that liberal society, which claims to be pluralistic, tolerant, and neutral to all points of view, is actually intolerant of those who faithfully embrace Christianity.

How then should the Christian community live the gospel in a social context hostile to its nature? Hauerwas addresses this question in the sixth chapter of *The Peaceable Kingdom*, “The Church is a Social Ethic.” He begins this chapter by focusing strongly on what it means to be the church.<sup>70</sup> After this ecclesiological material, he outlines in a very clear way his view of Christian ethics as it relates to social ethics and the world.

But surely in matters of social ethics there must be moral generalities anchored in our social nature that provide the basis for common moral commitment and action. Surely in social ethics we should downplay the distinctively Christian and emphasize that we are all people of good will as we seek to work for a more peaceable and just world for everyone.

Yet that is exactly what I am suggesting we should not do. I am in fact challenging the very idea that Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable or just. Put starkly, the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church—the servant community. Such a claim may well sound self-serving until we remember that what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic.<sup>71</sup>

The Christian community must focus on living out the Christian narrative, seeing the world through the Christian vision, and fostering the development of Christian character. Its primary concern cannot be the transformation of the world. Instead, the church must be inwardly focused. Thus, the role of Christian ethics in a pluralistic society becomes that of assisting the

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<sup>70</sup> As noted above this focus is key for his understanding of what it means to do Christian ethics from within the community.

<sup>71</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

Christian community to remain faithful to its master narrative by answering the question of how to live a life of virtue, living the kingdom of God while in the kingdom of this world.

### Hauerwas' Goal of Christian Ethics

What then is the goal of Christian ethics? As noted, Hauerwas' goal for the church is to be a faithful Christian community within the world, living lives faithful to the Gospel and the example of Christ. It is this life lived according to the Christian narrative that Hauerwas refers to as "being the church" and it is this "being the church" that is THE goal of the Christian community in a pluralistic society. The goal of the church is to be the church and it is this ecclesial goal that dictates the goal of Christian ethics. Rather than being about determining "the Good" and working to achieve what is right in the world (an *ad extra* focus), Christian ethics is about determining how to establish the best Christian community possible by living a life of the kingdom (an *ad intra* focus). Stout observes that for Hauerwas,

The task of Christian ethics should be to say what difference Christian commitments and practices make to ethics. If Christian beliefs do make a difference to ethics, it should not be surprising that people who are brought up outside the church reach ethical conclusions that put them at odds with Christians. The primary way for a Christian to persuade such people, as Hauerwas sees it, is to preach the gospel and to conduct oneself in a way consistent with the gospel, so that people can see what the Christian way of life looks like.<sup>72</sup>

Stout also observes that Hauerwas "endorsed Yoder's claim that the church's task is not to transform the sociopolitical order through direct engagement with it, but rather to establish its own community of discipleship—in the world, but not of it."<sup>73</sup> When the church seeks to

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<sup>72</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 146. It is interesting to note that Stout, too, recognizes that part of Hauerwas' understanding of the church's role is that of persuading those outside the church through its example. Again, as noted in chapter two, this depends on the ability of a human ability to discern the "Right" and the "Good" prior to the acceptance of the Christian narrative as one's primary narrative.

<sup>73</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 143.

establish the kingdom of God through its role in society, it becomes the church of the world. It adopts the contemporary social structure as the correct way to act and fits itself into that structure with the incorrect assumption that the church can “Christianize” the *status quo*. It attempts to figure out a way to rule and direct society in a more Christian manner. “The Catholic attempt during the medieval period to run a world civilization on Christian principles of justice in fact made Christianity too much a thing of the world. Christian moralists found themselves addressing the odd question of how to rule empires and fight wars lovingly.”<sup>74</sup>

For Hauerwas the fundamental error in such an approach is the assumption that Christians “are or should be rulers. . . . In contrast to that posture, I would like Christians to recapture the posture of the peasant.”<sup>75</sup> To be a ruler within society is to have already accepted the established structure of society as a valid social structure. By contrast, the role of Christians in the world, like the role of Christ, is to be loving servants. It should be a community that, without seeking to take control, seeks to love. This love, if truly in the path of Christ, demands a position of non-violence even in the face of evil. “I believe that nonviolence is not only the necessary prerequisite for such politics, but that the creation of nonviolent community is the means and end of all politics.”<sup>76</sup>

Instead of seeking to change the world through the use of its power, the Christian community exists as an example of a different way of being community—a servant community of love rather than a ruling community of justice. In the book *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, Stephen Lammers provides an overview of Hauerwas’ medical ethics and points out that

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<sup>74</sup> Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 153.

<sup>75</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 105.

<sup>76</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 10.

“One of his [Hauerwas’] most persistent claims is that the church, when it is truthful, is distinct from the culture in which it finds itself. Only when it is itself can the church be of service to the world: its being itself offers the world another vision of how things might be.”<sup>77</sup> Hauerwas rejects all political understandings of the human person because they perceive the human person as being in control and then ask the question of how that control ought to be exercised.

Hauerwas counters the understanding of the person that he finds in modern society. He counters with the church, which for him stands against not only this society but any political society. Unlike modern society, the church is formed by the conviction that God rules the world, and it bears witness to this fact. Part of this witness will involve nonviolence. For Hauerwas, violence is a sign that Christians do not in fact believe in the providence of God but wish to entrust themselves to their own powers.<sup>78</sup>

According to Hauerwas, the unique vision of Christianity recognizes that God, not humanity, rules the world, and it is a vision that trusts this divine providence even in the face of seemingly unconquerable evil. It is this trust in God that makes the church so different from any other of the voices in the public dialogue. When the Christian community uses force, power, control or social structures to establish its view of the kingdom of God, it betrays its trust in divine providence and becomes merely another voluntary community. Instead of being a community focused on changing society for “the better,” the church must be a community focused on changing the character of its members to reflect more clearly the character of Christ in order that, as a community, it may reflect more clearly the kingdom of God.

Christian ethics must serve and be formed by the Christian community, a community whose interest lies in the formation of character and whose perduring history provides the continuity we need to act in conformity with that character. . . . Christian ethics is concerned more with who we are than what we do.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 64.

<sup>78</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 65.

<sup>79</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 33.



In fostering this approach to ethics, it is Hauerwas' goal to call the Christian community back to a faithfulness that is lost by the church when it adapts itself and its message to modern society. This renewal of the more "sectarian" nature of the Christian community is to be achieved by embracing a renewed understanding of the Christian narrative, vision and character. The focus of Christian ethics is then an *ad intra* focus on how to be the most authentically Christian community possible. However, in faithfully living this life and preaching the gospel, the community has an *ad extra* concern. It believes that its role in society as a unique example of a different way of life is the manner in which it most fully participates in realizing its goal of bringing about the kingdom of God.

The goal of this participation relative to the public community is somewhat unclear. On the one hand the church (in being a community of the Gospel) is a witness to society and functions as a moral example and prophetic voice. In such a role, the church serves as an instrument of change within society. An example of this can be seen in Hauerwas' treatment of such issues as pacifism, war, and severely handicapped newborns. Nevertheless, Hauerwas is also insistent on the fact that this prophetic role of renewing society can not be the intent, focus, or goal of the Christian community. It is in many respects a byproduct of the real goal of being the church as the kingdom of God. In this respect the Church must be the community of faith hoping to influence the world, (and trusting that such a hope will ultimately be fulfilled), but without allowing such a hope to impact its conduct as an ethical community.

This presents a number of problems. When one focuses on the crucifixion of Jesus (a refusal to use violence in the face of unjust evil), one can't neglect the context within which that occurs, namely Jesus' proclamation of a new kingdom, a new way of living, of doing things, and of being the voice of God within society. This is quite clear in the choosing and sending of the

disciples, as well as in the designation of Jesus as Christ, the anointed one of God. The prophetic role of the church, that of the church as example to the world, is very clearly an important part of the nature of the church for Hauerwas. However, such an aspect of the church (that of prophetic voice) would seem to require not only an *intra ecclesial* focus on how to be the kingdom of God, but also an *extra ecclesial* focus on how the message of God is conveyed to and received by the *extra ecclesial* community.

An additional problem is the criteria by which one should gauge the effectiveness of Christian witness. In many regards Hauerwas identifies the criteria by which the church is judged “to be the church” as the extent to which the church is different from the world. The church is most clearly the church when it is unlike the society within which it exists.<sup>80</sup> Here the church clearly exists as the city on the hill and an example for society to imitate by changing its ways. If this is the case, and the church is successful in being “the church” (its primary goal) to such an extent that it has the secondary effect of changing society, then how does, or even why should the church continue to remain divorced from or in conflict with that aspect of society? Clearly that is one situation in which the nature of the church should not be against culture.

#### “Irreconcilable” Ethical Differences between the Church and Society in Hauerwas’ Thought

However, it is quite clear from much of Hauerwas’ work that any such resolutions between the church and society, if possible at all, will be the exception rather than the rule. One should expect that the fundamentally different natures of the Christian community and contemporary society will result in many irreconcilable ethical differences. One should remember that, from Hauerwas’ focus on moral character, these particular ethical differences are

not nearly as important as the character of the two different communities and the characters of the individuals that they produce. It is no surprise that Hauerwas' response to these ethical differences is not a matter of how to resolve the issues, but a matter of how the Christian community can maintain its fundamental character in the face of such ethical differences. When it encounters such differences, the Christian community is called to respond in several ways.

First, and most important, the church must remain true to its narrative, vision, and character. It must recognize itself as the prophetic voice of truth within a sinful society. The church must remain faithful to the gospel narrative and recognize that “the most determinative political loyalty for Christians is the church,” and this faithfulness entails more than simply not abandoning the Christian position and adopting that of the society.<sup>81</sup> The church must remember that rather than striving to institute some social ethic, the church is a social ethic in itself. When addressing any issue, the primary question for the Christian ethicist is “How does the Christian community live as the kingdom of God relative to this issue?” The *intra ecclesial* focus of Christian ethics mandates that even concern about the difference between the church and society on a given issue must be, in some respects, a sort of side effect of the primary concern of how Christians should respond to the issue as Christians in a gospel community. Therefore, Christian involvement in the world is always a one way dialogue—the church preaching to the world by its nature as the church. According to Hauerwas, Christian ethicists have reversed some fundamentally important priorities when they assume “that the subject of Christian ethics in America is America”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> In this respect Hauerwas is manifesting the notion of the church as Christ against culture.

<sup>81</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 11.

This ecclesiological understanding leads to a second response of the church's treatment of "irreconcilable" differences with society. Hauerwas recognizes that to be faithful to its faith convictions the Christian community may have to "extract" itself from many aspects of that society. For Hauerwas there is an understanding of the church as a *diaspora*.<sup>83</sup> In Hauerwas' concept of Christianity as a *diaspora* within the nation-state, the role of Christianity is to establish the Christian community, not to use Christian beliefs to establish the nation-state of Christendom. The fundamentally different aspect of these two communities means that by and large they will be in conflict. Since it is the nation-state that controls contemporary society, living according to the Christian gospel will result in the Christian community being a *diaspora* within such a liberal American society. Indeed, a major part of what defines the Christian community is its conflict with the standards of contemporary society. In many respects the understanding of the church as *diaspora* and his emphasis on the pacifist nature of the Christian gospel results in Hauerwas' view of the church being very similar to that of the Quakers.

It is this understanding of the church as *diaspora* that is so firmly linked to Hauerwas' final ecclesiological response. While it must live with its primary internal focus on living the gospel, as a diaspora within the world surrounding it, it does so recognizing itself as a moral example to the rest of the world. The church must serve its role as moral example of a life lived according to right ethical norms in contrast to the present social norms. "[T]hey [Christians] must begin where they are, in the midst of history, giving witness to what they believe and

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<sup>83</sup> Arne Rasmusson, "The Politics of Diaspora: The Post-Christendom Theology of Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder," in *God, Truth and Witness: Essays in Conversation with Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. et al L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 88-111. Much of this section's treatment of the church as diaspora draws upon Rasmusson's work. In it Rasmusson examines Hauerwas' ecclesial notion of diaspora and notes in particular its roots in the work of Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder.

hoping that others will find the form of life attractive.”<sup>84</sup> The church’s witness extends to carrying out its prophetic role to society so that society can learn from Christianity’s moral example. In this aspect of the church as moral model, the example of Christ silently suffering on the cross is to be the normative model for Christians and the Christian community.

But it must be clear that this prophetic role of the church as example flows from the prior two responses. If, instead, the Christian community adjusts the manner in which it lives the gospel in order to make itself a more effective example, it has abandoned its primary identity. It has, at that point, adopted the approach of all other communities that seek to change society to reflect their vision and do so by relying on their power, rather than trusting in God’s providence. To enter into the democratic “secularized” dialogue as one voice among many in the social order is to make the fatal error of relying on something other than divine providence. It is the way in which the Christian community loses its own identity in contemporary society.

Hauerwas himself makes a point that clearly conveys this manner of response in his own answer to Jeffery Stout’s book *Democracy and Tradition*. At one point in the book, Stout notes what an extensive influence Hauerwas’ work has had on contemporary theological ethics and in his response Hauerwas says,

I cannot deny that over the past few years I have received a kind of notoriety that I neither sought nor desired. It would be stupid to say I found the attention without benefit, but it is also a very mixed blessing. Given what I think about the work God has given Christians, I am not interested in being “noticed.” Christians are called to endure, not to win.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 64.

<sup>85</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 216-17.

In Hauerwas' footnote to this passage he further explains this difference between enduring and winning as he denotes the difference between himself and another theologian critiqued by Stout, John Milbank.

This is not the place to explore the differences between Milbank's work and my way of doing theology, but I think the most profound difference has to do with why I think enduring is so important for how Christians are to learn to live in the world as we find it. Milbank wants Christians to win. . . . I think at best we should want as Christians to endure. There is an impatience—what some take to be an arrogance—to John's work that I admire, but I cannot follow. Such a difference, I suspect, is most clearly apparent in our different understandings of violence and the Christian use of violence.<sup>86</sup>

Hauerwas' use of "endure" and learning to "live in the world as we find it" are clearly reflective of a view of the Christian church as a *diaspora* that lives the life of the gospel, as the kingdom of God, in a hostile contemporary liberal society, and with a complete trust in the providence of God, rather than trusting its own work, as the way "to win."

But one result of this understanding of the church as a *diaspora*, clearly not articulated and most likely unintended by Hauerwas, is the impact that it has on Hauerwas' definition of what constitutes the Christian community. The character of the Christian community is seen as being fundamentally in contradiction to the character of contemporary liberal society. As a result there is a sort of fundamental aspect to his ethics that is defined by articulating the ways in which it is in conflict with the nature of society. In turn, Hauerwas also turns this around so that anything of the nature of contemporary liberal society is anti-Christian, which means that in many respects the nature of the church as Christian community is defined by a process of contrast to the more general society. Stanley Hauerwas' emphasis in the area of ethics tends to focus on denouncing wrong character rather than on showing what a good social ethics would entail.

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<sup>86</sup> Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith*, 217.

### **Richard A. McCormick**

To examine McCormick's view of the role of Christian ethics in society, one must begin by recalling, from chapter one and two, his understanding of the role of faith convictions in Christian ethics. For McCormick, ethics is universal. His natural law approach to ethics insists that judgments of moral right or wrong are made using universal criteria of basic human values. Knowledge of "The Good" is rooted in human nature, which is always and everywhere the same. The "rightness" or "wrongness" of any human activity is determined by how it fosters or impedes the human good of the individuals and communities that it affects. Since this human good is common to all people, there is, in one sense, no distinctiveness to the moral content of any ethics, including Christian ethics. This means that there is no substantive difference between Christian ethics and human ethics. Both have the same ethical content, so that ethical evaluations made using either approach will, if made correctly, arrive at the same ethical judgment.

Christian faith convictions affect Christians and their ethics by affecting them at a profound level of themselves so as to bring about a theological perspective. This perspective does not provide clear or specific answers to particular moral questions, but instead yields general Christian values, themes, insights, and attitudes which serve as fundamental guides for making ethical decisions and living ethical lives so as to achieve "the Right" and "the Good."<sup>87</sup> Such a perspective casts a new light on life so that there is a new way of seeing the universally common human ethical reality. While affected by culture, limited by human finitude and wounded by sin the human capacity for moral understanding (Christian as well as non-Christian) is still intact, so that it directs the human person to the ultimate human goal or *telos*—eternal

beatitude with God. In this respect faith “reveals human existence in its fullest and most profound dimensions.”<sup>88</sup> Such revelation does not replace human reason or function without human reason. Instead the revelation of faith serves to inform the still intact human reason.

The Catholic tradition, in dealing with concrete moral problems, has encapsulated the way faith “directs the mind to solutions” in the phrase “reason informed by faith.” We see this reflected in Bishop Malone’s phrase “a religiously informed contribution.” “Reason informed by faith” is neither reason replaced by faith, nor reason without faith. It is reason shaped by faith and, in my judgment, this shaping takes the form of perspectives, themes, insights associated with the Christian story, that aid us to construe the world theologically.<sup>89</sup>

#### McCormick’s Role of Christian Ethics in Society

What, then, is the role of these religious ethics within a pluralistic society? Because of his understanding of ethics as universal, McCormick believes that Christian ethics has an important role to play within a pluralistic society. This role begins within the Christian community. Christian faith provides the community with a transcendent insight that affects Christians in a cyclical manner. The transcendent insight fosters a Christian moral worldview, which in turn yields Christian moral values contributing to Christian moral behavior, thus developing a Christian moral character that affects the Christian characters’ moral worldview.<sup>90</sup> McCormick’s understanding of faith’s role (in the ethics of Christians and the Christian community) is that it enables a profound and pervasive impact of faith but does so without

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<sup>87</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *The Critical Calling: Moral Dilemmas Since Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 193.

<sup>88</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 140.

<sup>89</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 202.

<sup>90</sup> One should note that this process is a cycle that progresses both ways so that it is also the moral character that gives rise to moral behavior and fosters moral values thus contributing to and refining a moral worldview which in turn affects the moral character.



drawing a direct and exclusive connection between that faith and specific moral judgments. Because the content of this worldview (and associative values, behavior, and character) is rooted in the true human nature as *imago dei*, it is a common ethical truth shared with and accessible to all people. The Christian faith functions as a lamp for the Christian community in its discernment of a universally common ethical reality. “Whatever material content this light of the gospel leads to, it will always be utterly human, not beyond or at variance with the human and the reasonable.”<sup>91</sup>

While Christian ethics does not have exclusive access to ethical truth, it does have a unique, and in a manner “privileged”, perspective that provides certain insights into the common ethical reality. “[T]hose who have true gospel have a source of knowledge which others not exposed to the gospel do not have.”<sup>92</sup> Rooted as it is in the extensively trans-historical and trans-cultural community of the church, Christian moral insight can make an extensive contribution to overcoming some of the inherent cultural limitations in human ethics. While its affect on the impact of human finitude is not as direct, its view of the transcendent nature of the human person functions uniquely in its extensive participation in ongoing ethical dialogue. And in its acknowledgement of the impact of original sin, it sets forth a teaching regarding the ideal nature of the human person as *imago dei* which, though not fully perceived in the here and now, can serve as an ethical ideal for all people.

Moreover, Christian ethics ought to engage society and assist in providing insight into what truly fosters the human good. Because its understanding of ethical reality is that it is an ethical reality common to all people, dialogue with those outside the faith community (who do

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<sup>91</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 Through 1980* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1980), 300.

<sup>92</sup> McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 Through 1980*, 300.

not, and need not, accept Christian faith convictions) is both desirable and productive. It is in this respect that the Christian community fulfills its most crucial role in the larger society. The ethical insights of the Christian community, rooted in the Christian faith convictions, are insights of common moral truths (directed to fostering the human good) that can be discerned from other worldviews.

The Church is, as Rahner has noted, a world church. I will refer to this characteristic of Christian morality as its "universalizing feature." I mean to underline the idea that Christian morality, while being theological to its core, must not be isolationist or sectarian. Isolating accounts of the Christian story would repudiate a constant of the Catholic tradition: that God's self-revelation in Jesus does not obliterate the human but illuminates it. As Vatican II worded it: "Faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation and thus directs the mind to solutions which are *fully human*." It added: "Whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, *becomes himself more of a man*." Christian ethics, then, is the objectification in Jesus Christ of what every person experiences of her/himself in his subjectivity. In a sense we may say that the resources of scripture, dogma and Christian life are the fullest available "objectifications" of the common human experience.<sup>93</sup>

The values and principles realized through Christian belief can also be recognized from outside of the Christian commitment of faith. Christians can share these moral truths with the larger society and "teach" the moral understandings without requiring non-Christians to convert to Christian belief. In this respect, the church exercises its prophetic role in and through the ethical dialogue. This ethically prophetic role of the church can be accomplished because even those without the same faith convictions can recognize the moral good, rooted as it is in the human good.

According to McCormick, it is this approach of shared moral truths that enables the church to function as prophet. In discussing the Christian contribution to medical ethics, McCormick points out what difficulty there would be if the moral insights yielded from the

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<sup>93</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 28.

Christian perspective were radically unique and accessible only to those rooted in the Christian story.

The question naturally arises: what about those who do not share the story, or even have a different story? If the theological contribution to medical ethics must be derived from a particularistic story, is not that contribution inherently isolating? Those who do not agree with the themes that can be disengaged from the Christian story need only say: "Sorry, I do not share your story." There the conversation stops. Public policy discussion is paralyzed in the irreconcilable standoff of competing stories and worldviews.

That would be a serious, perhaps insuperable problem if the themes I have disengaged from the Christian story were thought to be mysterious—that is, utterly impervious to human insight without the story. In the Catholic reading of the Christian story, that is not the case. The themes I have lifted out are thought to be inherently intelligible and recommendable—difficult as it might be practically for a sinful people to maintain a sure grasp on these perspectives, without the nourishing support of the story. Thus, for example, the Christian story is not the only cognitive source for the radical sociability of persons, for the immorality of infanticide and abortion, etc., even though historically these insights may be strongly attached to the story. In this epistemological sense, these insights are not specific to Christians. They can be and are shared by others.<sup>94</sup>

Part of the reason that this understanding of Christian engagement with society works is because the focus is on moral themes. McCormick notes that "In this sense I believe it is true to say that the Christian tradition is much more a value-raiser than an answer-giver."<sup>95</sup> McCormick recognizes that specifically Christian moral norms could not be extracted from the Christian narrative without losing their grounding and authority, if not also losing their meaning. Rather than specific moral norms, Christian morality brings to society's attention general themes and values that influence the way the ethical situation is seen and understood. It is in this manner that the Christian community influences the practical norms established by society. It is not a matter of the Christian community communicating specific moral norms into society, or getting

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<sup>94</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 203.

<sup>95</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 170.

society to integrate Christian moral norms into its structure. The general themes and values are themes and values that can be recognized from multitude of “competing stories and world views.”<sup>96</sup>

Christianity is able to exert influence on the larger society because the themes and values that are recognized from other positions can then be used within society to re-structure and change the society. The Christian community can thus help the society to recognize the common ethical theme or value in question, but can do so by enabling each to recognize it from his or her own worldview.<sup>97</sup> As a result, it is possible for the Christian influence to change society for the better without the need of “converting” people to Christianity before they can recognize the good values as good. In as much as these values are common to the human person adequately considered, the locus from which that understanding begins is irrelevant to the content of the values themselves. The church enlightens the ethical perception of society in order to aid society in becoming more and more human. William Spohn notes how McCormick’s understanding of a universal morality available to Christians and non-Christians alike fosters Christian participation in the social order rather than isolation from it.

This confidence in reason allows the believing community to address social problems in a public moral language that should not be inaccessible to nonbelievers. The alternative feared by McCormick would be “the separatism of those who divide morality into natural and revealed and invite the Church to concern herself all too exclusively with the latter.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 204.

<sup>97</sup> Like any other form of teaching, the teaching is most effective when one helps those learning to recognize the truth from their own perspective by utilizing the tools and abilities that they already possess. One builds upon the truth that is already recognized by the “students” and coming at the truth to be learned from the “students’” own perspective.

<sup>98</sup> William C. Spohn, “Richard A. McCormick: Tradition in Transition,” *Religious Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (January 1987): 40. McCormick’s quote from *Notes on Moral Theology: 1965 through 1980*: 131.

One can see that in McCormick's work the primary role of the church in its ethical relationship with society is one of ethical teacher. Through it the Christian community assists society in more fully manifesting the good intrinsic to the human person. In this it fosters the eschatological goal of the kingdom of God. But beyond this role of the church in society, there is an additional element in the approach that McCormick takes. That is the role of the church, not only as teacher, but also as student.

The nature of morality as universally accessible opens the possibility of independently discerning moral truth from non-Christian perspectives. With the acknowledgement that even Christian understanding of morality and ethics is subject to human finitude comes the acknowledgement that there exists the possibility of a Christian ethical understanding that is limited in some aspect which is already recognized in a non-Christian context. Since this non-Christian ethical recognition can occur apart from and prior to Christian moral discernment, the possibility exists for the non-Christian ethical understanding regarding some aspect to be more complete than that of the Christian community. If there is an incomplete aspect to some aspect of the Christian community's ethical understanding, it is the Christian community that must recognize and respect the activity of the spirit in the prophetic voice of society. In this respect the church is able to realize the fullness of its role as student. McCormick is clear that at such times it is the faith community that is enlightened by society to a previously unrecognized moral norm or value: "What also happens, conversely is that a religious community can have its corporate eyes opened by a previous societal acceptance of a value the religious community

failed to discern. I believe this happened to the Catholic Church with the notion of religious freedom.”<sup>99</sup>

### McCormick’s Goal of Christian Ethics

Given such a view of the ecclesial participation with society, what are the goals for Christian ethics? The goal of Christian ethics is not only the *ad intra* goal of manifesting the kingdom of God within the Christian community but also the *ad extra* goal of the kingdom of God as realized in human society. The goal is not simply a matter of being an excellent community of Christian practice; it includes active participation in society. For both the religious community and the public, the goal of this participation in ethical dialogue is the goal of all ethical dialogue—to foster the good of the human person adequately considered.

McCormick sees the function of moral theology as a key in achieving this goal when it functions as a form of what he refers to as “corrective vision.” “I borrow the phrase [from William F. May] to state in shorthand what I take to be the major contribution of moral-theological reflection: opening peoples’ eyes to dimensions of reality they may have missed. If moral

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<sup>99</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 197. One ought to observe that if what Christians believe about humans being in the image and likeness of God is true, then any anthropology that is accurate will correspond with Christian anthropology. If social anthropology (society’s understanding of what is good for the human person) and Christian anthropology (Christian understanding of the same human good) do not agree, then two options are present. First, the non-Christian anthropology is incorrect. In such a case theists will have, through Christian values, an “inside track” or “head start” on how to show that this is actually wrong. But this inside track, consisting as it does of values, is merely a hint about ways in which to discover and lead others to recognize this anthropological error. It is not any answer in itself and certainly cannot be used with those outside the Christian worldview as a “proof” that the other point of view is wrong. If it really is wrong then it ought to be able to be shown to be wrong without a sectarian appeal to special revelation. The second option is that the Christian anthropology is incorrect. Because it, too, is a product of finite human thought and understanding, Christian anthropology is in the process of growth, development, and change. In the terms of the Vatican, it is incomplete. This would lead to the necessity of the theological anthropology considering the truth claims of the secular point of view along with a self-critical examination of its own truth claims.

theology does not do this, it is utterly dispensable.”<sup>100</sup> For the religious community, participating in public ethical dialogue enables the Church to communicate its insights more effectively. Such a goal requires not only the discernment of the moral truth from the Christian worldview, but an attentiveness to justifying those insights from other points of view. William Spohn notes McCormick’s attention to this saying,

Discernment may be the process of arriving at moral insight, but it is insufficient for justifying to others the actions we have taken. We cannot simply rehearse the process by which we came to our decisions if we want to make them intelligible to others, particularly when they do not share our Christian story. Hence, McCormick faults proponents of narrative ethics who rarely engage in moral justification concerning concrete moral problems. At the same time, he acknowledges that ethicists who concentrate on justificatory arguments often do not address the narratives that shape Christian character and vision.<sup>101</sup>

This prophetic role of the church is not limited to preaching and teaching against the ethical wrongs recognized by the church, but instead includes active engagement with society and its social structures. For McCormick, the goal of the church in society is to transform society—not only by being an example but by engaging the social reality in order more fully to realize the kingdom of God. The church can function in society to make it more just, more fair, more loving, and in so doing make the kingdom of this world more like the kingdom of God. When it is recognized that the prophetic role aims at realizing the kingdom of God, it must also be recognized that working for the kingdom—loving your neighbor as yourself—includes feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the ill, and visiting those in prison (Mt 25:34-36).

In turn, this fosters the transformation of society to a fuller realization of the human good through socio-political structures and norms. Thus, the goal of this participation for the

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<sup>100</sup> McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, vii.

<sup>101</sup> Spohn, "Richard A. McCormick: Tradition in Transition," 41.

Christian community is that the insight of the Church can help to inform and form public policy in such a way that it effects the development of the human good.<sup>102</sup> The Christian community works to foster and develop those aspects of society that already, in some aspect, manifest the reality of the kingdom. The ability to do this can be fostered not only through co-operation with those in the Christian community but also by co-operating with the larger society. In this the church is not attempting to establish a Christendom, but is assisting the world to more fully realize the kingdom of God. Again, the Christian community should also remain open to the possibility of gaining new insight through this dialogue. In this respect the goal is not only transformation of society, but self-transformation to realize more fully a Christian community that promotes and enables the human good.

McCormick gives a rather thorough treatment of how this entire process of Christian ethics functions in his work “Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?” He points out the importance that “basic human values,” accessible to all persons, have in the process of ethical perception. He notes the centrality of the human person as a means to and measure of ethical values. And he points out that the goal of such Christian ethics is directed to shaping perspective and worldview rather than providing specific ethical answers to particular ethical questions. This clear and precise statement is worth quoting at some length.

Love of and loyalty to Jesus Christ, the perfect man, sensitizes us to the meaning of persons. The Christian tradition is anchored in faith in the meaning and decisive significance of God's covenant with men, especially as manifested in the saving incarnation of Jesus Christ, his eschatological kingdom which is here aborning but will finally only be given. Faith in these events, love of and loyalty

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<sup>102</sup> For example, if the Christian community sees that a war is unjust, it is not enough just to be the best non-violent community possible and to preach and teach against the wrongness of the war. It is also a responsibility of the Christian to involve himself or herself in society to work for the end of the war. This will include using the means and the tools available which includes the use of power through a social structure of some sort—voting, protesting, involving oneself as a voice in various structures and committees, etc.



to this central figure, yields a decisive way of viewing and intending the world, of interpreting its meaning, of hierarchizing its values. In this sense the Christian tradition only illumines human values, supports them, provides a context for their reading at given points in history. It aids us in staying human by underlining the truly human against all cultural attempts to distort the human. It is by steadying our gaze on the basic human values that are the parents of more concrete norms and rules that faith influences moral judgment and decision-making. That is how I understand "reason informed by faith."

In summary, then, Christian emphases do not immediately yield moral norms and rules for decision-making. But they affect them. The stories and symbols that relate the origin of Christianity and nourish the faith of the individual, affect one's perspectives. They sharpen and intensify our focus on the human goods definitive of our flourishing. It is persons so informed, persons with such "reasons" sunk deep in their being, who face new situations, new dilemmas, and reason together as to what is the best policy, the best protocol for the service of all the values. They do not find concrete answers in their tradition, but they bring a world-view that informs their reasoning—especially by allowing the basic human goods to retain their attractiveness and not be tainted by cultural distortions. This worldview is a continuing check on and challenge to our tendency to make choices in light of cultural enthusiasms which sink into and take possession of our unwitting, pre-ethical selves. Such enthusiasms can reduce the good life to mere adjustment in a triumph of the therapeutic; collapse an individual into his function ability; exalt his uniqueness into a lonely individualism or crush it into a suffocating collectivism. In this sense I believe it is true to say that the Christian tradition is much more a value-raiser than an answer-giver. And it affects our values at the spontaneous, prethematic level. One of the values inherent in its incarnational ethos is an affirmation of the goodness of man and all about him—including his reasoning and thought processes. The Christian tradition refuses to bypass or supplant human deliberation and hard work in developing ethical protocols within a profession. For that would be blasphemous of the Word of God become human. On the contrary, it asserts their need, but constantly reminds men that what God did and intends for man is an affirmation of the human and therefore must remain the measure of what man may reasonably decide to do to and for himself.<sup>103</sup>

#### “Irreconcilable” Ethical Differences between the Church and Society in McCormick’s Thought

What then is the Christian community to do in the face of irreconcilable ethical differences? From a certain perspective there is no such thing as an irreconcilable ethical difference in McCormick’s approach. The existence of ethically different positions comes with

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<sup>103</sup> McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 169-70.

the recognition that the resolution of such differences rests in the universal ethical truth which is rooted in the truly human. Thus, the resolution of such differences will be realized in the grand scheme of things. Some of this resolution happens in the here and the now as a result of the work of the Christian community. But this trust of complete resolution is founded on a faith in an eschatological reality which includes, as part of it, the reconciliation of those ethical differences.<sup>104</sup> In as much as that reality is eschatological there will remain, in the here and now, irresolvable ethical differences between the Christian community and non-Christian society. But for McCormick these irreconcilable differences are not as serious as for Engelhardt and Hauerwas. In McCormick they are, in a sense, misunderstandings with differing levels of conflict between them and differing levels of resolve on the parts of the participants.

With some such ethical issues it will be possible for Christians to live with society in a compatible manner while attempting to change that social reality for the better. Other more fundamental differences pertain to more basic human goods and, thus, may exert a more divisive effect on the relationship between church and society. Some such issues of irreconcilable differences may require actions such as civil disobedience. But even at that point the civil disobedience operates within a larger society by virtue of the Christian understanding of what is the most effective way of changing the unethical element of social reality. A goal of such Christian participation is the change of society regarding the ethical issue. In addition to the *ad intra* goal of maintaining itself as a community of faith, there is the clear intent of the *ad extra* goal of changing society. The change of society is not a side effect.

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<sup>104</sup> One may note that such a faith in an eschatological resolution of ethical difficulties could also be attributed, in a somewhat different sense, to Engelhardt and Hauerwas. For both Engelhardt and Hauerwas the eschatological “resolution” is less a matter of mutual growth to realizing the kingdom of God, than it is a matter of the Christian community growing to the kingdom of God and the associative incorporation of society into the Christian community.

In these matters, the Christian community must continue in its struggle to transform society, through either a change of public policy or a change of social norms. This should be done through continued engagement at many levels and continuous attempts at persuasive interaction, attempting to make the Christian insight more understandable in the social context in question. The church should take measures so as to adapt the message—how it is communicated not the content—in order to be more effective in the society.<sup>105</sup> This form of engagement seeks “the best possible mediation of gospel values in the contemporary world.”<sup>106</sup>

Some such issues may require a manner of Christian non-participation in certain social evils in order to enable the Christian community to live faithfully according to its own ethical teachings and beliefs. But the non-participation in the social evil comes with an obligation to participate within society in order to change that aspect of society so as to better foster basic human values. The closer that the ethical and moral issues are to a violation of basic human values, the more likely it is that Christians will be unable to participate in society’s structures with regard to those issues while at the same time struggling to change them. McCormick takes such an approach in his treatment of enhancement genetic engineering which he notes, “involves a subtle but very real change in our attitudes toward human persons. . . . Such attitudes can powerfully nourish actions and practices that ought to be abhorrent to civilized people.”<sup>107</sup> Further on, in his treatment of eugenic genetic engineering, he remarks that “contemporary scientists rightly run from positive eugenics as if it were the plague.”<sup>108</sup> But he is equally clear at

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<sup>105</sup> Thus, it is noted by some that the role of moral theology should include making Christian ethical insight understandable to those outside of the communal Christian narrative.

<sup>106</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 266.

<sup>108</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 267.

the end of this work that “it is paramount” that the treatment of such issues, including legislation and medical guidelines, occurs within the “*public* mechanism of ongoing deliberation” and needs to include the contribution of the Christian perspective.<sup>109</sup> McCormick points out that the church’s contribution of its wisdom “is not only a gift; it is above all a responsibility.”<sup>110</sup> It must enter the public discussions well-informed and well-intentioned, seeking to foster the human good.

Clearly McCormick believes that the church has an obligation to maintain its ethical stance, but with his recognition of natural law and the concept of dialogue, he also holds that the church must be at least a little self-critical and recognize its role as **both** teacher **and** student. In his treatment of such issues as birth control and theological dissent (particularly the removal of Charles Curran from Catholic University of America’s School of Theology), McCormick’s theological dialogue, directed *ad intra*, clearly criticizes some of the church’s activities. When addressing the issue of dissent in the church he remarks, “In summary, since theology is both public and critical, public critical evaluation, or dissent, is part of its task. I am astonished at—and at some point deeply afraid of—those who question this or are threatened by it.”<sup>111</sup>

For McCormick, it is important to see that differences between the church and society often are learning opportunities on both sides. The church engages culture with the goal of transforming society to a fuller realization of the human good. But this should be done in good faith, confident that both are seeking the human good, and it must be done with a self-critical eye, open to the possibility of new insight from the “secular” view. Much of his later work, such

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<sup>109</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 270. Italics in the original.

<sup>110</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 271.

<sup>111</sup> *Dissent in the Church*, ed. Richard A. McCormick and Charles E. Curran, Readings in Moral Theology, vol. 6 (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1988), 430.

as the work in *The Critical Calling* and *Corrective Vision*, consists not only of Christian ethical reflection on socially pertinent issues, but also of *ad intra* critique of Christian ethical teaching in light of human values that may be more clearly recognized by society.

### **Conclusion**

Having considered the “public theology” of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick, what conclusions can be made? This section will begin by observing some basic points of similarity shared by all three theologians as well as making some general observations about certain basic differences in how they envision the relationship between the Christian community and society. This will be followed by some brief more specific comparisons of the theologians to each other. The conclusion of this section, and the chapter as a whole, will consist of some suggestion as to the cause of the differences.

#### General Similarities and Differences

In order to comprehend fully how each of the authors understands the role of Christian ethics in the larger society, one must begin by noting that all three ultimately ground their ethical criteria of right and wrong in their Christian belief in God as the creator and source of all goodness. All three embark upon ethics with a belief in the fundamental goodness of creation as a whole and the human person in particular. All three also acknowledge the brokenness of society as an effect caused by sin and acknowledge as well the redemption of that reality by Jesus Christ. For all three, this places the Christian community, faithful to Christ, in a unique role of discernment within the context of a society still marred by sin.<sup>112</sup> The church plays a

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<sup>112</sup> In regard to this aspect, none of the three hold that the church’s unique role is one of being perfect.

special role in the ultimately eschatological manifestation of the kingdom of God. It is roughly here that the similarities shared by all three of the theologians end.

One of the clearest differences between Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick is the *ad extra* responsibility of the church to society in the manifestation of the kingdom of God. All three affirm that it is God, not the church or the Christian community, who establishes the kingdom of God. But there is a significant difference in how they see the Christian community functioning in this realization. Much of this difference in their understandings of how the church functions in society is due to the difference in their understandings of how faith functions in the church. Chapter two noted that despite the prominent role that all three assign to Christian faith, each sees the ethical function of faith quite differently. In particular, the three differ in significant ways when addressing the question of how one comes to know “the Right” and “the Good.”

In this area, Hauerwas and Engelhardt are similar in many respects. Both take a position of supernatural metaethical absolutism that relies on Christian faith convictions as **the** means for knowing right and wrong. Indeed, one can not properly recognize right and wrong apart from the acceptance of these Christian faith convictions. Tristram Engelhardt focuses on the community of traditional Christianity as the source of that revelation while Hauerwas' focus is more scriptural in nature, focusing on the ethically normative nature of the Christian narrative. In contrast, McCormick asserts that it is the commonality of creation, especially common human nature, which serves as the means of knowing “the Right” and “the Good”. Thus, human beings come to discern right and wrong by virtue of examining reality and how it fosters or impedes human well-being. Christian faith provides a new light and a unique perspective on that common ethical reality. His natural law approach differs from the approaches of both

Engelhardt and Hauerwas in that it presumes common criteria for all persons in the making of ethical judgments.<sup>113</sup> These differences in their conception of the nature of faith and the manner in which it is active in Christian ethics profoundly impact their understanding of how the Christian community functions within the public moral discourse.

For Engelhardt, the traditional Christian community provides the means for right relationship with God and, as a result, is the sole true source of ethical knowledge. It has little to learn from interacting with secularized society. It also has little to teach. Since contemporary society is one of ethical relativism, the church's ethical positions will make little sense to anyone who is not rooted in the Christian community. There is no real public moral discourse.

Engelhardt advocates a sectarianism for the Christian community. For him the existence of the pluralistic contemporary society means that only thin ethics can rightly exist in the public domain. Any thick ethics will be practiced among moral friends and must exist in a community of shared ethical convictions. For Engelhardt, the true Christian community of the church will be very strong and rigid and will use the tradition of the community to establish clearly what it means to be Christian. Thus, ethics is about being the right person in relationship with God by living the right life and doing the right things. Being Christian is about control of one's actions and the world in which one lives.

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<sup>113</sup> It must be acknowledged that the very belief in this reality of universal human nature is itself an act of faith. It is a product of the belief in the fundamental goodness of all creation, especially the goodness of the human person. It is a product of the belief that human nature, though wounded by sin, remains the discernible *imago dei*. In McCormick's approach it is this universal human nature, and the participation of all people in that nature, that establishes the community, a community that Engelhardt's narrow understanding of community denies as a possibility, that is necessary for what Engelhardt would call "thick ethics." And in McCormick's view it is the common beginning and end provided by this universal nature that enables the meta-narrative that Hauerwas denies as a possibility.

Being Christian is very much about being in control by determining and doing what is right. It is about living rightly in *noetic* relationship with God and this is lived by being a member of the community of traditional Christianity. Christian ethics is then about how to live rightly in traditional Christianity which is a community of “thick” ethics in a society of “thin” ethics. There is a certain element of hopelessness for all of those outside the Christian community, and Engelhardt is willing to abandon non-Christians to damnation short of conversion. There is no reason for Christian ethics to work at establishing a “good” society. This can not take place in society in general because there is no justification, particularly on a social level, for imposing this sort of control. True ethics can only be voluntarily accepted by embracing the Christian faith.

The ethical relativism that exists in society ensures that the best that can be hoped for at the social level is a free society in which those who freely chose to do what is right can do so.<sup>114</sup> For Engelhardt, Christians operate the same way every other community of “thick” ethics operates. Christians “rope off” a little corner and live according to Christian norms. These norms, known to be right by virtue of the Christian tradition, are what enable the *noetic* experience and all that it entails, including a morally right life. Christians welcome into the Christian community of “thick” ethics all of those who embrace the Christian faith. But the principle of permission prevents any sort of coercion of non-Christians. In society there is no

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<sup>114</sup> It would seem that Engelhardt would embrace the opportunities provided by a sort of “Constantinianism” but, in today’s day and age, that is not a possibility. It seems that he would be happy with a sort of Christendom well run. “I embrace a sense of church from that time which for Stan Hauerwas is terrible—the splendor of Christendom, the age of the ancient Fathers, set in the light of St. Constantine the Great.” H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., “The Belligerent Kingdom Or: Why Authentic Christianity Is Even More Politically Incorrect Than Hauerwas Acknowledges,” in *God, Truth and Witness: Essays in Conversation with Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. et al L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 201. He rejects such an option because there is no universal principle by which to justify such a universal social control.



way to justify requiring people to become Christian. For Engelhardt, Christianity and Christian ethics are focused *ad intra* because there is no possible *ad extra* effectiveness.

Engelhardt is very clear and very consistent: the church and the Christian community work for establishing the kingdom of God **within** its own community. The *noetic* experience, the ultimate norm for all judgments, is realized only in communion with the church of traditional Christianity. Outside the Christian community, the absence of the normative *noetic* experience results in ethical relativism. According to Engelhardt, the only responsibility for the Christian community in secular society is to work to foster a libertarian society which will allow Christians to live the way that they should live, recognizing that at the same time such a libertarian society will allow evil people to lead the evil lives that they desire to live. But, if it is a good libertarian society, it will keep those who have refused traditional Christianity from oppressing Christians and impeding the realization of the kingdom of God within the Christian community. He believes that such unjust oppression is already taking place with contemporary liberal society's treatment of traditional Christianity's firm religious and ethical convictions. It is only the limited agenda of eliminating such oppression that draws the Christian community into any sort of public moral discourse. Its limited function in this discourse is the insurance of a free society, not the establishment of any Christian norms or values.

For Hauerwas, there is a sort of prophetic role to the public moral discourse of the Christian community. It is the acceptance of the Christian narrative that ultimately leads to the goal of Christian ethics—the fostering of ethical character. Christ's life, and especially his suffering and death, serve as the model for a Christian life of ultimate trust in divine providence. As was the case with Engelhardt's community of traditional Christianity, it seems that for Hauerwas this Christian narrative has an exclusive claim as the source of ethical knowledge and

right character. Again, the Christian community has little to learn from interacting with secularized society. In contrast to Engelhardt, Hauerwas would advocate that it has much to teach contemporary society. But this teaching will be done indirectly and will occur as a by-product of the Christian community living lives true to its narrative.

For Hauerwas, Christians are not in control. Being Christian is about recognizing that it is God, not humanity, that is in control. It is about “being” not about “doing.” The most important thing is to be the church. Hauerwas’ vision of the church is that of a community that makes the gospel narrative, with its primary theme of unwavering trust in God, the fundamental structure of its communal character. The church cannot engage society on society’s own terms of trying to **make society better**. The church can only **make the church better** by focusing its ethics on how to live rightly in the world.

The church does not seek to change the world, because to seek to do so would change the church, not the world. In seeking to change society the church betrays the key pin of its own existence, namely, ultimate trust in the divine providence of God and the special relationship of the Christian community with that God. The church has to focus on what it means to be a community of loving service and it is here that Christian ethics functions. Christian ethics should attempt to clarify for the Christian community how to live as a subordinate and oppressed community within modern society.

Christian ethics should **not** focus on trying to change society into a more just society or into a society that more closely follows Christian practices. True ethical change is not possible without accepting the Christian beliefs that ground those practices. Christian ethics is directed *ad intra* to ensure that the church lives like the church, committed to its gospel narrative even while in the contemporary world. The church does not need a social ethic of how society ought

to be. The church IS a social ethic because, in as much as the church lives a life of the gospel, a community of loving service, it is an example to the rest of the world about trusting divine providence while recognizing that humans are “out of control.” The Christian community operates with an “*ad intra* focus” with the trust that a good “*ad intra* focus” will bring about the transformation of the world and the establishment of the kingdom of God.<sup>115</sup>

The inconsistency that exists in Hauerwas’ approach is his notion of the church as example. His concept of the Christian community being able to teach by example such things as medical ethics to those outside the Christian community carries with it the implication that it is possible to recognize “the Right” and “the Good” from outside the Christian community. It implies that through such recognition society can change. Society is changed by recognizing that the church’s example of how it treats the poor, the oppressed, and the physically handicapped is right. For that to be possible, it must be possible for those in the non-Christian society to recognize “the Right” and “the Good”. In that respect Hauerwas is inconsistent with his insistence on the necessity of the gospel narrative for good ethics.

McCormick’s contention is that Christian faith throws a new light on ethical norms that are universal in nature and fundamentally open to understanding by all people. This enables Christian ethics to assume a prominent role in the public moral discourse in a religiously pluralistic society without insisting on the acceptance of its faith claims. Such common criteria enable the cross-communal and cross-narrative ethical interchange that the methods of

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<sup>115</sup> Hauerwas fears that the Christian community too easily shifts from focusing on living the gospel as the Christian community to focusing on conveying the gospel to society in such a way that society changes. That happens when the Christian community, rather than focusing on being the kingdom of God, focuses on making society more like the kingdom of God—the focus is on “doing” rather than on “being.” He sees that as an attempt to reestablish Christendom and a fundamental contradiction to what it means to be Christian in the first place. It is more appropriate to be the Christian peasant than the Christian ruler.

Engelhardt and Hauerwas would disallow. The ability of all people to appeal to a common nature, especially human nature, as the means of verifying the understanding of “the Right” and “the Good”, make such interchanges desirable sources in the process of ethical discernment.

McCormick’s understanding is consistent regarding the interaction of the Christian community and society. For McCormick, morality and ethics are based on, understood in light of, and directed toward the human good. It is the good of the human person adequately considered. The universal experience of this common human nature winds up making all of ethics and morality accessible from any perspective. It is possible to know “the Right” and “the Good” from within any cultural or religious context because one is capable of recognizing the good of the human person. Because Christianity recognizes the human person as the *imago dei*, it can fully embrace both this human morality and the fundamental Christian faith in God as the source and measure of all good and right.

Clearly, due to sin and its effect on societies and communities, the recognition of the truly human is more difficult in some contexts than in others. For McCormick, part of the special nature of the Christian community is that it provides an especially privileged understanding of the human person. By following the teachings of Christ, who is the fullest example of what it means to be human, there is an “inside track” to the recognition of both the morality (“the Right” and “the Good”) and the immorality (the wrong and the bad) within the structures of society. This sets the role and the goal of Christian ethics within the larger society. McCormick asserts that the Christian community is called to engage society in order to foster the good of the human person and in that way to assist in realizing the kingdom of God. The impact on society is not so much a side effect of being what we are called to be, but rather part of what we are called to be as the Christian community. The Christian community can help foster the

development of human beings and human society so as to more fully realize the fully human. Moreover, it can do so recognizing that working for that goal need not be done from within a position of Christian belief. Conversion to Christianity is not a requirement.

However, the difficulty presented by McCormick's approach is the determination of what makes "Christian ethics" distinctive from other sorts of ethics. The issue is one of determining what unique contribution Christian faith makes to either the content of ethical judgments or the process of arriving at those judgments. McCormick certainly rejects the idea that Christian revelation or belief contributes any unique content to "essential ethics."<sup>116</sup> He insists that "there is a material identity between Christian moral demands and those perceivable by reason."<sup>117</sup> What then does Christian faith contribute to the process of ethical decision making? One less than ideal possibility would be to see Christian faith as providing only motivation for being good. McCormick adopts another, more adequate, understanding. Christian faith provides a paradigm that assists in providing a new insight into the common reality of the human person, thus enabling the possibility of a better judgment of the human good. His answer is that in as much as Christians have the revelation of the fully human in the person of Christ they have, through revelation, a fuller recognition of and insight into what is the "true right" and the "true good" as it is communicated through the human person as *imago dei*.

#### Specific Comparisons

This brief section of specific comparisons will examine the three theologians in sets of two in order to consider the most prominent differences. It will begin by comparing the

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<sup>116</sup> For clarification of McCormick's use of Norbert Rigali's terms "essential ethics," "existential ethics," "essential Christian ethics," and "existential Christian ethics" refer to the examination of McCormick's approach to Christian ethics found in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>117</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *How Brave a New World? Dilemmas in Bioethics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 9.

theologians with the most dramatic differences, McCormick and Engelhardt. Next, the less apparent differences between Engelhardt and Hauerwas will be seen to be nearly as profound. The final comparison of Hauerwas and McCormick will show the complexity of their disagreement.

### **McCormick and Engelhardt**

The clearest contrast regarding the Christian community's role in society is between the approach of McCormick and that of Engelhardt. There is a fundamental opposition between their ethical worldviews regarding the church's relationship with the secular society that forms its context. The central point of this disagreement is their disagreement about the ability of non-Christians to ascertain moral truth, and thus to live rightly. This opposition starts with McCormick's fundamental belief in a universal ethical norm. His "natural law" vision includes belief in a common ethical structure, rooted in the nature of the human person adequately considered, that is accessible to all persons for the process of correct moral living. While Christian faith, a faith in Christ as the fullest manifestation of the human *imago dei*, provides a unique perspective and privileged insight into the moral nature of the human person, human reason provides the ability for all people to ascertain the same moral truth. The human ability to ascertain moral truth makes possible meaningful ethical dialogue in society at large—a dialogue that is able to foster the good of the human person through social structures.

While Engelhardt believes in a universal moral norm (thus the fires of hell as the reward for immoral activity) he is equally as certain that some universal ability to ascertain that moral truth simply does not exist. The "fallen-ness" of human nature prevents the human person from knowing the moral truth apart from "a *noetic* experience of God that rises out of rightly directed

worship.”<sup>118</sup> Outside the community of traditional Christianity there is no way to discern moral truth and thus no way of determining the “right” position in any ethical conflict. Ethical dialogue in society at large is meaningless. Short of the misuse of power, the only way to resolve such ethical conflict is to reach some form of peaceful co-existence in which each group is allowed to pursue the good as that group perceives it. Short of rectifying any violation of the principle of permission, there are no moral rules that society may impose. As a result, society exists in a state of complete metaethical relativism.

This difference in metaethics is the cause of the difference between McCormick and Engelhardt in their view of Christianity’s role in society. McCormick’s approach of empirical metaethical absolutism in society, and the resultant meaningful ethical dialogue, makes Christianity’s participation in that dialogue not only meaningful but an essential part of its very nature as a light unto the nations. Engelhardt’s approach of complete metaethical relativism in the reality of secular society means that there is simply no possibility of Christians attempting to foster or develop a better society. Christianity, in Engelhardt’s thought, is a sectarian community of thick ethics, ethics directed only *ad intra*, which fosters the realization of the kingdom of God within the church. Christianity’s participation in society is limited to seeking to maintain the libertarianism necessary for the Christian community to live rightly. In these two differing views, the role of Christianity in society is fundamentally opposite: McCormick’s church seeks engagement and Engelhardt’s church seeks isolation.

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<sup>118</sup> Engelhardt, "The Belligerent Kingdom," 202.

## Engelhardt and Hauerwas

In comparing the positions of Engelhardt and Hauerwas, one begins by seeing a much larger extent of agreement.<sup>119</sup> Both focus on the church as a community most certainly set apart from the world and in conflict with contemporary society at large. As was the case for the disagreement between Engelhardt and McCormick, the cause of this agreement between Engelhardt and Hauerwas rests in their metaethical epistemology—namely their mutual assertion of the inability for those outside the Christian community to ascertain moral truth. Both claim that the attempt to ground secular ethics has failed.<sup>120</sup> The result of this mutual assessment is their agreement on the overwhelming importance of the Christian community, and the importance that the ethics of that community be an *ad intra* endeavor about how to live as a Christian community in a world hostile to its existence. The underlying cause of this agreement is that they agree on a condition of supernatural metaethical absolutism within Christianity and a condition of metaethical relativism (with a resultant religious pluralism) outside Christianity.

However, this agreement on the importance of the Christian community is also a large part of their ethical disagreements, because while they agree about the church's importance they disagree about its nature.<sup>121</sup> In Hauerwas' writings, the church is the people of God. The nature

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<sup>119</sup> For an excellent and concise examination of the similarities and differences in the approaches of Engelhardt and Hauerwas, it is best to consider the submission of each to the festschrift of the other. Engelhardt, "The Belligerent Kingdom."; Stanley Hauerwas, "Not All Peace Is Peace: Why Christians Cannot Make Peace With Engelhardt's Peace," in *Reading Engelhardt: Essays on the Thought of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.*, ed. Brandan P. Minogue et al (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 31-44.

<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas, "Not All Peace Is Peace," 31-32.

<sup>121</sup> Engelhardt, "The Belligerent Kingdom," 200; Hauerwas, "Not All Peace Is Peace," 33-34. One of the clearest comparisons of their conflicting views can be found in Engelhardt's "The Belligerent Kingdom", 205. In it, he quotes one of Hauerwas' explanations of church and offers what the explanation would look like if he had written it, thus making an explicit contrast between his own and Hauerwas' understandings of church.



of the church is that of a moral community proclaiming the gospel and caring for the world. But this understanding of ecclesial nature makes the concept of “church” a bit nebulous. Identifying what is or is not “the church” is difficult since it is not entirely clear where this Christian moral community begins and ends.<sup>122</sup> It is difficult to identify who has and has not made the gospel story of Christ his or her fundamental narrative.

Hauerwas advances with great certainty his moral maxim that the role of the church is to be the church.<sup>123</sup> It is a servant community rooted in the Christian narrative seeking to exemplify what it means to live as the kingdom of God.<sup>124</sup> Fundamental to its nature must be its complete surrender of control to God in all things, which it does in imitation of Christ. In living as Christ lived, the church is a city on a hill and an example to all people. The example that it manifests—the way it lives rightly—is to love as Jesus loved, by caring for individuals, not by seeking control of social structures in order to make the kingdom of God a worldly reality.

By way of contrast, Engelhardt’s church is the body of Christ which is most fully realized as “a common experience sustained in a shared appreciation of and engagement in baptism, chrismation, the Eucharist, and the other mysteries that bind the members of the church as the ‘assembly of the saints.’”<sup>125</sup> In contrast to Hauerwas, Engelhardt’s concept of “church” is fairly clear. His criteria of baptism, chrismation and being *in communio* with the bishops of the

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<sup>122</sup> This difficulty is increased by Hauerwas’ critique that many “Christians” in contemporary society are not really members of the church because they have not made the Christian narrative their worldview.

<sup>123</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

<sup>124</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

<sup>125</sup> Engelhardt, "The Belligerent Kingdom," 201.

Christian Church establish clear external markers as to where the church begins and ends. It is possible to identify who has or has not made entry into the “church.”

His emphasis on right belief and right worship as the necessary grounds for the *noetic* experience, which is so absolutely necessary for incorporation into the body of Christ, results in a Christian community with ethics that are focused extremely *ad intra* on particular communal rituals, rules and guidelines. Engelhardt’s church is a church that is clearly about the control within the Christian community that is necessary to live rightly. Without living rightly in this world, with the help of the church, the transcendent experience of God is not possible.

For both authors the goal of establishing the kingdom of God is an *ad intra* task. But Engelhardt holds that Hauerwas’ church lacks the transcendent *noetic* nature that is at the heart of what it means to be the church. For Hauerwas, in contrast, Engelhardt’s approach, with no attention to itself as example to the world, lacks a concern for the extra-ecclesial reality so necessary for being the church in the world. In fairness it must be pointed out that in this matter Hauerwas lacks a consistency found in Engelhardt. Engelhardt’s social ethical relativism is maintained in both his metaethical epistemology and in his understanding of the church’s role in society (perhaps more accurately the church’s non-role in society.) Hauerwas’ understanding of the church as a city on a hill, an example to the world about how to live a life fully trusting in God, depends on the ability for those outside the church to recognize the good present in the Christian community, and this is inconsistent with the metaethical relativism that he claims to be the state of society.

## Hauerwas and McCormick<sup>126</sup>

It was seen that the fundamental cause for disagreement between Engelhardt and Hauerwas about the role of the church in society is their disagreement about the nature of the church. In the disagreement between Hauerwas and McCormick, the fundamental disagreement rests on their understanding of the nature of the human person. For Engelhardt, Christian ethics is about the specifics of right worship and right behavior as discerned through the community of traditional Christianity. In contrast, both Hauerwas and McCormick take a more general approach. For both, ethics is not so much about specific answers to particular moral questions as it is about the values by which Christians structure their lives. By focusing on the values rather than specific issues, Christian faith helps to shape the moral character of believers in order to provide them with the resources and abilities to live rightly. These values serve as general criteria in the process of living ethically.

For McCormick, with his approach of natural law, these values can be discerned through reflection on human nature and can be realized through acting in accord with the human good adequately considered. At the base of this position is a fundamental trust in the nature of the human person as *imago dei*. It is a trust in the order of creation. There is the recognition, by McCormick, that both this order of creation and the nature of the human person have been wounded by sin. But there is also the affirmation that their essential goodness remains intact.

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<sup>126</sup> The theological dialogue between Hauerwas and McCormick is quite thoroughly documented. Among numerous brief references to one another in many works, specific instances of this dialogue include Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 59-61; McCormick, "Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?" 166; Richard A. McCormick, *Notes on Moral Theology: 1981 Through 1984* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1984), 26-27; Lisa Sowle Cahill, "On Richard McCormick: Reason and Faith in Post-Vatican II Catholic Ethics," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 86-87; Spohn, "Richard A. McCormick: Tradition in Transition," 41.

They are wounded by sin, not broken. The order of creation remains intact enough for the nature of the human person to serve as the general criterion necessary for living rightly. The understanding of human nature provided by the order of creation is reinforced by the order of redemption. The human good adequately considered is universally accessible to all people and this universal accessibility is what makes possible ethically good social action in a social realization of the human good.

By way of contrast, Hauerwas seems to emphasize the order of redemption by emphasizing the effects of sin. It seems that in this perspective the order of creation, including human nature, is not only wounded by sin but broken. Human nature has been so corrupted by sin that “the fully human” will lead away from the kingdom of God rather than toward it. As a result, the nature of the human person cannot serve as the general criterion for living rightly. Within a worldview strongly emphasizing the order of redemption, the general criterion for ethics and morality shifts from the nature of the human person to the gospel narrative. The order of redemption, realized in and through the gospel narrative, replaces the order of creation as the order for living rightly. The gospel narrative—Christ’s story of faithful living in a sinful and oppressive world—becomes the normative narrative and the criterion which forms and guides the Christian community. The covenantal community of the Christian church is born in the midst of the narrative and lives out the narrative of the gospel as a community set apart from the rest of the world.

This understanding of the human person and the effects of sin has a profound impact on the ethical role of church in society. Hauerwas’ emphasis on the brokenness of the world and the consequent necessity of the gospel for right ethical living is in direct correlation with his ethical approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism. Moreover, this emphasis excludes the

possibility of the Christian community working **with** society to manifest more fully the kingdom of God in the social reality. McCormick's affirmation of the still relatively intact goodness of creation and human nature enables his position of empirical metaethical absolutism to encompass not only the Christian community but all of society. For McCormick, the common ethical ground of human nature encourages the Christian community to work with society, learning as well as teaching, in order to assist it in more fully realizing the kingdom of God. The impact of the Christian community on society is not a Hauerwasian side effect of being the kingdom of God, but an intentional goal of the church. The *ad intra* responsibility of being the kingdom of God as fully as possible brings with it the *ad extra* responsibility of fostering the realization of the gospel in the world.

In the matter of the church's role in society, McCormick shares a consistency with Engelhardt that Hauerwas lacks. There is a consistency in their thought between their assessment of the moral aptitude of non-Christians and the role of the Christian community in the non-Christian society. In Engelhardt, because non-Christians are incapable of accurate moral assessment, the Christian community can play no role in making society a better society. McCormick's understanding, that both non-Christians as well as Christians are able to discern "the Right" and "the Good", makes possible the Christian role as prophetic voice and active participant in the changing of society. Hauerwas' inconsistency rests in the fact that, while maintaining that true morality is not possible outside of the Christian community, he also maintains that the Christian community can serve as moral example to non-Christian communities. For the church's role as example to be possible, society must have some ability to discern and pursue "the Right" and "the Good"—an ability he denies.

## Causes

By way of concluding, this chapter will offer some suggestions as to the cause of these differences regarding the role of the church in society. It should be apparent that the two crucial and interlinked elements of Christian ethics that impact the theologians' position of the church's proper role in society are the theologians' metaethical epistemology and their understanding of the Fall.

The "philosophical" basis of their differences is the difference in their metaethical epistemology concerning what can and cannot be known about right and wrong apart from revelation. Engelhardt and Hauerwas assert a position of supernatural metaethical absolutism in which the human ability to know moral truth, and to live rightly, is dependant on Christian revelation and the individual's acceptance of that revelation. As a result there is a pointlessness and futility to any attempt by the church to engage society in order to achieve a society more like the kingdom of God. In Engelhardt, this epistemological approach results in a radical sectarianism with a virtual abandonment of the world outside Christianity. Hauerwas' approach, of Christianity as the city on the hill, holds that in as much as Christianity attains its only true goal of living as a covenantal community of the gospel, it will have the side-effect of serving as an example to those outside the faith.

McCormick's position of empirical metaethical absolutism differs significantly in that supernatural revelation is not necessary to be able to recognize moral truth. The universal human ability to discern moral truth and goodness makes possible the meaningful interaction between the church and society at large. It is an interaction that profits both since the additional perspectives, Christian and non-Christian alike, assist in the discernment of moral goodness through the ongoing ethical dialogue.

This difference in metaethical epistemology is most basically a result of their theological understanding of the nature of the human person, specifically the human person after “The Fall.” The overwhelming effects of sin envisioned by Engelhardt are what prevent any real morality on the social level. Only the fully penetrating *noetic* experience of God in and through the traditional Christian community can restore the fallen nature of the human person and make true morality, and the corresponding eternal salvation, possible. Without that *noetic* experience, the fallen nature of the human person makes true knowledge of “the Right” and “the Good” impossible.

The effects of sin for Hauerwas are similar to those of Engelhardt. It is clear that the metaethical epistemology within the Christian community is one of supernatural metaethical absolutism. Christian narrative is the necessary context for washing away the effects of sin and living the right life. Without making the story of Christ one’s own, true knowledge and understanding of “the Right” and “the Good” is not possible. What is unclear in Hauerwas is the nature of the metaethical epistemology in the non-Christian community. His emphasis on the effects of sin as well as his emphasis on supernatural metaethical absolutism for the Christian community would seem to result in a metaethical relativism for the non-Christian community. But instead his emphasis on the role of the Christian community as a city on the hill would seem to be possible only if the effects of sin on society were not as profound as he sets forth. For the Christian community to operate effectively as moral example there must be some aspect of human nature, still present in all people, that is intact enough to distinguish good and evil.

For McCormick, the effects of sin on the world are as pervasive but not as profound. The order of creation is wounded but not destroyed by sin. This enables human reason to serve as access to the same moral truth revealed through the order of redemption. The role of the church

in the order of redemption, to be a light unto the world, mandates that the church engage society. It is able to do so effectively because the still-intact nature of the human person serves as a common criterion for reaching ethical judgments.

As to the impact of this on the church's role in society, the following summary may be made. Engelhardt's approach to Christian ethics more clearly maintains the unique, distinctive and authoritative role of Christian faith in ethics but in turn sacrifices any normative claim of Christian ethical judgments on the community outside the church. Hauerwas attempts to maintain both a distinctive certainty to the role of Christian faith in ethics as well as the normative nature of those ethical judgments outside the Christian community, but in doing so his approach presents a number of inconsistencies. An approach such as McCormick's is more consistent in its claim of the normative nature of right ethical judgments for both the Christian community and the rest of society but in turn, by questioning the uniqueness of a contribution to ethics by Christian faith, raises questions regarding the normative nature of ethics rooted in the Christian tradition.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### ENGELHARDT'S APPROACH TO EUTHANASIA AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

Having examined, in the first three chapters, the general role that faith plays in the ethics of these three individuals, chapters four, five and six will be examinations of specific issues in the area of health care as a means of illustrating the effect that the ethicists' different methodologies have on their "doing" of ethics. The consideration of a single issue for comparison would seem to be too limited in two respects. First, it would be hard to get a reliable picture of how each ethicist applies his methodological convictions from the examination of a single topic since a particular application may be limited to a specific issue. Second, while there is no sharp line of division, ethical issues in the field of medicine do tend to occur at some point along a spectrum between more individually focused issues and more communally focused issues. The treatment of only one issue would automatically exclude any consideration of such variance. In order to overcome the problems presented by selecting only one topic, as well as overcoming the problem of attempting to address too many topics, two issues will be addressed—euthanasia and universal health care.

Each author's specific treatment of the issues of euthanasia and universal health care will be examined. The topics have been carefully selected for the following reasons. First, both euthanasia and universal health care are important issues in the field of medical ethics about which there is currently significant difference of opinion and ethical controversy. Additionally, both issues have been treated at some length by the ethicists to be considered, which will make it possible to ascertain both the authors' position regarding each issue as well as the aspects common to the authors' treatment of both issues. Finally, by selecting both the issue of euthanasia (which tends to be located on the more individual end of the spectrum) and universal

health care (a decidedly communal or social issue) it will be possible to examine the authors' treatment of both individual and social issues.

Chapter four will examine Engelhardt's treatment of these issues while chapters five and six will do the same for Hauerwas and McCormick. These chapters will not be an evaluation of the ethical position of each author on the issues under consideration. Rather each chapter will limit itself to a descriptive account of the ethicist's position regarding these topics and of the role that faith plays in reaching those positions.

### **Summary of Engelhardt's Ethics**

In many respects the impact of faith on Engelhardt's ethics is made fairly simple due to the sharp division that he makes between the realms of Christianity and the world. The resultant ethical sectarianism makes clear Engelhardt's two different understandings of an ethics with and an ethics without the impact of Christian faith. Through a comparison of these two approaches on the issues of euthanasia and universal health care it will be easy to see what Engelhardt regards as the significant impact of faith on ethics.

As was noted in chapter one, Engelhardt regards social ethics as non-normative metaethical relativism that has as its founding principle the principle of permission—that,

when God is not heard by all in the same way (or is not heard by some at all), and when all do not belong to one closely-knit, well-defined community, and since reason fails to discover a canonical, concrete morality, then justifiable moral authorization or authority comes not from God, nor from a particular community's moral vision, nor from reason, but from the permission of the individuals.<sup>1</sup>

There is a fundamental inability of human society to discern moral truth. In Engelhardt's view, the inability of society to reach agreement on the issues of God, community and reason result in

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<sup>1</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xi.

the inability of society to set significant guidelines for what ought to be considered ethical and, more importantly, unethical behavior. Instead, society must allow all to pursue the good as they understand it in so far as such pursuit does not impede others from doing the same. This peaceful co-existence, guided by “thin” ethics, limits human behavior and choices by disallowing any sort of violent or oppressive behavior, since by definition such behavior violates the victims’ rights to pursue the good. It is this libertarian structure that ought to be protected by social norms, and thus maximization of individual freedom, limited by protection of others, ought to be the basis of any ethical decisions on a social level.

Chapter two showed that Engelhardt’s understanding of Christian ethics differed quite significantly. His view of the true Christian community of traditional Christians envisioned a community strongly united through the noetic experience of God. It is this noetic experience that enables the ability to recognize moral truth. This noetic experience is achieved only by grace and through the guidance of the community in which “faith, asceticism, and prayer” enable the *theosis* necessary for the Christian to know human nature as it ought to be.<sup>2</sup> This noetic experience serves as the foundation for all ethical and moral norms and the fact that it is an experience not shared by all results in a Christian community with an ethics different in both method and norms from the rest of society. The difference between the “post-Fall” broken human nature and the noetic redeemed human nature assures a vast unbridgeable chasm between non-Christian and Christian ethics.

Chapter three illustrated the sharp impact that this sectarian approach had on Engelhardt’s understanding of the role of Christian ethics in society at large. Since there is such an insurmountable division between Christian and non-Christian ethics, traditional Christianity can

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<sup>2</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Exton, PA: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), 176.

not seek to “Christianize” society by working to incorporate what it knows to be ethically true into the publicly enforced norms of society. The dependence on the principle of permission for instituting social ethical norms is implemented in large part by a democratic process of majority rule. Any freedom of society to institute and enforce ethical norms not shared by all would impair the ability of the traditional Christian community, a clearly minority population even within Christianity, to pursue what it knows to be ethically true. The sole role for the traditional Christian community in society at large is to work towards a maximization of freedom in a libertarian society. If fully realized, such a libertarian society would enable the Christian community to live lives founded on the noetic experience and directed toward bliss-filled eternal unity with God.

### **Engelhardt’s Bioethics**

Like all other forms of Engelhardt’s ethics, there is a sharp distinction between his Christian bioethics and his non-Christian bioethics. The desire of people in the pluralistic secular society to live according to their own worldview will lead them to seek out similarly minded individuals and establish medical communities of moral friends. This will result in the creation of sectarian medical communities that operate according to the values of “thick” ethics that they, as a community, hold to be true. Society must protect the rights of these communities to operate freely according to their beliefs in so far as the practice does not violate the liberty of other persons.

Thus, Engelhardt envisions at least two health care systems—that of traditional Christianity and that of secular society—and suggests that it would be much more likely that a plurality of systems would exist, each managed and directed by the “thick” bioethics of the

community that served as the foundation of that system.<sup>3</sup> These independent medical systems would form the contexts for decisions regarding such issues as euthanasia and universal health care. Engelhardt addresses how these issues would be treated in at least two such systems—a traditional Christian system and a secular system.

The necessity of a medical community of moral friends will lead traditional Christians to establish their own medical establishments that operate according to a mutually embraced “thick” ethics in which “the cardinal considerations are transcendent.”<sup>4</sup> These “thick” medical ethics will guide the separate health care system that evolved from such co-operation so that the medical care of persons would occur within a community focused on prayer and the spiritual growth of patients and staff—care for the soul. “All patients would find themselves in a context that invited conversion away from sin, to right worship and belief.”<sup>5</sup>

His non-Christian bioethics, like his general secular ethics, are libertarian in nature. When interacting with moral strangers, the principle of permission oversees all behavior. In so far as there is no commonly recognized moral authority within contemporary society, society’s “thin” ethics must allow all biomedical actions that do not violate the liberty of other people. For Engelhardt, such an affirmation of absolute freedom makes socially permissible much that he affirms to be fundamentally morally wrong, such as “the sale of heroin, the availability of direct abortion, the marketing of for-profit euthanatization services, or the provision of commercial

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<sup>3</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 382.

<sup>4</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, "Infinite Expectations and Finite Resources: A Roman Catholic Perspective on Setting Limits to Critical Care, or, Can Roman Catholic Moral Theology Offer More Than Secular Morality Provides?" in *Allocating Scarce Medical Resources: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Mark J. Cherry (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 382.

surrogacy.”<sup>6</sup> In as much as any medical activity is carried out with the permission of all those involved, medical professionals as well as patients, it must be allowed by society.

According to Engelhardt, it is this primacy of permission in secular bioethics that results in the emphasis on individual decisions, informed consent, patient autonomy, power of attorney, living wills and other issues of authorization.<sup>7</sup> This emphasis results in a priority of truth in the process of informing patients, or their surrogates, so that they are able to make well-informed decisions for themselves. Lacking any commonly recognized criteria for distinguishing good medical decisions from bad ones, secular medical ethics ensures that the criteria used for the moral evaluation are those of the person(s) most directly and profoundly impacted by the medical decisions. The focus on the right of the individual to operate autonomously forbids the deception of the individual. It thus assures that each person gets to exercise his or her liberty regarding health and physical wellbeing according to individual values.

By way of contrast, his Christian bioethics is set within an over-all vision of a Christian life formed and informed by the noetic experience of God which is realized only through the community of traditional Christianity. This re-prioritizes many of the values of bioethics so that such principles as autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice are all subjected to the Christian value of holiness. Ethical actions in medical settings are assessed by how they contribute to or interfere with the spiritual journey of the persons involved with the decision.

[T]he provision of health care is subordinated to the pursuit of holiness. All concerns with health and well-being are to be placed within and constrained by

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<sup>6</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, xi.

<sup>7</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 355; Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 309-19.

Christian morality, as well as oriented to the kingdom of heaven. The pursuit of the kingdom of heaven has moral and ontological priority.<sup>8</sup>

The new insight provided by this worldview demands that true Christians evaluate all health care decisions in the light of their journey toward union with God. Indeed, the value of health care itself is reassessed in light of the new-found goal of all human existence. “Traditional Christianity re-orientes secular, taken-for-granted appreciation of health care’s importance. . . .

The vocation of medicine can only be rightly understood when ordered in terms of the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>9</sup> Engelhardt is clear that such an approach does not make health care unimportant, but that health care must be situated in the overall context of good Christian living.

He says,

Still, health care remains important. Avoiding suffering and postponing death are generally good. In addition, health care can be located within the Christian life. Oriented towards the love of God, the health care professions take on an earnestness of dedication to God and others. But it is not worldly cure, care, and health that are most important. They have enduring significance only if they lead to the only true cure of death: salvation. If not aimed at this ultimate goal, they lead to ultimate death. Traditional Christianity re-orientes secular, taken-for-granted appreciations of health care's importance.<sup>10</sup>

Medical choices are subordinated to non-medical priorities. Good medical judgment is placed in service to sound spiritual direction. “Choices need to be embedded within the context of repentance, metanoia, and the pursuit of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>11</sup> Such decisions as allowing a patient to die or prolonging an inevitable dying process are dependent on whether the

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<sup>8</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 366.

<sup>9</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 354.

<sup>10</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 353-54.

<sup>11</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 365.

patient has attained a life of relationship with God or has yet to repent from a life of sin.<sup>12</sup> Engelhardt even sanctions the use of deceit in communicating with patients so long as it is directed toward the salvation of the one deceived. “The meaning of lying and deceit is thus radically different within a traditional Christian context. . . . [I]t has been recognized that in this broken world one may be obliged to use deception in the pursuit of salvation and the pursuit of goods closely associated with salvation.”<sup>13</sup> Engelhardt regards deceit as a “very strong medicine used sparingly and carefully to achieve an appropriate important good.”<sup>14</sup> In this reorientation and the subjugation of all to the pursuit of holiness, Engelhardt even subordinates his virtually absolute good in secular ethics – the good for which the principle of permission exists – autonomous action. “The goal of acting autonomously and without deception, though generally good, is not an overriding good. It must be radically situated within the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>15</sup> All practices short of coercion are legitimate means to the end of salvation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Engelhardt states, “Finally, high-technology, highly invasive treatment may be morally necessary for those who have not faced and undertaken the tasks of repentance and the pursuit of the Kingdom of Heaven. Patients who find themselves still focused simply on pursuing whatever treatment will increase the quality of the life left to them or their dignity in dying, instead of focusing on entering into a pious and prayerful relationship with God, should if morally and medically possible be treated until they face their finitude and turn to the Kingdom of Heaven. If at the end of life a patient is still engaged in this world rather than turning to God, further treatment should be encouraged in the hope that the patient will in repentance turn to God. High-technology care can provide additional time to achieve a good death, one of prayer and repentance. In this regard, if at all possible, analgesics should not be used to the point that they make the patient's repentance and preparation for death difficult by clouding the patient's sensorium. It is for all these reasons that traditional Christians should use advance directives not only to avoid medical interventions likely to be useless or spiritually burdensome, but also positively to ensure appropriate spiritual guidance as death approaches.” Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 322.

<sup>13</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 356.

<sup>14</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 358.

<sup>15</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 358.



## Euthanasia

The treatment of end of life issues is radically altered within such a system of traditional Christian health care, due to its attention to the end of life and the goal of the kingdom of heaven. There is a certain “quality of life” approach to end of life decisions in which the criteria are spiritual rather than physical or psychological. “The issue turns on discerning when attempts to postpone death or bring health distract from preparation for eternal life with God.”<sup>17</sup> For Engelhardt, this criterion would usually result in a medical approach much less focused on the preservation of physical existence than one finds in the current system of medical care. The recognition of the naturalness of death would assist in overcoming the idolatry of self-preservation and lead to a medical care in which it was as important for the medical professional

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that this sort of approach seems to undermine the very intent of the personal liberty that Engelhardt enshrines. In as much as one is choosing a falsely represented option, one is not truly exercising one’s freedom to choose from the available choices. One is being misled into using (perhaps better mis-using) one’s “freedom” in a manner that is contrary to one’s will. It is, in a sense, a form of coercion. Despite his assertion that to be free to choose is to be free to choose very wrongly, this seems to take the approach of “error has no rights,” so that the autonomy and freedom that is an absolute right in secular society has no rights in the Christian community if it is going to be used by the person in such a way as to lead the person away from union with God.

Additionally, this seems to call into question the operation of these medical communities. If all persons within the community of moral friends are living according to the “thick” morals freely accepted by the individuals, then why should such deception be warranted? It seems that such deception would seem to be warranted only for those who had yet to commit to the values of the Christian community. And yet Engelhardt says that such deception is permitted for those who are in the “grip of passions and [are] therefore unable on their own consistently to keep their lives directed to God” (Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 356.) Such actions fundamentally undermine the very core of libertarianism that he insists must be practiced in order for each person to choose the good for him or herself. Any such medical community so subject to pervasive deception of the patient based on a spiritual evaluation by the medical professional hardly qualifies as any sort of community of moral friends.

<sup>17</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 319.

to know when it was spiritually appropriate to allow patients to die as it was to know how to preserve their physical life.<sup>18</sup>

His approach makes clear that withholding or withdrawing treatment is often the morally correct decision. In his discussion of death within a Christian worldview Engelhardt states,

What is important is often not what one does or does not do medically, but why and how one does it, as long as one's actions and omissions are not what proximately lead to death, as long as the underlying disease process existing before the action or omission, and continuing independently of the action or omission brings death. In withholding and withdrawing treatment, it is essential that one make such omissions in order to avoid acting in a way that would be harmful to the patient. The omission must be a stepping back from spiritual injury. Treatment should be withheld or withdrawn because its burdens would cause the patient or others to fall short of the mark.<sup>19</sup>

His evaluation of withholding and withdrawing life sustaining care is applied in the same manner to providing pain relief at the end of life in light of possibly hastening that patient's death.

Treating pain, even when this risks an earlier death, if done to comfort the patient and avoid despair, is neither a violent act nor manslaughter, if it is the sort of intervention that would not have caused death in the absence of the disease. The treatment may not be independently lethal and surely may not aim at

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<sup>18</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., "The Counsels of Finitude," in *Death Inside Out: The Hastings Center Report*, ed. Peter Steinfels and Robert M. Veatch (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 115-25.

<sup>19</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 319. In this quote Engelhardt continues by saying, "All health care interventions must be given in parallel with care for the soul of the patient, to paraphrase a passage in St. Basil's Long Rule. Indeed, to quote St. Basil, 'To place the hope of one's health in the hands of the doctor is the act of an irrational animal.' Instead, our final reliance must be on God. We are not obliged to postpone our deaths indefinitely in a highly technologically mediated environment that would be strange to the Fathers and contrary to St. Basil's warning against allowing medical care to encompass our lives. In such circumstances, one should allow broken nature, as God wills, to take its course. . . . At stake is avoiding not just acting without an intention to effect an earlier death, but also avoiding intimate and proximate involvement in the taking of a human life."

preventing pain by taking life. However, one can provide analgesia to comfort the patient and avoid despair, recognizing that, as a result, death may occur earlier.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear from such passages as these, as well as numerous others in this section of the book, that it is the role of faith in Engelhardt's approach to Christian ethics that forms and structures his approach to end of life issues.<sup>21</sup>

However, Engelhardt is clear that this increased acceptance of the "naturalness of death" is not an endorsement of the practices of assisted suicide and euthanasia. "As a morality of dying and death grounded in Christ's humble acceptance of crucifixion, this life has no place for the self-assertion of physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia."<sup>22</sup> Engelhardt speaks of them as sinful by nature and speaks of the need to resist "physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia temptations."<sup>23</sup> He makes it clear that the ethical approach of traditional Christianity, despite resisting the vitalism of contemporary society, excludes the practices of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Where, then, does this leave Christians when confronting suffering, dying, and death? Traditional Christianity is fundamentally opposed to physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. The traditional Christian life has always experienced such

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<sup>20</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 322. Engelhardt supports this position by reference to St. Basil the Great saying, "Within such constraints, the treatment of pain should be acknowledged as acceptable, as St. Basil the Great understood: '...with mandrake doctors give us sleep; with opium they lull violent pain.' Analgesics may even help the ill to pray. Suffering is not in itself good, even though pain can be our offering to God. It is appropriate to use medicine to avoid suffering. One may not only pray to avoid the temptations that for some may be associated with suffering, but one may also act to avoid the temptations suffering may bring, rather than to confront them ascetically."

<sup>21</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 309-51.

<sup>22</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 331. It should be noted that Engelhardt regards these two actions as morally equivalent and as a result condemns them (Christian ethics) or permits them (secular ethics) in tandem. Therefore, in treating Engelhardt's approach I will follow suit.

<sup>23</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 319.

a death as a separation from the humility and holiness of the life and death of Christ. This opposition to suicide, assisted suicide, and euthanasia is rooted in the experience of the Christian life as a life directed to humility. To be a Christian is to take on Christ, not only His life, but also His submissive death on the Cross (Romans 6). To avoid confusing traditional Christian and contemporary, post-traditional Christian and secular moral understandings of murder, killing, and suicide, one must recognize the humble submission involved in acquiring moral and spiritual health.<sup>24</sup>

In dealing with end of life issues, Engelhardt focuses on accepting the will of God and understanding that the person's death is ultimately the responsibility of God.<sup>25</sup> To attempt to end the person's life in advance of that time is—like attempting to prolong it past that time—morally wrong. The submission of the human biological existence to the spiritual purpose of human life is the key of medical ethics that parallels the person's submission to the will of God.<sup>26</sup> In choosing to end their own life prior to its natural occurrence, people place their will before that of God's and repeat the fundamental sin of Adam. It is the Christian faith that enables persons to recognize these actions of suicide and euthanasia for the sin that they are.

By way of contrast, the secular society has no such normative criteria. The fundamental principle of permission, upon which all secular ethics and bioethics is based, entails no such prohibition of suicide or euthanasia. The “thin” ethics of society permit all people to act according to their own “thick” ethics so long as they do not harm other people in doing so. This

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<sup>24</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 331-32.

<sup>25</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 324.

<sup>26</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 327-32. It is this submission to the will of God that Engelhardt uses to make an extensive argument in defense of certain martyrs. His argument is that in as much as these saints were submitting to God and doing what it was that God wanted them to do, then they should not be considered as having committed suicide. This seems to be a rather twisted argument in which he even goes so far as defending St. Martinian (the account of which is relayed favorably by St Nicholas Velimirovich) who, in the process of defending his called life of chastity, avoided a temptress by throwing himself “into the sea intending to drown himself.” p. 328 Engelhardt declares that “such behavior is not suicidal but an exemplary affirmation of life: the pursuit of eternal life.” p. 328.

has a very significant impact on end of life issues. Since it is the dying individual who is most directly and most profoundly impacted by the ethical decision, she or he is the one who is free to use her or his own ethical criteria to make the judgment. In so far as the individual does not force someone else into doing something without consent (i.e. force a traditional Christian doctor to give the individual a lethal injection) the individual is free to die in whatever way she or he chooses. Engelhardt states,

If there is no difference in principle between intending someone's death and merely allowing it, there will be no absolute moral bar against killing an individual on request. Indeed, the principle of permission does not bar terminating the life of an individual who was once competent and (1) who is not competent and (2) will not again be competent, (3) where it appears by clear and convincing evidence that the person would have wished not only to be allowed to die but to have death expedited in the circumstances in question. Only involuntary euthanasia, not nonvoluntary euthanasia (i.e., euthanasia that is not explicitly refused, but can be presumed to be in accord with a now incompetent individual's past wishes), can be forbidden by an appeal to the principles of permission or beneficence. Permission is not violated and one appears to be acting in the person's best interests.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the primacy of permission and the emphasis on individual autonomy, there is a virtually absolute nature to individual negative rights. No one in society has justification for keeping people from killing themselves if they want to do so. The nature of the relationship between persons in secular society—that of moral strangers—prohibits any imposition of control on society by those who reject physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. The “thin” ethical nature of the society makes it impossible for society to interfere with such a private decision rooted in such deeply held “thick” ethical beliefs of the individual.

If personal freedom and human dignity are central to secular morality, the conclusion is drawn: it is appropriate for secular health care and educational

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<sup>27</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 354.

institutions to support the acceptance of individual, intimate decisions about death, including physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.<sup>28</sup>

There are no common normative grounds within secular society that would function in such a way as to make it right for society to prohibit physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. Such action would be “secularly unjustifiable coercive power.”<sup>29</sup> A libertarian secular society must “allow individuals to agree to morally diverse visions of health care” so that they can “collaborate freely with consenting others.”<sup>30</sup>

These few citations, of many others available, make it clear that for Engelhardt the Christian bioethical approach and the secular bioethical approach are very different in their treatment of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. This difference is rooted in the fundamental difference in their treatment of death. It is in light of the ultimate goal of human life that Christian bioethics makes judgments about the meaning of end of life care, thus concluding that physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia are immoral actions. For Engelhardt, the Christian need for conversion, repentance, and turning to God is of primary importance. Lacking such normative criteria, society is obliged to permit such free action to occur according to each individual’s beliefs about death. Thus he states,

[a]fter all, the Christian view of life and death is deeply at odds with the secular. Though a nonbeliever might affirm the goodness of a peaceful unforeseen death, Christians have traditionally prayed for an anticipated death (e.g., “a subitanea improvisa morte, libera nos, Domine”), recognizing that the most significant threat from serious illness is not death but dying without repentance, unreconciled with God. . . . In addition, Christians who understand that the Cross is the way to

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<sup>28</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 312.

<sup>29</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 357.

<sup>30</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 358.

resurrection and eternal life will undoubtedly have a more complex or at least different understanding of suffering than those who are not Christian.<sup>31</sup>

Having established a dualistic view of end of life ethics, Engelhardt's approach clarifies how these two ethical systems should interact. Again, the ethical key in the larger society is that of permission, which, Engelhardt points out, includes the permission to protest and express dissatisfaction with actions and behaviors. The Christian rejection of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia should not be compromised by society's need to allow it. He points out that what is required in such a libertarian society is toleration, not acceptance.

Having already established that traditional Christianity is against these actions, and that Christians recognize them as wrong behavior in their community, Engelhardt insists that the Christian community within any libertarian society should be free to condemn such behavior.<sup>32</sup> Christians should not be forced to accept it as morally right behavior by being forced to be silent about it. Contemporary liberal cosmopolitan society mistakes toleration (which Christian community must do in a religiously pluralistic society) with acceptance. When one tolerates something it is still appropriate behavior to make a judgment that it is immoral and wrong. One can judge it as a wrong behavior and recognize that the endorsement of that wrong behavior, whether by open endorsement or silent acquiescence, is wrong as well. However, to accept something requires more than mere toleration. To accept it means to "[forgo] the judgment of wrongness."<sup>33</sup> It is to recognize it as a choice that is wrong for oneself, but perhaps the right choice of action for other persons. To tolerate something is to recognize its wrongness for all

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<sup>31</sup> Engelhardt, "Infinite Expectations and Finite Resources," 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 312.

<sup>33</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 312.

people, while recognizing that it is they who will have to make the decision about whether to engage in such wrong behavior or not.

So, too, when a person is dying in intractable pain, begging for physician-assisted suicide, the Orthodox Christian must out of love attempt to ameliorate the pain while resolutely denying the request. In such circumstances, these denials may appear as immoral affronts, not only to those who ask but to those in the culture generally who will see the denial as unfeeling, if not disrespectful and outrageous. In a culture that demands mutual respect in the sense of avoiding judgment of another's way of life, traditional Christianity will fail to respect the core commitments of the liberal cosmopolitan ethos. When traditional Christian health care professionals refuse to be involved in core elements of the liberal cosmopolitan understandings of decent health care, it will be clear that traditional Christians stand for moral views at odds with the health care values of the surrounding society. By being true to their own moral commitments, traditional Christians in liberal cosmopolitan terms will appear profoundly insensitive to the understandings and commitments of others, if not enemies of civil probity.<sup>34</sup>

This is the manner in which Engelhardt sees faith functioning in secular society regarding the topic of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. They are recognized as wrong within the Christian community. They can not be prohibited as wrong by secular society, and therefore people who wish to freely engage in such actions must be allowed to do so. But the Christian community, informed by faith as to the morally wrong nature of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, must also be allowed to protest such actions. The tolerance forced upon the Christian community by a libertarian society should not be allowed to result in acceptance.

### **Universal Health Care**

The role that faith has on the rather individual ethical judgments regarding physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia in Engelhardt's work can be seen to be similar to the role that faith has on the more social ethical judgments regarding universal health care, though it has a slightly different result. In this matter, it is most beneficial to begin with the concept of universal

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<sup>34</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 367.



health care in secular ethics and proceed from there to show how such a concept functions within a Christian approach to health care.

As noted in the previous section, much of Engelhardt's secular bioethics revolved around the idea of permission. "The principle of permission is the source of authority when moral strangers collaborate, because they do not share a common understanding of fairness or of the good."<sup>35</sup> The pluralistic ethical nature of society results in numerous pluralistic understandings of what constitutes justice and fairness. This lack of common fairness results in a social inability to make a distinction between the "unfortunate" and the "unfair" lack of medical care.<sup>36</sup> In a social setting which could identify the lack of some medical care as "unfair," there would be a social obligation to provide such care. If there were an entitlement of the individual, a positive right, to medical health care, then it would entail an obligation on the part of society to ensure that the individual receives such care.<sup>37</sup> Such a right would include a claim on the resources of others. But Engelhardt holds that to make such a judgment of an unrealized right one must make judgments from within a particular worldview. Each different understanding of the morally good life will result in a different understanding of the goal of health care, which means there will be a different understanding of what health care individuals are entitled to receive.

Taking a particular position in these matters requires endorsing a particular moral vision. Outside a particular view of the good life, needs do not create rights to the services or goods of others. Indeed, outside of a particular moral vision there is not canonical means for distinguishing desires from needs.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 382.

<sup>36</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 382.

<sup>37</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 383.

<sup>38</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 383.

Since there is no way in which to distinguish between desires and needs, there are no criteria by which society can distinguish between a lack of health care that is “unfair” and one that is “unfortunate.” Without the ability to make such a distinction, there exist no criteria by which a society can determine any positive individual right to health care. Without such right there is no obligation on the part of society to provide health care.

Engelhardt does not say that society cannot institute some form of social medical care, but this fundamental lack of an individual positive right to health care has at least three important impacts on such a social system. First, there are no inherent minimal criteria that are social obligations for inclusion in such a medical system. The social agreement regarding provision of health care is not a social realization of some fundamental human rights. It is a social agreement to certain benefits and burdens regarding the costs and rewards of participating in the social health care system.<sup>39</sup> The criteria for such a social agreement are open for the society to choose.

Secondly, any social health care system will have to be a two-tier system.<sup>40</sup> Engelhardt insists that even if such a social health care system were instituted, it could not ethically place a universal limit on health care. Again, Engelhardt’s primary principle of permission founds his conviction that persons who have the financial resources to purchase additional medical care cannot be morally prohibited from doing so. He insists that while it may be permissible to institute a social system of health care that insures a minimal level of health care for all members of society, it is unacceptable for that social system to limit the freedom of others. In terms of individual rights it could be expressed as follows: no person has an inherent positive right to

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<sup>39</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 382-87.

<sup>40</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., "Why a Two-Tier System of Health Care Delivery Is Morally Unavoidable," in *Rationing America's Medical Care: The Oregon Plan and Beyond*, ed. Martin A. Strosberg (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), 196-207.

health care and even if society institutes a health care system that guarantees a minimum level of benefits it can not structure the system in such a way that it interferes with the negative rights of persons who wish to pursue health care according to their own values and ethical convictions.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, in part as a practical result of the second point, any social health care system will not be a system of equality of health. In addition to the necessity of allowing the freedom of individuals who wish to exercise their individual rights, there is the problem of evaluation. There is no way for society to institute some measure by which to assess health. In practical terms, how does one make decisions about which is healthier: a diabetic, an epileptic, a paraplegic, a victim of severe blood pressure, or a pre-mature infant? Such examples do not even begin to include such issues as age, social status, or multiple health problems. Without being able to make such an evaluation it is not possible for society to decide where to devote resources in order to make sure there is an equality of health. In his chapter “Rights to Health Care, Social Justice, and Fairness in Health Care Allocations: Frustrations in the Face of Finitude,” Engelhardt provides his own summary of the principles of health care allocation. Since it provides a summary of many different aspects regarding such allocation, it is worth quoting at length.

#### PRINCIPLE OF HEALTH CARE ALLOCATION

People are free to purchase the health care they can buy and to provide the health care others wish to give or to sell.

A. The principle of permission allows persons with common resources to act beneficently by creating a package of health care that can be guaranteed to others, thus creating basic expectations for care and treatment. The principle recognizes the following secular moral constraints:

1. A private tier of health care is morally unavoidable.
2. A public or communal tier of health care may, but need not, be created out of communal funds.

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<sup>41</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 375-412.

3. There is no canonical, secularly discoverable normative comparison or ranking of health care needs and desires with other needs and desires, or among health care needs and desires; all such orderings or rankings must be created. There is no secularly obligatory rule of rescue that is independent of particular agreement.
4. Health care in almost all morally defensible circumstances will be multitier so that when a basic package is provided for the indigent, more ample or better quality basic as well as luxury care may be purchased by the affluent.
5. An all-encompassing, single-payer plan, as has existed in Canada, is morally impermissible because it violates fundamental principles of secular morality. It is in this sense immoral.
6. Inequalities in health care are morally inescapable because individuals are free and differ in the scope of their needs and resources.
7. Whether or not they are geographically located, given the limited secular moral authority of large-scale governments spanning pluralist societies, communities (e.g., the Roman Catholic) may develop their autonomous health care systems so that they need not be involved in morally objectionable health care services (e.g., be involved in abortion and euthanasia) and so that such services may be forbidden in their own facilities.

B. Maxim: Give to those who need or desire health care that which they, you, or others are willing to pay for or provide gratis.

This principle, like all the principles in this volume, summarizes a cluster of moral issues salient in the peaceable collaboration of moral strangers. It also underscores that the foundation of the secular moral authority binding moral strangers is derived from the permission of individuals. The principle of health care allocation does not disclose what concretely is good, proper, praiseworthy, or morally appropriate for individuals to provide to others in need of health care. That can only be discovered within the right community of moral friends.<sup>42</sup>

Engelhardt's Christian treatment of universal health care is even more clearly rooted in his general approach to bioethics than his treatment of euthanasia. For health care, as it is for all other aspects of life, the primary focus must be "spiritual" in that it serves the noetic experience that ultimately leads to the goal of human existence—union with God. This means that while there are intrinsic goals of medicine, such as preserving life and relieving pain, they exist in the larger context of care for the person spiritually and morally.

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<sup>42</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 402-03.

The preservation of life and the avoidance of suffering are not overriding goals. Christ charges us to visit the sick (Matt 25:36), not to secure the best available physicians and health care for the sick. . . . then as now the pursuit of health and a longer life through medicine could become an all-consuming project, deflecting both the giver and the receiver of care away from the pursuit of the kingdom of God. St. Basil the Great in question 55 of his Long Rules makes this clear: we are not to immerse ourselves wholeheartedly in the pursuit of health through medicine.<sup>43</sup>

From Engelhardt's perspective there is currently a cultural obsession that neglects the spiritual aspect of life to concentrate on physical existence. In this respect, as in many others, the morality of contemporary society "is at odds with traditional Christianity."<sup>44</sup> Rather than placing health care within the context of a good life, formed and informed by the noetic experience of God, contemporary society becomes obsessed with this worldly existence and a resultant obsession with keeping people as healthy as possible for as long as possible, relieving them of suffering by whatever means necessary. Society's failure to perceive and understand the fundamental aspect of the human person—the person's intimate relationship with God—results in the failure of society to provide appropriate health care to the person. It is this conviction on the part of Engelhardt that leads not only to his sectarian approach to bioethics, but also to his rejection of "a single, all-encompassing state system, when its morality is at odds with traditional Christianity."<sup>45</sup> For Christians to immerse themselves in such a system would undermine the fundamental approach of Christianity to the issue of health care. Engelhardt states,

An encompassing health care system combined with a cultural obsession with health care becomes a major spiritual threat, because health care touches all passages of life likely to be integral to a cosmopolitan liberal society's attempt to establish fully its moral vision. It will serve as a vehicle for reforming religious

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<sup>43</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 379.

<sup>44</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 379.

<sup>45</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 379.

understandings of sexuality, reproduction, and death. Such an all-encompassing health care system will be the powerful embodiment of an anti-Christian ethos.<sup>46</sup>

Engelhardt's view is that the institution of some all-encompassing health care system will force true Christians to engage in anti-Christian activity and will prevent them from pursuing health care that is in service to a holy life. Engelhardt sees the denial of a universal healthcare system, especially a one-payer system, as fundamentally linked to the freedom that is necessary for traditional Christianity to pursue the good that it knows, without being forced into doing evil. He considers such claims that "centrally enshrine commitments to social justice" as "hostile to traditional Christianity."<sup>47</sup> To institute such a universal health care system at the level of secular society would deny Christians the ability to practice health care the way that they know it ought to be practiced—in service to the person's spirituality and relationship with God.

For Engelhardt, it is necessary to insure freedom within the secular sphere of bioethics in order for the Christians to be free to practice bioethics within the context of a true Christian life. However, once that freedom is established, practicing health care according to Christian convictions is quite distinct. The Christian moral obligations to care for the neighbor and the stranger will direct the actions of the Christian in such a manner that the way Christians practice health care will be very different from the way that non-Christians do so. There is a moral obligation to practice health care in this manner, but because it can only be recognized from within the moral community of Christianity it must be exercised in a sectarian manner by a community located in a libertarian society. It is this sort of health care community that Engelhardt believes to be the goal of Christian healthcare. By providing such a sectarian health care community Christians will be able to provide and receive health care in a manner that

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<sup>46</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 379.

<sup>47</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 380.

fosters their true human nature. “In an age that is post-Christian if not anti-Christian, traditional Christians will need to seek to provide care while both avoiding forbidden interventions (e.g., abortion) and giving care with a clear and particular religious character.”<sup>48</sup>

As an example of how this would work Engelhardt portrays a traditional Christian hospice that would

offer an opportunity to care in contexts in which those approaching death can be helped to turn from themselves and to Christ. To provide hospice as would the holy unmercenary physicians will require remaining as free as possible from the morality of the surrounding society. This may necessitate refusing any government payments for services that would disallow an uncompromisingly particularist character for such health care institutions. After all, a Christian hospice should with love and patience attempt to bring all under its roof to repentance and conversion. To provide health care in such circumstances will require robust acts of charity. The requirements of the Gospel leave little justification for feeling at ease if one has not done all one can to help those in need. After all, Christ demands that we give our very coats to those in need. "The one who hath two tunics, let him share with him who hath not" (Luke 3:11). At the same time, one must not confuse the demand of charity with a demand for an egalitarian, all-encompassing health care system. Christ calls us to be good Samaritans, to turn personally to persons in need. Christ did not call us to use the coercive force of the state to ensure that others will be cared for by an anonymous, secular welfare system.<sup>49</sup>

In this passage Engelhardt goes on to insist that a uniform health care system, which out of envy was committed to a strictly egalitarian level of health, would be evil because: it would concern itself with those who have more and would force them to give to those who have less; it would make health care a matter of overriding concern; it would “invite patients and care-givers to enter into a medical morality hostile to traditional Christian commitments;” it would constrain what should be free manners of Christian care; and it would prevent “ascetical works of charity”

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<sup>48</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 381.

<sup>49</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 381.

that could lead to holiness.<sup>50</sup> For Engelhardt, to subjugate a Christian health care system to a secular system of universal health care would undermine its nature. “The goal should be to care for others in ways that do not involve compromises with one’s commitments as a Christian. Indeed, one should seek circumstances under which giving care to others will nurture and not threaten those commitments.”<sup>51</sup>

Because of this rejection of a state-instituted universal health care system, and this emphasis on a Christian obligation to care for the patient, Engelhardt seems to envision a world-wide Orthodox health care system that is free to practice health care according to the moral commitments of what it means to be a traditional Christian.<sup>52</sup> “Such a health care system should provide a basic level of care nested within a spiritual life for both staff and patients.”<sup>53</sup> Even in such a system Engelhardt maintains that the focus must be spiritual and personal in nature.

The response to those in need must be an expression of personal love – of love for the poor and of love for God. The focus must be on the character of the charity, the character of the love that motivates the giver. If the giver gives other than out of a love that sets others within an overriding love of God, the giving will not lead to the kingdom of heaven. "And if I dole out all of my goods, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but I have not love, I am being profited nothing" (1 Cor 13:3). The provision of health care should be as saliently Christian as that offered by the holy unmercenaries.<sup>54</sup>

Engelhardt’s Christian approach to universal health care has an approach that, again, focuses on the freedom of Christians to live according to Christian norms. But the practical result of this is quite different. Engelhardt seems to think that the status quo regarding freedom

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<sup>50</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 381.

<sup>51</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 381.

<sup>52</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 382.

<sup>53</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 382.

<sup>54</sup> Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*, 380.



of health care at the social level is what is necessary for Christians to practice health care according to their own beliefs. His solution to the Christian obligation to care for the sick is to set up a separate health care system—a truly sectarian healthcare system within a libertarian society. But whereas he sees euthanasia being only tolerated, with the Christian obligation to protest it and the social obligation to allow that protest, he seems to see the social health care system as accepted by Christian health care. Engelhardt does not seem to advocate Christian protesting of the social status quo in order to get all people to provide health care for the poor. His rationale is that to do so successfully would be to intrude “thick” norms as normative criteria for social structures. For Engelhardt this undermines a libertarian approach to social ethics.

As was seen in the treatment of euthanasia, Engelhardt’s Christian bioethics are sectarian in relationship to the society’s non-Christian bioethics. It is this relationship that he wishes to maintain. He desires to maintain this sectarian existence in a libertarian society in order to enable the Christian community to live what it recognizes to be the right life. Such a libertarian society would also allow the community to speak out and protest against what it recognized as wrong behavior. But with the issue of universal health care there seems to be less of a distinction between what Engelhardt considers tolerance and what he considers to be acceptance. It seems that for Engelhardt part of this difference is due to the nature of the freedom operative at the secular assessment of the action. While euthanasia is justified within society by virtue of negative rights (freedom from constraint in some voluntary action), universal health care would have to be justified within society by virtue of a positive right (entitlement to some fundamental good), and would necessarily “coerce” the unwilling affluent to aid the indigent.

An additional difference that is important in his treatment of the two issues is the threat that Engelhardt ascertains they pose to practicing health care according to traditional

Christianity. The issue of euthanasia is quite individually focused and thus poses little threat to the community of traditional Christianity. For society to allow such action will result in harm coming to those who chose to engage in it, but will not prevent traditional Christians to live a good Christian life. However, the issue of universal health care is quite different in that it is focused beyond the individual and even beyond the community. The focus of such an issue on society at large poses a threat to traditional Christianity in as much as adopting some form of universal health care might prevent the community of traditional Christianity from administering health care in what it knows to be the morally right way. Such a social structure may prevent traditional Christians from doing what they know to be good and may force them into behavior that they know to be evil.

### **Summary**

From the consideration of both euthanasia and universal health care, three things about the role of faith in medical ethics are apparent in Engelhardt's approach. First, the primacy of the spiritual aspect of Christian ethics—the noetic experience realized through Christian faith—results in its extremely sectarian nature when considering the normative ethical judgments of Christianity and those of non-Christianity. Second, those of other communities who do not share that aspect of Christian faith cannot share the Christian approach to ethics. Thus society, in order to permit persons to pursue their own perception of the good, must operate according to the principle of permission. Third, and most important, it is this separate nature, resulting from Christian faith, that determines how the Christian community functions in society. Engelhardt wants to make sure Christians can live freely according to their faith convictions. In order to do this Engelhardt believes that it is necessary to maximize individual freedom by maximizing individual negative rights in a social setting—the principle of permission.

For euthanasia this means freedom from being forced to engage in it and freedom from being forced into a health care system that includes that. It is also important to be free to protest against it. For universal health care this freedom means freedom from being forced into a health system that engages in particular practices that are contrary to Christian bioethics. But, unlike the issue of euthanasia, Engelhardt does not seem to advocate a need to protest against failure to care for the poor. Instead, the protest that Engelhardt seems to advocate is a protest against a monolithic state health care system such as Canada's. For Engelhardt it is important to avoid a single universal health system that would compromise traditional Christian health care norms. The result of both of these is Engelhardt's advocating a system of sectarian Christian health care facilities and systems practicing good medicine. In these systems, health care would be subordinated to a more holistic care of the human person, even at the same time that they existed within a libertarian society that would have to allow all communities to practice health care according to their own moral beliefs.

Having seen how faith impacts Engelhardt's approach to these issues, it is appropriate to turn in the next chapter to a consideration of the same issues in the work of Stanley Hauerwas.

CHAPTER FIVE  
HAUERWAS' APPROACH TO  
EUTHANASIA AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

This chapter will examine Hauerwas' approach to the issues of euthanasia and universal health care in light of his understanding of the role of Christian ethics in contemporary religiously pluralistic society. It will begin with a very brief consideration of the treatment of Hauerwas up to this point by summarizing his understanding of ethics, Christian ethics and the role that Christian ethics have in a religiously pluralistic society. The second section will provide a short outline of how he understands Christian health care ethics. Following this, the third and fourth section of this chapter will demonstrate how this approach is manifested in Hauerwas' treatment of the issues of euthanasia and universal health care.

It should be noted here, as it was in the beginning of treating Hauerwas' work, that the nature of Hauerwas' work makes an examination of any particular ethical issue problematic. His focus on ethical character (with the associated concentration on vision, narrative, and community) rather than on particular ethical issues requires any consideration of a specific issue to be drawn from numerous sources that are located in various contexts each with a slightly different focus. While this will make the consideration of euthanasia and universal health care difficult, it is not as problematic in Hauerwas' more general approach to health care ethics. His attentiveness to narrative and community enables him to engage in health care ethics by considering those involved in health care (both patients and providers) as a particular community with its own narrative. What will be seen as the key theme in this health care narrative is that caring for the patient is more important than curing his or her ailment.

## Summary of Hauerwas' Ethics

As we have seen in chapter one, the beginning point for Hauerwas is that ethics is not about what we are to do but about who we are to be. It is about character which is constituted by vision which is formed by a narrative preserved within and conveyed by a specific community. It is because of this “rootedness” in a specific community that there is no “universal” morality or ethics. Each ethical outlook is from within a particular community that is structured by a particular narrative that results in a particular perception that forms the moral character of both the individual and the community as a whole. “All ethical reflection occurs relative to a particular time and place.”<sup>1</sup> From this approach Hauerwas rejects the notion that there is any real “metaethics.” He sees any claim that such metaethics exist as yet one more ethical approach rooted within a particular community that has as its story that their understanding of ethics is an understanding from outside of any story.

For, ironically, what liberal societies cannot acknowledge is that we did not choose the story that we should have no story except the story we have chosen from the position where we allegedly had no story. Therefore, modern liberal societies cannot acknowledge that they are coercive, since they derive their legitimation from the presumption that no one, if they have appropriate social and economic power, is coerced to be a member of such social orders.<sup>2</sup>

All the same, a consideration of Hauerwas' approach to the normative ethics of Christianity can be shown to entail certain assumptions regarding the nature of “the Good” and how, if at all, we can come to know that good. Hauerwas' normative ethical methodology is best understood as a form of virtue ethics in which Christ is the model of a life of virtue. We are to make ourselves like Jesus and to make Jesus' story our own. The moral character embodied by

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 167.

Christ is formed by a particular vision that is generated by the narrative of his life and death. It is a narrative that is conveyed by and preserved within the Christian community. Hauerwas' insistence on Christ as the morally normative way of being and his insistence on the Christian story of his death and resurrection as the right story by which to pursue that moral character can only be undertaken within a metaethical context of supernatural metaethical absolutism. There is a good that is common to all people—all people are called to be like Jesus and make his story their own—but that good can only come to be known through the revelation conveyed in the Christian narrative.

His self-limitation to Christian ethics, necessary with respect to his understanding of ethics as rooted within the agent's particular narrative, eliminates (in his mind) the possibility of his engaging in any ethics other than Christian ethics, thus eliminating as well any approach to making some ethical narrative the norm for all of society.

Chapter two made clear Hauerwas' understanding of Christian ethics. Within Christian ethics it is the character of Christ that Christians are called to be, which they do by adopting a Christian vision which is, in turn, achieved by accepting the Christian narrative as conveyed by the Christian community. Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of what it means to be in the world but not of it and it is this that becomes the moral norm. For Hauerwas, what is key about the imitation of Christ is that, like Christ, Christians are to proclaim the "Kingdom of God" by living it within the kingdom of this world. The "Kingdom of God" is the *telos* toward which the lives of individual Christians as well as the Christian community as a whole are directed. Christians do this by abandoning the false narrative of the world in order to make Jesus' story our own. "Being a Christian" is to be incorporated into a community constituted by the stories of God, which, as a consequence, necessarily puts one in tension with the world that does not share those

stories.”<sup>3</sup> As Jesus did, Christians will live in a certain amount of tension and conflict with the worldly kingdom and Christians must respond to this conflict in the same way that Jesus did. They are to respond non-violently to the unjust persecution. They are to remain resolute in their faith and suffer with an ultimate trust in God, knowing that there are goods greater than this earthly existence, and believing in the triumph of good over evil.

Christian ethics is the work of the community that helps Christians see the world rightly in order to become more like Christ, and in doing this Christian ethics teaches the community to live as the “Kingdom of God.” The ethical life is a life of living like Christ, particularly in the Christian encounter with evil. Like Christ, Christians are supposed to live faithful and loving lives even in the face of a world that oppresses them. Like Christ on the cross, Christians are to be faithful to the gospel message so that even in the Christian encounter with evil, Christians are to be non-violent—trusting God in all things. The Christian community is unique in how it understands the world in that its role is not to change society but to live the gospel.

Chapter three showed how Hauerwas envisions Christian ethics functioning within a pluralistic society. Due to “the Fall” and the resultant brokenness of creation, all of the narratives of the world which place their trust in human power are false narratives that must be rejected in order to accept the Christian narrative which places its trust in God. It is this change of narratives that is at the center of Christian ethics. In a pluralistic society, Christians and the Christian community are to be models for the rest of the world. Christians, rather than attempting to use their power to change the world on the world’s terms of persuasion, coercion, and force, should manifest the kingdom as Jesus did—by living exemplary lives which others can emulate. There is a fundamental difference between how the world lives and how Christians

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<sup>3</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 137.

live. There is a “rightness” about living from within the Christian narrative that is lost without the narrative of Jesus as the model of virtue. Doing the same things without the Jesus narrative does not achieve the *telos* of Christian ethics. The focus of the Christian and the Christian community needs to be centered *ad intra* on how to live the life of the gospel, not *ad extra* on how to convey the message in order most effectively to change society for the better. To the extent that the church maintains the right focus, it will succeed in helping others to make the narrative of Jesus their own. Thus the transformation of society will be a side effect of living lives rooted in the Christian community that is faithful to the narrative of Jesus.

Fundamental to the narrative of Jesus is how to respond to worldly evil and the resultant suffering. Christians are not supposed to use violence to attempt to eliminate such evil. Like Jesus, Christians are to live the gospel and suffer non-violently in perfect virtue with faith in God’s promise to bring the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Seeking to bring about the “Kingdom of God” through personal power and efforts is a betrayal of the very nature of the Christian narrative. Most especially it betrays trusting Jesus as the moral model who trusted God completely even in the face of utter loss.<sup>5</sup> When this happens the church no longer serves as a community of witness to the nature of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 153.

<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas sees the refusal to use force or coercion as one of the key ways in which Jesus is to serve as a moral model. He points out that Jesus had the power to bring about the kingdom but refused to use it, trusting that God’s plan would be fulfilled through the proclamation of the gospel rather than through the use of power. It is this that should serve as the model of the Christian life in which Christians proclaim the gospel, trusting that the “Kingdom of God” will not be realized through the use of their own power but through God’s guidance.



The role of the church “is to be the church.”<sup>6</sup> This means that Christian ethics, of necessity, will have an inward focus that teaches the community how to live the gospel and be the prophetic voice in the face of evil rather than having an outward focus of how to solve the problem by changing the way society works. Thus Christians must seek to live the gospel in the *status quo* structure of “the world as it is” without attempting to “Christianize” that structure. It is wrong even to claim that one is doing Christian ethics if one attempts to make “Christian ethics” the moral norm of society, for at that point one is trusting in the control of human action instead of trusting in God’s control (since one is attempting to use the power of the Christian community to change the world). In taking such an approach of trying to change society one has adopted the worldly narrative and vision of the use of power to achieve the good.

It is not the job of the Christian community to run the earthly kingdom. Its trust that God is ultimately in control, even in the face of seemingly unconquerable evil, is the one aspect that makes the Christian community unique. As soon as it attempts to exert control, it shifts from a faithful trust in God as the bringer of the kingdom to an idolatrous elevation of itself as the source of that kingdom. Rather than trusting that the will of God will be done, it seeks to impose its own understanding of that will, and thus implicitly abandons faith in divine providence. This is an attempt to control the world that betrays the church’s trust in God’s control and makes the Christian church simply another community seeking to use its power to make the world correspond to its vision of the way things ought to be. It is this perception of control that is key to understanding Hauerwas’ approach to medical ethics.

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<sup>6</sup> Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

## Ethics in the Medical Care of Others

In the beginning of his book *Suffering Presence*, Hauerwas states that “As these essays will make clear I am not even sure if I believe in ‘medical ethics’ as a specifiable discipline or area.”<sup>7</sup> Despite this statement, much of his written material addresses medical issues. For Hauerwas the treatment of such issues is done from within a holistic ethical understanding of the moral character of Christians and of how they are to live in the world. In as much as living in the world includes medical treatment, medicine is one topic that is addressed within his “general” Christian ethics of community and society. The fundamental unity of his ethics results in an interweaving of his ethical issues. “Thus what appears to be a book about medicine turns out really to be book about social and political theory. I hope that will not seem odd to those who have graciously taken the time to read through these essays.”<sup>8</sup>

As was the case with his “general” ethics, Hauerwas’ “medical ethics” advances the same sort of ethical methodology that focuses on the moral character of the person, his or her vision, the associated narrative, and the surrounding community rather than focusing on the moral evaluation of specific actions.<sup>9</sup> He insists that health care ethics is not so much a matter of

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that, as was the case in his “misuse” of the term “natural law,” his use of several key terms in medical ethics is inconsistent with the understanding of those terms in the writings of many other ethicists. One such example that is of particular relevance may be found in his treatment of end of life issues. As seen in the following example, he misuses the terms “ordinary” and “extraordinary” to describe the technological difficulty of medical treatments and thus rejects the concepts as helpful in making end of life decisions.

The question of when life is worth prolonging cannot be avoided. Of course there has been much reflection on this issue in the past, such as Pius XII’s use of the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means; he says only the former are obligatory in the care of the sick. The problem with such a distinction is its highly relative nature: what is ordinary procedure for

making specific medical choices as it is a matter of discerning the proper character for the medical community. And Hauerwas maintains that this consists of both how the community cares for the suffering patient and how the patient lives within the community. The patient, in the midst of his or her sickness and illness, lives as an example of how to live in the face of evil without losing trust that life has meaning and without losing faith in God's providence. From this approach, the character of the health care community and the individuals' relationships within the community are particularly important. Hauerwas insists that the character of the health care community should focus on **caring** for the patient rather than on **curing** the ailment.

This fundamental differentiation between care and cure is one that is rooted in the understanding of control. When one recognizes that the continual preservation of life is impossible, one recognizes that medicine is not as much a matter of being in control of health as it is a matter of caring for those who are ill. And this is done trusting that there is a significance for caring for these people even when their cure is beyond control. In this respect the medical community and the Christian community share a vision of recognizing themselves as not being in control but trusting that there is a meaning to their caring for people even in the face of death.

Unfortunately, the character of *modern* medicine is one that is in conflict with both the Christian faith and the original character of health care, both of which focus on caring for the person who is ill. If the focus of medicine is cure, then ultimately medicine will always lose because everyone eventually dies. Modern medicine, despite its focus on providing a cure for all threats to life, does not control death. If the goal of medicine is the preservation of physical

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one kind of patient would be extraordinary for another. Modern medicine has been primarily characterized by making ordinary what was extraordinary but yet a year or a few short months before. The issue is not really whether we can draw a distinction between "ordinary" and "extraordinary," but whether in all circumstances even ordinary measures ought to be employed to keep the hopelessly ill patient alive .

Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 177.

existence, then the only thing that medicine does is spend a vast amount of resources postponing the inevitable. Instead of having cure as its goal, Hauerwas maintains that the goal of medicine is care of the patient. Thus when considering medical ethics one must look at what the medical community should do in order to achieve its goal of caring for people.

Hauerwas sees modern medicine in contemporary society as fundamentally wrong in its focus on curing rather than caring. This wrong focus stems from failing to see life in relationship to any greater reality. The result is a vitalism in which physical existence comes to be understood as the greatest good of human life. In addition, modern medicine sees itself as being in control of and responsible for the physical well-being of the patients. In as much as modern medicine elevates itself to the level of “being in control” of the ultimate good of physical existence, it makes an idol of humanity in general, and medical care in particular.<sup>10</sup>

Sickness challenges our most cherished presumption that we are or at least can be in control of our existence. Sickness creates the problem of “anthropodicy” because it challenges our most precious and profound belief that humanity has in fact become god. Against the backdrop of such a belief, we conclude that sickness should not exist.<sup>11</sup>

This emphasis on the meaninglessness of sickness and on the “control” of modern medicine results in a primary devotion to the cure of illness rather than the care of the patient.

With its focus on cure rather than care, modern medicine wrongly makes suffering the ultimate “problem” of health care and the elimination of that suffering the ultimate purpose of health care. Suffering has no point in a worldview that regards healthy physical existence as the

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<sup>10</sup> One should note that this is a specific example of the issue of control as noted in the previous section of this chapter. One cannot be a faithful Christian and presume to control some aspect of the world since doing so attempts to exert one’s own will rather than accepting God’s.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 62.

greatest good. Illness, pain and suffering are regarded as meaningless and therefore they ought not exist.

The ideology that is institutionalized in medicine requires that we interpret all illness as pointless. By “pointless” I mean that it can play no role in helping us live our lives well. Illness is an absurdity in a history formed by the commitment to overcome all evils that potentially we can control. I suspect that this is one of the reasons we have so much difficulty dealing with chronic illness – it should not exist but it does. It would almost be better to eliminate the subjects of such illness rather than to have them remind us that our project to eliminate illness has made little progress.<sup>12</sup>

Contemporary health care can be seen to take this wrong approach in as much as it devotes so much of its research and energy to developing increasingly more effective ways to eliminate all suffering by focusing on eliminating its physical causes. In medical terms, Hauerwas sees this as the shift of medical focus from caring for the patient to curing their ailment.<sup>13</sup> No longer focusing on being present to patients in their pain and suffering, modern medicine falsely assumes that it is in control and is therefore responsible for doing something to eliminate the “pointless” suffering. And the emphasis on eliminating the suffering goes to the extreme of proposing euthanasia as a means of “eliminating” the suffering by eliminating the patient when his or her suffering cannot be controlled.<sup>14</sup>

Hauerwas returns to the question of suffering a number of times in his work. He claims that liberalism has us see suffering wrongly. Liberals, as Hauerwas understands them, see suffering as something that always should be overcome. For example, the suffering patient whose pain cannot be relieved provides the paradigm for the consideration of active euthanasia. In short, it is the

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<sup>12</sup> Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> An example of such an approach can be seen in the patient who has numerous doctors (cardiologist, neurologist, oncologist, and hematologist), each of whom treats a specific ailment but none of whom care for the patient as an integrated human reality.

<sup>14</sup> Such a choice of eliminating the patient becomes attractive to the modern medical community in as much as the uncontrollable suffering threatens medicine’s false belief that it is in control.

reality of suffering that causes the most anguish for the person schooled in liberalism, whether a theologian or not. In saying this, Hauerwas does not wish to minimize the real and terrible sufferings that some people undergo. He objects, however, to those who, in their zeal to relieve the suffering, consider the possibility of removing the sufferer from the scene. Although "solving" the problem of suffering for the survivors, because suffering is no longer present, this practice is not one Hauerwas wishes to encourage. Instead, he asks, why do we assume that we have to relieve all suffering? Is that medicine's distinctive task, or is there another?<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to this approach taken by the medicine of contemporary society, Christian health care must focus on caring for those who are suffering. Christian medical ethics is not really a consideration of the difference that Christian faith makes on how to care for people in a medical setting. Instead, Christian ethics is always a consideration of the types of people Christians are to be with Christ as their model. The development of such moral character focuses on learning how to care for others in all contexts including the medical setting. Thus Christian medical ethics is less a matter of what medical choices are or are not permitted, but the consideration of what types of people and what type of a community Christians should become in order to care for people the way that Christ did.

The Christian response in health care is caring for the individual trusting that God has ultimate control. While such care often includes curing the patient, it also acknowledges that medicine's obligation to care transcends its ability to cure. The Christian life includes the recognition that life has significant meaning beyond physical existence and that in this physical existence one cannot completely eliminate suffering. With Christ as the model of a virtuous life, Christians must recognize that living a life of meaning, and living it well, does not necessarily include avoiding suffering. A Christian life will include the acceptance of many forms of

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen E. Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas: Theology, Medical Ethics, and the Church," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 70.

suffering. What is necessary, and what Christian medical ethics provides, is the ability to assess the suffering in respect to a life well lived.

[W]e should be able to distinguish the descriptive question of what suffering is from the normative question of whether suffering is good or bad. Then we would be able to make discriminating judgments about what kinds of suffering are good and under what conditions it is appropriate to try to alleviate it. What medicine tries to do is not to eliminate suffering and death, but unnecessary suffering and untimely death.<sup>16</sup>

There is the expectation that life includes suffering and that being Christian is not about eliminating all of that suffering but about how one responds to it and how one lives his or her life in the face of it. The question becomes, “Do we face our suffering the way Christ faced his suffering—with a complete trust in God even in the face of ‘irrational’ and ‘hopeless’ situations?”

This seems to indicate that for the early Christians suffering was but an opportunity for living in a way more faithful to the new age which they believed had begun in Christ. Their suffering did not make them question their belief in God, much less God’s goodness; their suffering only confirmed their belief that they were part of Christ’s church through baptism into his death. Their faith gave them a way to go on in the face of specific persecution and general misfortune. Suffering, even their suffering from evil and injustice, did not create a metaphysical problem needing solution; rather, it was a practical challenge requiring a communal response.

Any truthful account of the Christian life cannot exclude suffering as integral to that life. Yet it is important that this not become an invitation to make suffering an end in itself or to acquiesce to kinds of suffering that can and should be alleviated. Admittedly, this is not an easy distinction to make in theory or in practice, but it is the kind of distinction that must be hammered out by the common wisdom of a people who worship the God found on the cross of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>17</sup>

This Christian belief and trust in the control of God over the world entails the recognition that human beings are **not** in control. Steven Lammers examines Hauerwas’ approach to

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<sup>16</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences*, 84-85.

medical ethics in the book *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics* and states, “Hauerwas maintains that, for Christians, suffering is a time to display their belief that God rules the world.”<sup>18</sup>

Hauerwas himself maintains that “[I]llness is seen as an opportunity for growth in faith and trust in God.”<sup>19</sup> Any human attempt to use force to control the world, particularly the attempt to control death, betrays the trust that ought to be placed in God. The nature of Christian health care is caring for others and living with trust and faith in the control of God even in the face of illness and death. Therefore, Christian health care is a fundamental aspect of living a Christian life and is a “natural” outgrowth of Christian trust in God combined with care for others.

However, according to Hauerwas, this commitment to the primacy of care over cure is not isolated to a Christian view of medicine. For Hauerwas, this commitment to the care of others is a part of what it means to be human. “I think our humanity is fundamentally bound up with our willingness to care for the weak.”<sup>20</sup> Hauerwas sees the physician’s basic pledge of caring as being an outgrowth and manifestation of the nature of being human. It is a matter of being humane. It is a matter of being present to and present with those who are ill and suffering. This puts into perspective the way things are supposed to work in the medical community. Hauerwas states,

Yet the fact that medicine through the agency of physicians does not and cannot always “cure” in no way qualifies the commitment of the physician. At

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<sup>18</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 70.

<sup>19</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Selecting Children to Live or Die: An Ethical Analysis of the Debate Between Dr. Lorber and Dr Freeman on the Treatment of Meningomyelocele," in *Death, Dying and Euthanasia*, ed. D. and D. Mall Horan (Washington, DC: University Publications of America, 1977), 234.



least it does not do so if we remember that the physician's basic pledge is not to cure, but to care through being present to the one in pain.<sup>21</sup>

He maintains that it is this community of care that is necessary to combat one of the worst consequences of suffering—alienation from one another.

Medicine involves the needs and interests that we all share. All of us wish to avoid untimely death. All wish to avoid unnecessary suffering. All wish to be cared for when we are hurt. These basic interests or needs . . . do have a kind of almost inescapable “objectivity,” making medicine an especially interesting testing ground for theological ethics. Medicine provides a powerful reminder to Christians of our “nature” as bodily beings beset by illness and destined for death. Yet medicine also reminds us it is our “nature” to be a community that refuses to let suffering alienate us from one another. The crucial question is what kind of community we should be to be capable of that task.<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that Hauerwas does not evaluate the health care community the way he does most social communities. While most other communities are regarded as worldly organizations that exist in some sort of conflict with the Christian community, the health care community, because of its focus on mutual care and personal presence in a context of illness and death that is beyond the community's control, is seen as already embodying a unique character that is more in harmony with the Christian commitment to care for others.<sup>23</sup> When Hauerwas

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<sup>21</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 78-79.

<sup>22</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> This attentiveness to the character of the medical community also results in the important role of narrative in Hauerwas' medical ethics. The limited nature of reason in the face of evil makes narrative necessary to address the issue of suffering. In Hauerwas' point of view, this narrative ought to be the Christian narrative that places suffering as well as the value of life in a proper relationship of mutual respect. But even without the adoption of the Christian narrative, adults have some manner of “fitting in” their suffering within their narrative and vision of life. It is the contemporary emphasis on individual autonomy (with the false presupposition of complete autonomy from all norms and values except those freely selected) and the resultant inability to adopt a common narrative that makes suffering such a problem in contemporary society. Due to a false enlightenment understanding of complete human autonomy, members of society refuse to “impose” our narrative of values, leaving instead a plethora of miscellaneous systems of values. The only remaining commonly recognized values are those of physical life itself and individual control over that life. Thus there is the overemphasis on vitalism.

addresses the topic of medicine, he indicates that it, unlike much of the rest of society, embodies a public policy that is morally cohesive and that he regards as worthy of being called good and excellent. In a section titled “Thinking Theologically about Bioethics in a Pluralist Society” he states,

The question of the relation of medicine, public policy, and theology is extremely complex. From the perspective I develop here the question is not what should be our public policy concerning medicine. But rather how, in a pluralist society, we might sustain the public policy which medicine already embodies. Too often we forget that the mere fact a society makes it possible for some of its number to dedicate their lives to care for the ill is already a significant public policy, though it may well be one that is increasingly hard to sustain in a secular and pluralist society.

For such an understanding of medicine assumes that medicine is a practice with internal goods and standards of excellence that give it a moral intelligibility unlike most of our institutions. In a sense medicine represents a sectarian commitment about how to care for the ill. . . . [M]edicine so understood embodies the wisdom of the body that is essential to the moral as well as the physical health of our society.<sup>24</sup>

In taking such an approach Hauerwas assesses the medical community very differently than Engelhardt.<sup>25</sup> Instead of just being a group of medical professionals willing to engage in

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Without a common narrative, society presumes that it is necessary for the individual to adopt his or her own narrative in order to cope with suffering. This is why Hauerwas thinks the suffering of children becomes such a problem. “Grown up” adults have some sort of chosen narrative that they can fit the suffering into. The adults erroneously believe that since children lack the autonomy and the maturity to adopt a narrative, the children also lack the ability to deal with suffering. But Christians ought to trust that the Christian narrative of God’s control in the midst of evil and suffering is of such a nature that, even in the face of suffering children, it is able to provide a vision of trust. With such a confidence in the Christian narrative, Christians should be able to help even children adopt a narrative capable of accommodating suffering and death.

<sup>24</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> To some extent Hauerwas’ understanding of how Christian faith impacts medical ethics is similar to Engelhardt’s opinion of medical ethics. Because there is a certain degree of tension and conflict between the church and the world, it is to be expected that a Christian way of caring for others is different from the manner in which the world cares for others. At one point Hauerwas even goes so far as to propose a unique Christian community for practicing medicine as an alternative to the contemporary social approach to medicine.

whatever medical contract is available, Hauerwas maintains that there are certain “moral presuppositions” in the medical community.

The very willingness of the physician to be present in times of illness and the ill to avail themselves of the physician constitutes a morality that simply cannot be explained on Engelhardt’s terms. . . . Therefore medicine as a moral practice draws its substance from the extraordinary moral commitment of a

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In the context of this kind of problem, we might seriously consider the possibility of developing a Christian practice of medicine and supporting institutions. Modern medicine has tried to give the impression that it is a seamless garment, that there is a consensus about what should constitute the practice of medicine, that the only variations occur in terms of the skill of individual doctors. This impression is illusory but if medicine is trying to serve a pluralist society with impartiality, it is a necessary illusion. For example, doctors are prone to take an absolutist stance concerning the protection of life because they do not wish to be placed in the position of having to decide between competing sets of values about who is and is not valuable.

In such a situation it may well be that Christians as a people who live with their peculiar readiness to die will have to begin to find new means to institutionalize this ethic. It may mean that Christians organize their hospitals to allow for an open awareness and sharing of the experience of death rather than a closed. It may mean that they insist that their hospitals be institutions where the truth can and must be spoken; for Christians we can afford the truth because as a community we will stand with those who must bear the reality of dying. It may be that because the Christian people have a special obligation to care for the weak, we must use our limited resources not to develop larger and better units for rescue medicine to prolong life, but preventive medicine that aims at helping us live morally worthy lives rather than keeping us alive as an end in itself.

Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 182-83.

But, despite this similarity, Hauerwas’ assessment of medical care is different from that of Engelhardt at a more fundamental level. While Engelhardt regards medicine in the public arena as a morally neutral tool that can be used for good or evil, Hauerwas regards medicine as entailing a fundamentally good nature that in its essence consists of caring for the weak and living in community with the ill. Hauerwas sees the decision to pursue a libertarian approach to medicine in public policy as a betrayal of medicine’s internal ethic and instead insists that the commitment to care for the ill, a commitment similar to the Christian commitment to care for the “least of these,” must be maintained.

For me to insist on the significance of theological convictions for understanding and sustaining the practice of medicine, therefore, looks like a step in the wrong direction. It is a failure to live by the requirements of a peaceable community. At least as such a community is construed by Engelhardt, it is nothing less than a declaration of war. Of course Engelhardt is not suggesting we must give up our religious convictions, but only for matters of public policy we must consider those convictions secondary or private. Yet I cannot accept that compromise, since to do so would be to deny that such convictions have any interesting truth value. Moreover, as I suggested above, such a compromise would decisively change the moral character of medicine as a profession determined by an internal ethic.

Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 12.

society to care for the ill. . . . Even when medicine cannot cure, the care physicians provide is all the more important.<sup>26</sup>

Medical care is about being present with the patient more than it is about being in control of the physical illness.

However, in as much as avoiding one's own sickness can require avoiding those who are sick, illness often results in the patient being isolated or excluded from his or her community. The patient's illness, sickness and pain can lead to the patient suffering a sense of alienation, abandonment, and despair. Thus the medical community, when fulfilling its true nature – a nature that “medicine already embodies”<sup>27</sup> – is about being present with the patient in the face of suffering so as to reaffirm the patient's presence in a caring and loving community. In the midst of individual suffering, the presence of others is necessary. “It is the burden of those who care for the suffering to know how to teach the suffering that they are not thereby excluded from the human community. In this sense medicine's primary role is to bind the suffering and the nonsuffering into the same community. Unfortunately, medicine is used too often to guard us from those who suffer.”<sup>28</sup> In his book *Suffering Presence* Hauerwas cites the Book of Job and Job's friends who, upon seeing his suffering, silently sit with a suffering Job for seven days and nights before speaking a word.<sup>29</sup> Similar to Job's friends, the role of the medical community is to be present with those who suffer even in the midst of their suffering.

It is this aspect of the medical community that seems to place it in a relationship with the church that is different from the church's relationship with other worldly communities.

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<sup>26</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 63.

Medicine, in its commitment to be present to those who suffer, is a profession formed and structured by an internal ethic that Hauerwas respects as inherently valuable and directed toward the good of the human person. To the extent that it achieves this end, it is more like the church community than it is like the rest of society. While the church's relationship with the rest of society is one of tension, its relationship with the medical community is one of support. Hauerwas sees this support as essential. Hauerwas points out that in as much as medicine is the commitment to presence, the commitment to care rather than cure, those in the medical community require support from outside the medical community itself. "[M]edicine as a practice requires convictions and institutions beyond itself."<sup>30</sup> Stephen Lammers cautions

Hauerwas is not here calling upon us to return to religious communities in order to sustain an appropriate medicine. What he does maintain is that medicine, if it is to remain true to itself, needs a wider community to sustain itself, and such a community seems unavailable to it in our age.<sup>31</sup>

While the patients' dependence upon the medical community for care is clear, the medical community's dependence on the larger community is not as evident. Hauerwas notes that it is easy to see that the decision to care for those who are ill can only be realized at a social level. In order to realize the commitment to care for individual patients, the network of the medical community is necessary for the patients' medical treatment as well as being necessary for their spiritual, emotional, and psychological support.<sup>32</sup> However, beyond the network of the medical community caring for the patient, a network is also necessary to provide support for those who care for the ill. "[I]t is not easy to carry out that commitment on a day-to-day, year-

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<sup>30</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 54.

<sup>31</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 69.

<sup>32</sup> This recognition of the diverse needs of the patients is one that grounds Hauerwas' understanding of the function of the medical community.

to-year basis. For none of us has the resource to see too much pain without that pain's hardening us."<sup>33</sup>

Those in the medical community who are committed to care for the patient even when cure is not possible must learn how to be present in bad times as well as good times. Such an approach of presence cannot regard physical existence as the ultimate good and death as the ultimate evil. Such presence is rooted in a faith and trust that that which is beyond one's own control is indeed trust-worthy. It requires a recognition of not being in control and a trusting acceptance of that non-control. It requires a trust that caring for the patient is good despite the ultimate inability to control the patient's death. In order to believe that medical care has meaning, even when it is ineffective as cure, one must trust that despite the patient's ultimate death there is a value to being with the patient in her suffering and dying. This faith in that which is beyond control and this faith in communal presence in the face of suffering and death are what the Christian community can bring back to the modern medical community that is too focused on cure.

The Christian community is a community rooted in values that go beyond purely physical existence. Through its familiarity with the struggle of suffering and death, the church can bring a unique perspective and vision to the medical community. The Christian community, in as much as it lives its essential life of faith as trust in God's control even in the face of suffering and death, can serve as the example and source of support that the medical community needs in order to realize its mission of care.

[I]f medicine can be rightly understood as an activity that trains some to know how to be present to those in pain, then something very much like a church is needed to sustain that presence day in and day out<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 79.

Instead of providing some set of moral axioms as the foundation of medical ethics, the Christian community provides “a resource of the habits and practices necessary to sustain the care of those in pain over the long haul.”<sup>35</sup> But it can only do this in as much as it lives out its own vocation of being the church—a community that lives a faithful life of complete trust in God even in the face of suffering and death. If the Christian community attempts to influence medical practice to make it more Christian by resorting to more secular methods and by arguing for what goals medicine ought to pursue by using thoughts and arguments that are based on more universally recognized moral norms, then it abandons its true mission to the medical community. When it pursues medical ethics as a quasi-secular process of discerning under what conditions certain treatments are and are not allowed, then it has abandoned its position as a community of care. When it “waters down” the religious commitments to faith and trust in God in order to make its ethics more accessible to those outside the Christian community, it gives up the one unique gift that it should bring to the practice of medicine—the exemplary community of loving care even in the face of suffering and death.

I do not intend, for example, to argue that medicine must be reclaimed as in some decisive way dependent on theology. Nor do I want to argue that the development of “medical ethics” will ultimately require the acknowledgment of, or recourse to, theological presuppositions. Rather, all I want to try to show is why, given the particular demands put on those who care for the ill, something very much like a church is necessary to sustain that care.<sup>36</sup>

Such an approach with its priority of care over that of cure has a particularly profound impact on Hauerwas’ understanding of how to care for dying patients.

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<sup>34</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 75.

Yet, properly understood, caring is the refusal to abandon the patient simply because he is dying. Caring is not to be identified with curing but with our willingness to be with another even though he is dying. Care is the insistence that human community is not destroyed at the first sign of death, but extends to and through the moment of death. The current suggestions about returning death to the home have much to recommend them in this respect. For to be allowed to die among our fellows and amid the familiar is one of our most significant ways of affirming care. Neither we nor the doctor should delude ourselves that we can substitute for this the technological forms of uncare with which we often surround the patient as our substitute for personal presence.<sup>37</sup>

Having examined Hauerwas' understanding of medical care it is now appropriate to consider the topic of euthanasia.<sup>38</sup>

### **Euthanasia**

From Hauerwas' perspective such a despair as underlies the choice for choosing suicide or euthanasia is one that is contrary to the Christian narrative. It endorses the belief that there is no meaning to the evil of suffering and that even death is preferable. In his treatment of Hauerwas, Lammers notes,

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<sup>37</sup> Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 180-181.

<sup>38</sup> Several sources should be noted as extremely helpful in treating Hauerwas' approach to euthanasia. Most especially helpful is an early article "Memory, Community and the Reasons for Living: Reflections on Suicide and Euthanasia" written with Richard Bondi and published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 3 (September 1976.) It is republished in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 577-595. Additionally helpful is his own work, *Suffering Presence*. Most notable in this respect are his "Introduction," 1-19, "Reflections on Suffering Death and Medicine," 23-38, and "Salvation and Health: Why Medicine Needs the Church," 63-83. Among other sources of note are: James B. Tubbs, Jr., *Christian Theology and Medical Ethics: Four Contemporary Approaches* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996); Stephen E. Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas: Theology, Medical Ethics, and the Church," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 57-77. His treatment of euthanasia in his own work is extensive and enlightening. Many passages are worth quoting at length. But since this chapter is not solely a consideration of his treatment of euthanasia it will have to make broad generalizations of his work using brief quotes in order to demonstrate how Hauerwas' position on euthanasia illustrates his understanding of the role of the Christian church in the moral discourse of a religiously pluralistic society.



Hauerwas maintains that, for Christians, suffering is a time to display their belief that God rules the world. Suffering and response to suffering can threaten that belief in at least two ways. First, if suffering has the last word in human affairs, then it is true that God does not rule the world. Second, if Christians respond to suffering under the assumption that they must do everything to relieve suffering, then they do not witness to the fact that there are goods beyond those of this world, goods not under our control.<sup>39</sup>

From Hauerwas' perspective it is clearly wrong for Christians to

seek our death as a relief from suffering. For the very willingness to carry suffering is but a continuation of the kind of moral commitment that has sustained our lives together in the first place.<sup>40</sup>

Later in this same passage Hauerwas makes it clear that such an approach should not result in vitalism. Rather it should become a means by which to discern when it is appropriate to allow the patient to die. It provides a means by which to accept a patient's death without feeling the need to hasten the dying.

At the same time, however, Christians do not believe that life must be preserved at all costs. As a result it is incumbent on us to develop expectations among ourselves when it is appropriate to fight death no more. The corresponding form of medical care we might well find would not only be more worthy and appropriate of Christian convictions, but might also result in helping those who do not share our convictions to find appropriate ways to fight and accept death.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to remember that Hauerwas' emphasis on the issue of limited control as an essential element of medical ethics results in a very clear distinction between killing (which seeks to exercise control over life and death) and allowing to die (which recognizes the limit of human control in preserving life.) This distinction, firmly rooted in the Christian priority of care over cure, results in Hauerwas being very strongly opposed to euthanasia without taking a position of vitalism.

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<sup>39</sup> Lammers, "On Stanley Hauerwas," 70.

<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 36.

Of course this kind of distinction [between “ordinary” and “extraordinary”] was occasioned by the necessity of distinguishing the withdrawal of medical support from euthanasia which the church absolutely condemns. However, this whole discussion is better carried on in terms of the distinction between putting to death and letting die. For such a distinction makes it clear that the church has no stake in the absolute preservation of life as an end in itself. The prohibition against euthanasia tends to give the impression that there are no limits to the obligation to sustain life. This, however, is wrong; there is nothing in Christianity that teaches the preserving of life as an end in itself—not even the preserving of the life of another. Rather, the Gospel demands the care of the weak, which is quite a different matter.<sup>42</sup>

While vehemently rejecting the act of putting a patient to death as appropriate in Christian ethics, Hauerwas asserts that there are “limits to the obligation to sustain life,” thus resulting in an acknowledgement that there are times when it is appropriate to let a patient die even when further medical treatment is possible. In this, Hauerwas articulates his belief in a rather clear distinction between appropriate and inappropriate medical care based on its impact on the patient in terms of benefits and burdens.

Therefore life for Christians is not sacred in the strict sense. Christians view life as a gift, but a gift for which they must care. Thus the claim that life is sacred is not really so much a statement about ourselves as it is an indication of the kind of respect that we owe our neighbor. Our life and the lives of our neighbors are to be protected, since they are not ours to dispose of. For our dying as much as our living should be determined by our conviction that we are not our own.

But what do these homiletical flourishes have to do with the concept of death? They at least make clear why Christians have an aversion to the connotation of hastened death associated with the unhappy word euthanasia. However, these considerations also help us understand why Christians, in spite of their condemnation of euthanasia, have assumed that death need not be prolonged in all cases. This distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of prolonging life, a distinction that is probably more trouble than it is worth, was the result of Christians’ attempt to balance their sense that their lives were not at their disposal with their sense that death is not to be opposed unconditionally.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 176-177.

<sup>43</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 93. It is interesting to note that even in this rejection of vitalism he displays an aversion to the terms ordinary and extraordinary.

For Hauerwas the Christian approach to death is most properly understood as formed by the Christian approach to life. Since Christians recognize the greatest good as incorporation into the “Kingdom of God,” they must recognize life as a limited good. With Christ as the fullest example of a rightly lived life, Christians must recognize communion with God as the greatest good and the ultimate goal of human existence. With the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ as the keystone of the faith, Christians must acknowledge that not all suffering and death is meaningless. With the community of the church as their context, Christians must live a life of trust in God’s care even in the midst of death.

But it is fundamental to the Christian manner that our lives are formed in terms not of what we will do with them, but of what God will do with our lives, both in our living and our dying. Life is not sacred as if we Christians had an interest in holding onto it to the last minute. Christians are a people who are formed ready to die for what they believe. Our beliefs are as precious to us as our lives—indeed, they are our lives. Life for us, therefore, is not an absolute, for that which we think gives our life form will not let us place unwarranted value on life itself.

At the very least this means that accepting the fatedness of our ending is a way of affirming the trustworthiness of God’s care for us. It means I will not fight my death nor the death of others when it cannot be avoided. Dying is not the tragedy but, from our point of view, dying for the wrong thing. As H. Tristram Engelhardt has suggested, what we need is “a language of finitude, a way of talking decently about the limits of human life, a way of saying why and under what circumstances death is natural.” Such a language would not deny that early death or painful death are matters we wish to avoid if possible, but it would give us the skill to know that our purpose is not existence but “the pursuit of a rich but finite life”; or, in language closer to our everyday speech, it would give us the means to talk of what a “good death” involves.

In this respect we Christians must rethink our relation to modern medicine. For we have been taught that natural death means the death that occurs when doctors can no longer do anything for us, but it may be that we must be willing to die a good deal earlier. For we may well have accepted in the medical imperative a Promethean desire to control death or extend life that is finally incompatible with our basic Christian convictions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 587-588.

Hauerwas sees the choice for suicide or euthanasia as one that is fundamentally inconsistent with a Christian understanding of life and how that life is to be lived.<sup>45</sup>

In the last chapter it was seen that Engelhardt also reached much the same conclusion. Euthanasia is wrong in a Christian life. But Engelhardt also concluded that it must be allowed within a libertarian society. In contrast to this approach, Hauerwas maintains that euthanasia should not be permitted within society. Hauerwas insists that medicine by its very nature is a community of caring more than it is a business of curing. The importance of presence with the patient in the midst of his or her illness, suffering and death and the priority of care over cure (especially in the past when health care could do less to cure the patients) are the traditional values of medicine and Hauerwas regards them as the true nature of medical care. Hauerwas would have the medical community maintain these fundamental values of medical care which would in turn lead to a rejection of euthanasia as appropriate health care.

The medical community, as a community of care, should recognize its limitations, particularly in its inability to control death. It should not regard the patient's death as a failure to achieve its mission or a testament to its lack of control. Rather than evaluating its success by how long it postpones death, it must assess its care for the patient by determining how well it provides a community in which the patient is able to live a life of meaning despite the presence of suffering and death. Such a medical community embodies, in the character of the patient and of those who care for him or her, a trust that life has meaning beyond physical existence, and it refuses to abandon hope even in the face of death which is beyond human control. Hauerwas

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<sup>45</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 105, 110-11; Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 578, 584-86.

sees the choice for euthanasia as one that is fundamentally inconsistent with the true character of the medical community.

From Hauerwas' perspective the endorsement of either suicide or euthanasia by contemporary medicine rests on at least four faulty beliefs. First, that physical existence is the greatest commonly acknowledged good of human life. Second, that suffering is meaningless and ought not exist. Third, that medical care that does not hold at least the potential for cure is pointless. Fourth, that humans are, or should be, in control of their own physical well-being. When combined they lead to the erroneous conclusion that when physical well-being can no longer be assured and medical care cannot offer the hope of cure, or at least the alleviation of suffering, then humans at a minimum can be (and should be) in control of their own death.

For modern medicine has had its task changed from care to cure in the name of compassion—a killing compassion. For example, the recent discussion of doctor-assisted death, or what perhaps should be called doctor-assisted suicide, surely must be seen in this context. Unable to cure those who are dying, we then think it is the compassionate alternative to help them to their death. Euthanasia thus becomes but the other side of the medical and technological imperative to keep alive at all cost.<sup>46</sup>

Lacking control over life, euthanasia is presented as a means by which it is possible to exercise one's control over suffering and death that is otherwise beyond control. Lacking the ability to attain his or her own cure, and faced with meaningless suffering in the process of dying, euthanasia is presented as the sole means by which the patient is still capable of exercising his or her autonomy. But Hauerwas maintains that the patient's suffering is wrongly understood as a threat to the patient's autonomy. Instead, given the human inability to

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<sup>46</sup> Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front*, 165.

completely avoid suffering, “we only gain autonomy by our willingness to make suffering our own through its incorporation into our moral projects.”<sup>47</sup>

Hauerwas sees many of the positions that wrongly advocate suicide and euthanasia as caused by a misunderstanding of suffering and its role in human life. In modern discussion many of the arguments for suicide and euthanasia rest on the inability to relieve suffering in all cases. The paradigmatic justification of euthanasia is often given by presenting a case of a patient in the final stages of dying with unmanageable pain.<sup>48</sup> The inability to cure the patient or to alleviate his or her suffering is presented as the justification for the euthanasia. For Hauerwas the current struggle to make such behavior legal is indicative of contemporary society’s inability to care for the dying. It is indicative of society’s lack of faith in the nature of the world. It is indicative of society’s refusal to acknowledge its inability to control life (and death.) And it is indicative that medicine has become too much about cure rather than care.

The choice to escape suffering by suicide bespeaks the patient’s inability to incorporate that suffering into his or her narrative. This is even more the case with euthanasia. Euthanasia is a cooperative activity among those persons who lack control over death, who refuse to admit that limitation, and who fail to trust that caring for the patient is a role of sufficient meaning for medicine. In addition to its impact on the particular patient, its impact on the community must also be assessed.

Suicide and euthanasia contribute to the erosion of community. They can both be signs of pathogenic abandonment, and they undermine our notions of

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<sup>47</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 33-34. For Christians, this is accomplished through the personal appropriation of the Christian narrative of Jesus’ faithful suffering and death.

<sup>48</sup> Lammers, “On Stanley Hauerwas,” 70.

living bravely in the face of suffering as individuals and as communities. . . .  
euthanasia can be a sign that our failure to care has triumphed.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the moral evils that are present in suicide, euthanasia creates a community that cooperates to bring about the deaths that the community feels are justified. Accordingly, Hauerwas regards it as wrong to endorse euthanasia.

Finally, we feel that to end one's own life, either by one's own hand or by requesting the hand of another to do it, places too great a burden on those who are left, as it asks us to cooperate in a process we should keep distant from. To ask us to passively or actively cooperate in the ending of life opens us to temptations best kept at bay: that we should determine for others whether they will live or die. To help another die invites us far too readily to justify our action by turning it into a policy, by saying that euthanasia is an act of mercy, a policy that is hard to control and even harder to adopt if we are to learn to look on life as a gift.

We are aware that our position may well result in some tragic circumstances. But then, finally, that is what the moral life is all about. Tragedy is a homely thing; the heart adapts and copes, if we are to live humanely.<sup>50</sup>

Hauerwas regards euthanasia as one of the issues in which it is quite clear that contemporary medicine is losing the values of the traditional health care community. He urges the medical community to remain true to its character as a community of care in the face of tragedy, and he believes that the Christian church can play a role in this process.<sup>51</sup> In this process Hauerwas proposes that the Christian community can be a means of helping the medical community to rediscover and re-appropriate the true values of health care. The Christian community, in its nature as a unique community of care, can assist the medical community to

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<sup>49</sup> Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 591.

<sup>50</sup> Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 595.

<sup>51</sup> A medical community of traditional values would remove euthanasia from the discussion of medical care. In one sense appropriate health care, true care that is not focused on cure, would make euthanasia unnecessary for the patient. A medical community truly focused on care of the patient could limit, avoid, or eliminate entirely the hopelessness and despair that motivate the desire for death so that euthanasia would not be regarded as preferable by the patient. In another sense such a medical community would reject the notion that killing the sufferer was a rational or suitable way to eliminate the suffering even if desired by the patient.

realize its own true nature as a community of care. Thus the Christian community engages society in such a way as to foster and promote the traditional values and virtues of medicine, the priority of care over cure. In this respect the current status of end of life care calls the church to work within society to keep euthanasia from being accepted as appropriate medical treatment in a community of care.

In one respect this is consistent with his idea of the Christian community as a model for the rest of the world. The Church, as an exemplary community of care, is a city on a hill that lives a life of the gospel serving as an example to those outside the Christian community. In his more “systematic” work, Hauerwas shows how this sort of ethics takes place within the Christian community by how it lives, without attempting to use its resources to change the society. Again, in part this is due to his understanding of all ethics as rooted within a particular narrative and the Christian narrative as being fundamentally different from other narratives. But this treatment of end of life issues displays a very different aspect of Hauerwas’ health care ethics. When it comes to how the Christian community ought to deal with such issues as euthanasia his approach is one in which the Christian community works to get the medical community to re-appropriate what Hauerwas sees as its fundamental values.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this is done with the presumption that those in the medical community, even those who are not rooted in the Christian narrative, can recognize the rightness and goodness of those traditional medical values most especially of the priority of care over cure. This stands in clear contrast. Hauerwas sees a fundamental correspondence, rather than conflict, between the virtues of the Christian community and those of the underlying virtues of traditional health care. The Christian community is “in conflict” with contemporary medical society only in as much as that society has changed (deviated) from



its previous approach to health care. And the manner in which Hauerwas sees the Christian community engaging the contemporary system of health care entails an implicit belief that those outside the Christian narrative can recognize the values and virtues of health care, which are the Christian values of a community of care, from within their own different (flawed) non-Christian narrative. The medical community takes on the nature of the Christian community in its ability to care lovingly for others in a manner of virtuous living.

Hauerwas is not entirely clear about how much of this “nature” of the Christian community is appropriated and what of the Christian nature is beyond the ability of the medical community to appropriate. But it is clear that the medical community, even without switching narratives, is able to practice caring for other persons in a manner consistent with a Christian community of care. And it is also clear that in as much as it fails to do this, the Christian community has a role to play in ensuring that the medical community does not focus on cure to the neglect of caring for the patients as persons.

Unlike Engelhardt, who would see the limit of the Christian community being that of banning Euthanasia from Christian hospitals and health care practice, Hauerwas would see the role of the Christian community as fostering the re-appropriation of the traditional value of care in the medical community. Such re-appropriation would ensure that euthanasia was regarded as morally wrong in any hospital or medical practice, Christian or not. Hauerwas’ approach of focusing on the character of the medical community rather than specific ethical norms leaves unaddressed how this morally wrong behavior would be addressed in institutional rules, social regulations and public laws. But it is certain that he sees a need that such behavior be prohibited

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<sup>52</sup> While this is true in his treatment of the issue of euthanasia it is even more so the case in his treatment of caring for disabled infants and children.

from the practice of health care and he does not regard it as appropriate for the Christian community to allow such behavior to go unaddressed.<sup>53</sup>

### **Universal Health Care**

Hauerwas' treatment of how the Christian community ought to address the issue of universal health care in the public sphere is not as clear as that of euthanasia. Due to the nature of his moral methodology, Hauerwas' position regarding the concept of universal health care is one that is difficult to articulate. On the one hand, it is clear that there is a moral obligation on the part of the Christian to care for and be with those who are in medical need and who are suffering or dying regardless of their ability to pay. But on the other hand he seems to see this as being appropriate only on a personal level. He justifies this approach for two reasons. First, with Christ as the normative example, Christians ought to practice ministry to the sick and suffering in the same manner that Christ did. Such ministry focuses on being with the person in their sickness and requires caring for each person individually rather than seeking to establish social structures of medical treatment.

Second, to attempt to establish such care as a social structure is to emphasize control in such a way as to fall into a two-fold trap. On the one hand, the church wrongly attempts to use its power to change and control social structures rather than fulfilling its role as prophetic voice.

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<sup>53</sup> In this regard Hauerwas' treatment of euthanasia is comparable to his treatment of violence in society. It is a morally wrong aspect of contemporary society and the Christian community ought to be a prophetic voice that opposes it. The difference is the ecclesial responsibility beyond its prophetic role. In regards to violence the church's role is limited to being the prophetic voice and living example of a non-violent community. With health care, Hauerwas regards the medical community as a community that is in many respects similar to the Christian community with values and virtues that resonate with those of the Christian community. As a result, the church's responsibility extends beyond that of prophetic voice and living example to that of being a community of support. As part of such support the church works with the medical community to maintain its more traditional medical values of care which would make euthanasia inconsistent with the practice of medicine.

Hauerwas would seem to see any attempt by the church at instituting some form of socially structured universal health care system as an attempt on behalf of the church to misuse its power to change society and the world rather than living a life faithful to gospel values and virtues. In this the church betrays its role as an exemplary community that trusts God when faced with the evils of suffering and death and instead it becomes similar to a host of other special interest groups attempting to establish its own view of the ideal kingdom through a use of its own power.

On the other hand, the emphasis of universal health care on the provision of medical services, falsely understood as the ability to control and eliminate suffering, can result in placing cure ahead of care. Christians must remember that the unique aspect that Christianity brings to the realm of health care is its focus on caring for the person with a trust that life's meaning transcends death. What is important is not the Christian effectiveness in eliminating evil and suffering, but the Christian example of responding to evil and suffering when it is encountered.

In the secular conversation of health care ethics, the concept of universal health care is often considered a matter of individual rights. One way it can be articulated is as establishing a minimal level of health care that all persons of a given society are entitled to by virtue of being a member of that community. Health care is not a commodity which one must purchase or earn; it is a service to which one is entitled apart from any sort of financial exchange. From this perspective universal health care is the claim that individuals can make against society to the health services to which they have a right as an individual. If one uses this understanding of universal health care, an entitlement to particular resources, there is no "right" to universal health care in Hauerwas' thought. Such a language of rights and claims is something that does not integrate well with Hauerwas' ethical focus on character, vision, narrative and community.

Hauerwas extensively treats the topic of rights and duties as they relate to health care in a chapter of *Suffering Presence* titled “Rights, Duties, and Experimentation on Children.”<sup>54</sup> In this chapter, originally prepared for the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, Hauerwas advances a rather negative view of rights in general, maintaining that it is a recent and unhappy phenomenon that ethics has come to be seen as a balance of individual rights.

[W]e need to remember the language of rights is of recent origin and presupposes an individualistic understanding of the person in society. Rights are necessary when it is assumed that citizens fundamentally relate to one another as strangers, if not outright enemies. From such a perspective society appears as a collection of individuals who of necessity must enter into a bargain to insure their individual survival through providing for the survival of the society.<sup>55</sup>

He notes that much of the discussion regarding the experimentation on children poses the question in terms of whether the children’s rights are violated. Hauerwas states that “rights language” is not only insufficient for the issue of medical treatment of children but insufficient for the more general consideration of a good society. He points out that a discussion focused on rights misses some of the more important aspects of the issue, most notably the character of the community.

My argument is not meant to deny all cogency to rights language, but rather to suggest that appeal to rights cannot provide the kind of basic moral presuppositions needed for the social and political life of a good society. . . . [W]hen rights are taken to be the fundamental moral reality we are encouraged to take an ultimately degrading perspective on society. No real society can *exist* when its citizens’ only way of relating is in terms of noninterference. . . . Therefore, even though I do not reject all use of rights language, as a basic moral language, I find it insufficient on grounds of social theory.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 125-41.

<sup>55</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 127-28.

<sup>56</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 130.

To do ethics primarily by use of the language of rights and claims is to resort to an individualistic view of the human person that sets all members of society in a permanent state of competition with one another for whatever resources are available – including the resources of health care. To make the health care of children, or health care in general, an issue of rights is to abandon the essence of care within a human community and allow the powers of contemporary society to make medicine an issue of competition for limited resources within an individualistic society. While Hauerwas acknowledges that much of the modern medical community is headed in this direction, he believes it to be untrue to the nature of the human person and to the traditional character of the practice of medicine.

For Hauerwas, ethics, particularly in the area of children’s health care, is not primarily an issue of rights. Instead he sees it in terms of the moral obligation that the community has to the children. “Morally the question is not what claim children have on us, but what our responsibility is to them, irrespective of their ability to make a ‘claim.’”<sup>57</sup> The inherently social nature of the human person results in ethics being about the nature of community and the types of relationships that ought to exist. Ethics is about the character of the person and of the community—about the type of person and the type of community that are, or should be, the goal of human existence. While people who are ill do not possess some right to universal health care, the character of the medical community is such that there is a universal obligation to care for all people who are ill.

As was the case in his treatment of euthanasia, Hauerwas’ distinction between care and cure is crucial in his understanding of universal health care. There is a **universal** obligation to care for those who are suffering, ill or dying. But for Hauerwas that care is not as focused on

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<sup>57</sup> Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 131.

providing specific medical treatments as it is on providing the care of presence. Such care can only be realized on a personal level. Social laws or institutional guidelines that provide for minimal levels of medical treatment do not provide the care that Hauerwas regards as crucial. In as much as it shifts the attention to cure it takes modern medicine in the wrong direction. Hauerwas' appeal to the original nature of medicine, not as focused on cure, emphasizes a medical community that cares for patients in their illness by being present. In this sense of "health care" there is an obligation for universal health care. But this care is not universal health treatment, and it is a care that must be realized at the personal level by a medical community that draws on the external community ("the church or something very much like the church,"<sup>58</sup>) for example and support. Such care must be voluntarily undertaken as vocation rather than institutionally mandated. It would seem that he sees any attempt to institute such care in some sort of legal or political structure on a social level as betraying the nature of true care.

Again, it is here that the Christian community can most effectively support the practice of medicine in its maintenance of the values of traditional health care. There is a universal obligation to care, but as pointed out above it is not a matter of rights. Christian ethics is about caring for the whole person in all contexts including the medical context of illness, suffering, and death. The Christian community, in living out its mission, can assist in two ways. First, the nature of the Christian church as a community committed to care for "the least of these" results in a commitment to care for the poor. Since it is an obligation to a particular type of relationship in light of the character of the community, the care provided cannot be dependent on the patient's ability to pay. Second, the nature of the Christian church as a community that believes life has real meaning beyond physical existence results in a particular type of caring for the

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<sup>58</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 65, 75.

patient. Since it is a matter of living a particular type of life, the care provided cannot be focused only on prolonging the patient's physical existence.

[B]ecause the Christian people have a special obligation to care for the weak we must use our limited resources not to develop larger and better units for rescue medicine to prolong life, but preventive medicine that aims at helping us live morally worthy lives rather than keeping us alive as an end in itself.<sup>59</sup>

The church fulfills its mission to be the kingdom of God by caring, in a way consistent with its understanding of the true nature of care, for the poor who are suffering, ill, and dying. As such it serves the medical community, and society as a whole, as an example of how to live as a community of care. And, because Hauerwas believes the traditional medical community to be a similar community of care, he sees the role of the church to be that of supporting the traditional values of the medical community that are threatened by a more “modern” approach to medicine.

Does Hauerwas believe in universal health care and a role for the church in achieving it? The answer is a very qualified “yes.” It is qualified by three points. First, and most important, there is no “right” to universal health care. Hauerwas’ universal health care is a universal obligation to care for others when those others are suffering or ill. It is an obligation that is embraced by choosing to be a special type of community—the Christian church or the community of health care. In both communities the universal obligation to care is not exclusive to caring for the sick, but it is made particularly manifest by their suffering and their incapacity that makes them more dependent upon the rest of the community. The “special obligation to care for the weak” requires that we exercise a preferential option in providing them with health care.

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<sup>59</sup> Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 182-83.

The second qualifying aspect to Hauerwas' belief in universal care is his definition of health care. Hauerwas makes it clear in his distinction between care and cure that the universal moral obligation is to provide care. Moreover, the universal obligation to provide care is not an obligation to provide certain minimal levels of medical treatments. The attempt to cure is often, but not always, an appropriate part of caring for patients. But in many situations the health care that must be provided is most clearly a matter of presence rather than treatment. There is a universal moral obligation to provide this sort of care.<sup>60</sup> Since the focus is presence with the patient, care not cure, then there is no sort of moral obligation to provide particular treatments or medical practices.

The third aspect that qualifies his "yes" to universal health care is how that care is to be achieved socially. The Christian community should serve as example and source of support to the medical community in achieving its inherent nature of care. As is the case with all other interactions of the church with the governmental structures, the church's role is not to act in the kingdom of this world in order to make the world the "Kingdom of God." The church's role is to live as the "Kingdom of God" present in the world, a role which includes care for the ill. This sort of care cannot be achieved through guidelines or policies since this care is a matter of personal presence to and with the patient in his or her illness, suffering and death. Instead it must be realized on a personal level in a relationship between those people who choose to care for patients and the patients who choose to trust the medical community for their care. Aside from this context, medical treatment is not really the care that Hauerwas defines as care. As a community that exemplifies such a community of care, the Christian community serves as a

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<sup>60</sup> As a result of their faith in the transcendent value of life and living, such care is a special obligation of Christians caring for dying patients.



model for the community of health care. And, in as much as the community of health care is a manifestation of such care, the church serves to support the true nature of the practice of medicine.

### **Summary**

One must understand character as the starting point of ethics for Hauerwas in order to understand Hauerwas' approach to the Christian community's role regarding the public issues of euthanasia and universal health care. This focus on character, when conjoined with the social nature of the human person, means that ethics is about the moral character of people in community. This establishes relationship as the fundamental key to ethics. Hauerwas moves from this focus to the understanding that these relationships entail responsibilities, the most important of which are the obligations of love and care. The actions that manifest this love and care are not matters of human rights of those who receive them, but are matters of moral character of those who provide them. The choice of a particular moral character is not primarily the choice to act according to a particular code of behavior but the choice to be a particular type of person who establishes particular types of relationships. For Christians this means living like Christ. This means living the "Kingdom of God," caring for people in a particular manner of selfless love, and trusting that God will bring the kingdom even when the kingdom of this world seems to triumph. To choose to be a Christian is to choose certain "obligations." In that sense, these "obligations" are not completely obligations since by their very nature they are not as much things that must be done as optional choices of the type of person to be.

Hauerwas uses this approach to address the issues considered. Both the end of life care and the issue of universal health care are matters of caring for others which are closely linked to the types of persons that Christians have chosen to be. When considering end of life issues this

Christian care is manifest in being present to and with the patient in his or her illness, suffering and death. When one recognizes that the care of presence takes priority over cure, euthanasia is no longer an option. Care for the dying patient cannot end when no cure is possible. And the obligation to care for suffering patients by being with them cannot entail killing them.

When considering universal health care, the Christian obligation to care for all persons, especially caring for the “least of these,” entails a universal obligation to care for the sick, ill and dying. But Hauerwas’ focus on character means that this care is not realized in terms of entitlements to some minimal level of specific treatments, but in terms of the relationship of presence and community that Christians should have with those patients. And the focus on character makes this an issue of Christian obligation rather than of patient rights.

In both of these issues, the Christian community is to be an ideal community of care and serve as an example to the medical community and to society at large. In its relationship with society, and the world, the church primarily serves a prophetic role by living as the already present “Kingdom of God” in the “Kingdom of this world” and by trusting that the fullness of God’s kingdom will come about not by our efforts but by God’s. However, the traditional medical community’s fundamental nature as a community of care in the face of illness, suffering and death results in a unique relationship between itself and the church. The similarity of their approach in caring for the human person in the face of suffering and death results in Hauerwas regarding the church as a support to help the medical community function according to its true nature. The church serves the medical community in a dual role as an exemplary community of care and as a support to the traditional values of health care. In the issue of universal health care it is here that the church’s role ends.

However, the Christian community seems to have some additional role in the matter of euthanasia. The church works in society with a goal of fostering the values of traditional medicine, most notably that of prioritizing care over cure. The relationship of the Christian community with the medical community includes “worldly” efforts on behalf of the church to see that euthanasia, a practice that is seen to be in conflict with the true nature of medical care, is not an option in any medical facility—Christian or not. While Hauerwas does not make it clear how this more active influence should take place, it is apparent that he envisions the Christian community actively engaging the medical community, and society at large, to ensure that the medical community retains its primary focus on care and, in doing so, disallows euthanasia.

While it is not entirely clear what causes the difference in Hauerwas’ approach to the church’s role regarding euthanasia and universal health care, one factor may be proposed—Hauerwas’ focus on the issue of control. In as much as this control is seen to be the church’s active engagement focused on changing the world and making it the “Kingdom of God,” Hauerwas rejects it. In as much as the actions of the church are seen as an effort to be faithful to the already present good of the yet to be fully manifested “Kingdom of God,” Hauerwas accepts it. Thus the Christian faith that the “Kingdom of God” includes living the Gospel through suffering—a faith that asserts a meaning to life beyond suffering and death—calls for active efforts to preserve the medical focus on care rather than cure. However, that same focus on the “Kingdom of God”—with a trust that it will be brought by God’s efforts—calls for a more detached role regarding universal health care. Thus the prophetic role is the limit of the Christian community’s engagement with society. In respect to the issue of control, euthanasia can be understood as a matter of maintaining a faithfulness, and is thus a matter of expected and

required self-control, while universal health care can be understood as an attempt to change society, and is thus an unjustified attempt to control the world.

Having seen how faith impacts Hauerwas' approach to these issues, the next chapter will consider the same issues in the work of Richard A. McCormick, S.J.

CHAPTER SIX  
McCORMICK'S APPROACH TO  
EUTHANASIA AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

This chapter will examine McCormick's approach to the issues of euthanasia and universal health care in light of his understanding of the role of Christian ethics in a contemporary religiously pluralistic society. The first section of this chapter will review briefly the treatment of McCormick in chapters one through three and will summarize his understanding of ethics, Christian ethics and the role that Christian ethics have in a religiously pluralistic society. The second section will provide a short outline of Christian health care ethics as presented in McCormick's thought. Following this, the third and fourth section of this chapter will demonstrate how this approach is manifested in McCormick's treatment of the issues of euthanasia and universal health care.

**Summary of McCormick's Ethics**

It was noted in chapter one that McCormick's approach to ethics adopts the fundamental aspects of natural law. Ethics is a universal reality that transcends specific cultures and communities and is rooted in the order of nature. As part of this approach, McCormick maintains that this order is able to be discovered by all people through their experience of creation, especially the experience of human nature. Moreover, it is human reason that enables this discernment of the ethical order of creation. His approach is a bit more contemporary than more traditional approaches to natural law in two respects: that it acknowledges the historical nature (and therefore limitations) of all human knowledge and that it appropriates a more inclusive understanding of what is meant by "human reason."

The more contemporary understanding of the human person that is a part of McCormick's approach to ethics recognizes that the moral subject must be understood as

embedded within a socio-historical context and impacted by numerous communities. And while these communities assist the individual to develop his or her ethics at a personal level (the communities serve to verify individual ethical judgments), they also influence that understanding of ethics. Thus, while there is a universal reality of human nature that is common to all people, it is always manifested within a particular context and subject to various influences. Such a recognition acknowledges that any understanding of the human person, including our knowledge of what constitutes the good, is intrinsically limited and therefore subject to continued discernment. And this continued discernment makes dialogue such an important aspect within McCormick's ethics. In as much as this knowledge of the human person and what constitutes the good of the human person is available to all people (not as the result of a specific revelation), all people are called to engage in this process of discernment. It is through dialogue with those of different ethical understandings that people are able to come to a fuller understanding of the human good. This is accomplished by teaching, with an element of pastoral care, and by learning, with an element of self-critical openness.

This firm conviction of the existence of a universal good, the dedication to pursuing this human good and an openness to developing a fuller understanding of the human person are what serve as the foundation for McCormick's normative ethics. According to McCormick, "The central question always is: Will this or that intervention (or omission, exception, policy, law) promote or undermine human persons 'integrally and adequately considered?'"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard A. McCormick, *The Critical Calling: Moral Dilemmas Since Vatican II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 267. It is also worth noting that this approach that recognizes the limited nature of the human person is what grounds McCormick's normative approach of "proportionalism." This approach is one that McCormick articulates quite clearly in beginning one of his more direct treatments of the issue of euthanasia, "The New Medicine and Morality" (*Theology Digest* 21 (Winter 1973): 308-21), which will be used later in this chapter when addressing the issue of euthanasia. McCormick begins his treatment of the

McCormick's understanding of Christian ethics was considered in chapter two. It is important to note that for McCormick there is no ontological difference between Christian and secular ethics because both are rooted in a common universal ethical reality—the good of the human person fully and adequately considered. Because the primary ethical criterion is the same, the good of the human person, there is a material identity between Christian and non-Christian ethics. While a Christian consideration of the human person may be unique in the perspective of the subject at hand, the human person fully and adequately considered is not unique to those of any particular religious conviction. As a result there is not a unique Christian ethics. The good of the human person integrally and adequately considered is universal and therefore right and wrong are the same for all people regardless of religious commitments. Ethical answers are not rooted in some unique religious tradition.

But while Christian faith does not provide exclusive ethical answers it does provide a particular Christian worldview, and this distinctive worldview helps in the process of moral discernment by providing a fuller understanding of the human good that is not as “tainted by cultural distortion.”<sup>2</sup> Christian faith sheds a new light on the common reality of the human person. It provides an insight into the nature of the human person as the image and likeness of God—most particularly in its acknowledgement of Jesus as the fullest manifestation of the human person and of God incarnate. Moreover, the Christian tradition maintains that this graced

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issue by stating, “Every human choice, being a finite choice, will fail to realize all possible values. It can realize only certain limited values, and in doing so must at times do so to the neglect of other values or at the expense of associated disvalues. ... [W]here values are copresent and mutually exclusive, the reasonable thing is to avoid what is, all things considered, the greater evil or, positively stated, to do the greater good.” (316).

<sup>2</sup> Richard A. McCormick, “Does Religious Faith Add to Ethical Perception?” in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 2: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 170.

quality of human nature, a quality that directs humans to their ultimate *telos* of union with God, is not forfeited by sin. It is because of this innate graced ontological reality of the human person that all people can share in the process of moral discernment. There is a “natural” inclination to divine communion and it can only be pursued through a relationship of love with other people. Human good, and human happiness, is a result of acting in accord with this fundamental and universal aspect of human nature that brings individuals into union with God through union with their neighbor. Thus, for McCormick, charity is the center of morality. As Lisa Sowle Cahill notes,

McCormick identifies the good “higher” than human life as the capacity for relationships of love. This good is related to religious commitment because love of God is accomplished through love of neighbor.<sup>3</sup>

Christian faith provides moral insight in order to help the faithful discern the “good” and, perhaps more importantly, it also provides the moral strength and guidance to do the “good” in order to be good people who more fully manifest the image of God to one another.

Chapter three noted that because of McCormick’s understanding of ethics as universal in its pursuit of the human good and his understanding of the ethical community as all of humanity, his Christian ethics is enmeshed in the “secular” ethics of society. Ethics takes place in the ongoing dialogue of humanity as a whole as to what constitutes the good. The ongoing process of moral discernment ensures that dialogue with non-Christian ethics is a fundamental aspect of Christian ethics and that in this dialogue the Christian community functions as both teacher and student. The insights of the Christian community into the human good, achieved through the lens of its particular Christian worldview, serve as a basis for the community to foster the basic

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "On Richard McCormick: Reason and Faith in Post-Vatican II Catholic Ethics," in *Theological Voices in Medical Ethics*, ed. Allen Verhey and Stephen E. Lammers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 92.



human values in the rest of society. In this respect the church community functions as teacher, entering into the ethical dialogue to foster and develop societal norms that will promote the human good of all of society. The impact of the Christian community on the broader society is not so much a side effect of being what Christians are called to be, but rather a part of what they are called to be as the Christian community. In this respect the Christian community helps to more fully realize the kingdom of God by helping society to more fully manifest that reality. Therefore, Christian ethics ought to engage society in order to exercise its role as a prophetic voice in the ongoing dialogue. Achieving this end requires that the Christian community address itself to society in a manner that is comprehensible to those outside the Christian community. In doing so the Christian community can help society to recognize and realize the common ethical reality of the human good, without the need of non-Christians becoming Christian. Due to the *transhistorical* and *transcultural* nature of the church's moral community, the Christian moral insight can contribute to overcoming social or cultural boundaries of more limited ethical positions.

In contrast to both Engelhardt and Hauerwas, McCormick insists that the church is also called to be an ethical student. The ongoing process of moral discernment, especially when considered in light of the limited nature of all human understanding, requires that the Christian community, like all communities, must be open to critique and change. In as much as some aspects of the human good are first recognized outside of the Christian community, the church must be open to recognizing those aspects as more fully manifesting the good of the human person. McCormick notes the issue of religious freedom as an illustration of this process in Christian ethics.

[A] religious community can have its corporate eyes opened by a previous societal acceptance of a value the religious community failed to discern. I believe this happened to the Catholic Church with the notion of religious freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Recognizing the possibility of discerning moral truth from non-Christian perspectives requires recognizing the potentially prophetic nature of the voice of society.

Christian ethics, whether functioning *ad intra* within the Christian community or *ad extra* within society at large, is directed at fostering the development of the kingdom of God by making the entire community, both Christian and non-Christian, more just, more fair and, most importantly, more loving.

### **McCormick's Health Care Ethics**

Much of McCormick's writing addresses issues of health care, especially health care in Catholic hospitals. Unfortunately, like Hauerwas, McCormick's treatment of health care is not done primarily as a systematic treatment of the material, but rather as short treatments of specific issues within that broader spectrum. There is, however, at least one work that consists of a more holistic consideration of the issue of health care: *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition: Tradition in Transition*.<sup>5</sup> In his eulogy to McCormick, Timothy O'Connell notes that this book "is a landmark summary of the rich Catholic vision of health, healing, and wholeness" and calls it "a worthy legacy for Richard A. McCormick."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 197. Such issues as freedom of conscience, slavery, and capital punishment may also be considered illustrative of the church as an ethical student.

<sup>5</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 62 (1986): 207-15.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy E. O'Connell, Ph.D., "Richard McCormick: Hero of Humane Healthcare," *Suffering: The Stauros Notebook* 19, no. 2 Summer 2000 The Stauros Center, 5/23/06 <<http://www.stauros.org/notebooks/articledetail.php?id=122>>.

McCormick begins this book by stating that it has come about as a result of following the suggestion of the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Facilities” (the 1971 document of the United States Catholic Conference) that “the directives would need revision in light of scientific and theological development.”<sup>7</sup> His consideration of the directives begins with a draft of a revision titled “Ethical Guidelines for Catholic Health Care Institutions” that was “developed privately over a two-year period by a group of Catholic theologians, ethicists, and health care personnel.”<sup>8</sup> He makes it clear that while this draft begins with the USCC document as its starting point it was not commissioned or approved by ecclesiastical authorities and has no official standing. However, it does serve as an excellent framework for his consideration of a Catholic approach to health care. His writing endorses the positions taken by the document and the book starts his consideration by including the guidelines, a full six and a half pages of text. His primary goal in the rest of this book is to explain more fully the principles and foundations that serve as the basis for the guidelines articulated in this document. The book also provides an excellent insight into McCormick’s integration of health care ethics and Catholic social teaching which will be extremely useful later in this chapter in the consideration of universal health care.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 6. These directives have been revised since then and the most recent version, the fourth edition, was put forth by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2001. It is interesting that a number of the themes noted by McCormick in this book as lacking from the document are present in the 2001 version, most notably the issue of justice as it relates to health care.

<sup>8</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 6. In the introduction to this book McCormick again makes clear how his understanding of the limited aspect of human nature serves as the context for his approach to all ethics, including health care ethics. “Our [ethical] formulations are necessarily the product of a limited grasp of reality, of historically conditioned attitudes, of limited philosophical concepts and language. At a given time in history they are only more or less adequate. Our personal and communal task is constantly to purify these formulations, to bring them closer to the abiding substance of our religious or moral concern.” (4).

<sup>9</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 4.

McCormick begins with the consideration of the mission of Catholic health care.

McCormick calls Paragraph A of the document the most important because it tells why the Catholic health care institutions exist and “in doing so, how they should exist.”<sup>10</sup> Here he cites the paragraph that understands the mission of Catholic health care institutions as a part of the mission of the church.

The Church’s mission is to reveal and mediate the healing redemptive love of Jesus Christ in the world. Catholic health care institutions exist to be a visible expression of this mission. They should powerfully embody the Church’s commitment to promote health and wholeness and to extend Christ’s healing love to people whose lives have been disrupted by sickness, injury, or death.<sup>11</sup>

This primacy of “Christ’s healing love” is explained further by McCormick when he states,

It is axiomatic that we expand and become capable of love by being loved. Hence the Church’s proclamation is necessarily action. The Church is in the health care apostolate because it is a most concrete and effective way of communicating to human beings their real worth—that is, the good news. For if the Church proclaims to people what they truly are here and now, yet does nothing about it, she literally does not mean what she says. Proclamation of the Gospel is by inner necessity concern for those to whom the Gospel is proclaimed. The Church’s ethical action is an anticipation of the kingdom, and, as such, a proclamation of it. We need our “visible expressions” of who we are.<sup>12</sup>

In his summary of the mission statement of the document McCormick provides a vision of how this focus on love of the human person must be understood in light of a holistic understanding of the human person.

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<sup>10</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 20.

<sup>11</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 8.

<sup>12</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 20. It is worth observing how McCormick’s anthropology is present in this statement. In understanding the mission of the church as the communication to human beings of “their real worth” there is an implicit anthropological assessment of the ontological worth of the human person. In this McCormick sees the church as making known to people “what they truly are here and now” rather than as proclaiming the Gospel in order to change people from what they are here and now. As was pointed out in chapter three much of this anthropology can be seen in the different understanding of original sin that one finds in each of the authors.

Paragraphs A, B, C, and D, then, hold up a vision of health care wherein the patient-person as a whole (spiritual, physical, and psychosocial) is the focal point. From the Catholic point of view this means to “extend Christ’s love” in the full biblical sense of health and healing. If this vision or purpose is absent, the “Catholic” health care facility becomes superfluous and the mission of the believing community in this area becomes fruitless.<sup>13</sup>

McCormick provides three reasons for both the importance of considering the *whole person*—that is the human person integrally and adequately considered, and the central role of the human person in his approach to ethics. First, he points out that in the past, “this insight [of the fundamental unity of the whole person] was neglected, and isolated aspects of the person, particularly biological aspects, became normative.”<sup>14</sup> Second, he reiterates that “a moral assessment of our actions must consider the *whole action*—external act, intention, circumstances, consequences—for each of its aspects has an effect upon the person.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, he insists that it is necessary to maintain the centrality of the human person because “this emphasis is essential to the notion of health and healing in the Catholic tradition.”<sup>16</sup> McCormick sees this focus on the entirety of the human person as crucial in the realm of health care.

It is the “total good of the person” that health care seeks, whether it be through surgery, spiritual counseling, care of the dying, psychotherapy, or anesthesia. Indeed, in a general sense, this “total good” is the ultimate aim of every human activity, but in the field of health care the phrase comes readily to Catholic lips.<sup>17</sup>

It is this understanding of health care in light of a consideration of the whole person, in all of his or her many aspects, relationships and dimensions, that serves as the criterion for how

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<sup>13</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 24.

<sup>14</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 18.

<sup>15</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 19.

<sup>16</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 19.

<sup>17</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 15.

those in health care ought to “extend Christ’s healing love.”<sup>18</sup> In doing this the people who care for the sick are, like Jesus, extending their gift of self to the ill and suffering. The practice of medical care forms a particular context for this extension of Christ’s love and it is this that forms the unique nature of a Christian view of the health care profession. “From the Christian point of view, the field of health care is a privileged context in which to encounter another person—and hence to encounter Christ.”<sup>19</sup> McCormick further illustrates the fundamental unity of Christian faith and love saying that “‘Love is the function of faith horizontally just as prayer is the function of faith vertically.’ This is true of both the curing and the caring dimensions of health care. If we do not view health care in this way, we interpret and restrict its reality short of the depths of faith.”<sup>20</sup>

One should remember this in light of McCormick’s understanding of the process of moral decision making. One of the key aspects in the process of conscience formation, according to McCormick, is the role of the community. Thus, Christian health care is about enabling right (as well as good) decisions in cases of moral problems by providing to moral decision makers a Christian perspective on issues of health care in order to yield better moral insights as well as better moral judgments.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 30.

<sup>19</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 39.

<sup>20</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 39. The quote included by McCormick is from Joseph Sittler’s *The Structures of Christian Ethics* (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 64.

<sup>21</sup> This role of communal perspective, a perspective beyond the individual making the moral decision, is crucial to McCormick’s distinction between good, which is the result of an individual acting in accord with his or her well-formed conscience, and right, which is the objective evaluation of the morality of an action. It is through interaction with the community beyond their individual self that the individual is able to develop his or her conscience so that

In its focus on narrative as the basis for this Christian perspective, McCormick's approach is very similar to that taken by Stanley Hauerwas. For McCormick numerous elements in the Christian story serve to provide "perspectives, themes, and insights" relevant to health care ethics.<sup>22</sup> While McCormick acknowledges that this results in many relevant themes he notes six

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good moral judgments are more actual manifestations of right moral judgments. In this process the moral sources, including the Christian community, enlighten the individual's conscience.

<sup>22</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 49-50. He notes several key elements in the Christian story as follows:

To see how Christian perspectives, themes, and insights are related to medical ethics, let us isolate some key elements of the Christian story and from a Catholic reading and living of it. One might not be too far off with the following list.

God is the author and preserver of life. We are "made in God's image."

Thus, life is a gift, a trust. It has great worth because of the value God is placing on it.

God places great value on it because he is also (besides being author) the end and purpose of life.

We are on a pilgrimage, having here no lasting home.

God has dealt with us in many ways. But his supreme epiphany of himself (and our potential selves) is his son, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we have been totally transformed into "new creatures," into a community of the transformed. Sin and death have met their victor.

The ultimate significance of our lives consists in developing this new life.

The Spirit is given to us to guide and inspire us on this journey.

The ultimate destiny of our combined journeys is the "coming of the kingdom," the return of the glorified Christ to claim the redeemed world.

Thus, we are offered in and through Jesus Christ eternal life. Just as Jesus has overcome death (and now lives), so will we who cling to him, placing our faith and hope in him and taking him as our law and model.

This Good News, this covenant with us, has been entrusted to a people, a people to be nourished and instructed by shepherds.

This people should continuously remember, and thereby make present, Christ in his death and resurrection at the Eucharistic meal.

The chief and central manifestation of this new life in Christ is love for each other (not a flaccid "niceness," but a love that shapes itself in concrete forms of justice, gratitude, forbearance, chastity, etc.).

If we are thinking *theologically* about the ethical problems of biomedicine, it is out of such a framework, context, or story that we will think. The very meaning, purpose, and value of human life is grounded and ultimately explained by this story.

“perspectives” that play crucial roles in Christian biomedical ethical deliberations. When noting these six perspectives he also makes it very clear that the origin of these perspectives in the Christian story does not limit their relevance to only those of the “storied community” of Christianity.

Thus far I have been discussing Christian perspectives that give shape to our ethical deliberations in biomedicine. I have mentioned six: *life as a basic but not an absolute value; the extension of this evaluation of nascent life; the potential for human relationships as an aspect of physical life to be valued; the radical sociality of the human person; the inseparability of the unitive and procreative goods; permanent heterosexual union as normative.* There are probably many more such themes woven into the Christian story, but the ones that I have listed are especially relevant to our being pilgrims created in the image and likeness of God.

The question naturally arises about those who do not share in the Christian story, those who may have a different story. If the theological contribution to medical ethics must be derived from a particular story, is not the contribution inherently isolating? Those who do not agree with the themes I have disengaged from the story need only say: “Sorry, I do not share your story.” There the conversation stops. Public policy discussion is paralyzed by the irreconcilable stand-off of conflicting stories and world views. And public policy is increasingly the area in which the ethical problems of biomedicine will be discussed and resolved, a point sharply made by Daniel Callahan.

That would be a serious, perhaps insuperable, problem if the themes I have disengaged from the Christian story were incomprehensible apart from the story. But in the Catholic reading of the Christian story this is not the case. The themes I have lifted out are thought to be inherently intelligible and commendable—difficult as it might be practically for a sinful people to maintain a sure grasp of these perspectives without the nourishing support of the story. Thus, for example, the Christian story is not the only cognitive source for the ideas of the radical sociability of persons and the immorality of infanticide and abortion, etc., even though historically these insights may be strongly attached to the story. In this epistemological sense, these insights are not specific to Christians. They can be and are shared by others. . . . Since Christian insights can be shared by others, I would call them confirmatory rather than originating.<sup>23</sup>

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Since that is the case, the story itself is the overarching foundation and criterion of morality. It stands in judgment of all human meaning and actions. (49-50)

<sup>23</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 58-59. Emphasis added. Later, McCormick uses this same passage in chapter three of his book *The Critical Calling* (1989) titled “Theology in the Public Forum” but does so without specifically tying it to health care ethics.



It is this perspective that shapes McCormick's understanding of Christian health care ethics. While the essence of all health care ethics is the same, Christian and non-Christian alike, the Christian faith and the teachings of the church, especially the six perspectives noted by McCormick, serve to provide insights into health care. These insights assist not only in the making of specific moral decisions, but also in the formation of conscience and moral character. Health care ethics formed and informed by the insights of Christianity serves a unique role in providing a *transcultural*, *transhistorical* point of view that assists the practice of health care to pursue the good of the human person "fully and adequately considered." As was the case with Hauerwas, this approach shifts the focus of medicine to care rather than cure, but does so in such a way that the focus on care is not limited to the Christian practice of medicine. Instead, McCormick envisions Christian health care as operating with a measure of self-critical reflection, in order cautiously to lead the way for all health care to a fuller understanding of what constitutes truly caring for the human person in the context of medicine. Timothy O'Connell notes that,

McCormick lays out a beautiful and inspiring Christian vision of well-being. Beginning from a love-based and Christ-centered vision of humanity, he proceeds to an understanding of health and of the health care profession that honors cure but maintains the primacy of care. And this, in turn, leads to what can only be called a "spirituality of health and medicine."<sup>24</sup>

With this understanding of McCormick's approach to Christian health care it is possible to consider how such an approach impacts his position regarding the issues of euthanasia and universal health care.

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<sup>24</sup> O'Connell, "Richard McCormick: Hero of Humane Healthcare."

## Euthanasia

Much of McCormick's work regarding end of life issues addresses persistent vegetative state (PVS) and withdrawal of life support rather than a more specific consideration of "active euthanasia." McCormick's attentiveness to the Christian focus on care and the Christian understanding of "life as a basic, but not absolute good"<sup>25</sup> leads him to a position on end of life care that is, in many respects, similar to that of both Hauerwas and Engelhardt. Like both, McCormick insists that the Christian approach to the end of life is rooted in a particular understanding of human life that should prevent health care from being vitalistic. The following words, taken from his "Theology and Bioethics," could easily have come from Engelhardt or Hauerwas.

[J]ust as aging is not mere dependence and weakening, so suffering is not mere pain and confusion, dying is not merely an end. These must be viewed, even if mysteriously, in terms of a larger redemptive process: as occasions for a growing self-opening after Christ's example, as various participations in the paschal mystery. Such perspectival nuances may not solve clinical dilemmas nor are they in any way intended to glorify suffering and dying. But they powerfully suggest that in approaching such realities healing can never be seen as mere fixing; autonomy is not a mere "being left alone," but a condition for life shaping; care is never merely material provision, but a "being with" that reinforces a sense of worth and dignity; dying can never be seen as "cosmetized passing" whose dignity is measured by the accumulation of minutes.<sup>26</sup>

McCormick acknowledges that unfortunately the practice of medicine has an inherent tendency toward such vitalism, but insists that the practice of medicine in the context of Christian faith asserts that the value of life transcends continued physical existence. Thus, since continued physical existence is not the greatest good to be pursued by medical care, there is no exceptionless requirement to do all that is possible to keep patients alive. To some degree all

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<sup>25</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Theology and Bioethics," *Hastings Center Report* 19 (March/April 1989): 9.

<sup>26</sup> McCormick, "Theology and Bioethics," 9.

three authors agree that contemporary medicine's focus on medical treatment of physiological problems, a focus that has resulted in an increased effectiveness, has led to a medical community too focused on cure of pathologies rather than on care of the entire patient. All three express concern that this has led to a particular neglect of patients who are in the process of dying. The medical evaluation of the inability to cure them, when cure is the most important goal of medicine, leads to an immoral omission of care when cure is not possible.

The characteristic temptation of the ethos of the medical profession is to idolize life and the profession's ability to preserve it. The manifestation of this is the abandonment of patients when cure is no longer possible and death is imminent. For many physicians death is defeat. ("No one dies on my shift.") This can skewer and distort the ministry of health care, decontextualize its instrumentalities, technologize its value judgments, and bloat its practitioners—to say nothing of limitlessly expanding its cost.<sup>27</sup>

And McCormick sees faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as corrective of just that vitalism which stems from an absolutizing of physical life.

[I]t is precisely connection with and commitment to God's deed in Christ ("as I have loved you") that is the best guarantor against absolutizing the relative. Specifically, it is corrective to the judgment that death is ultimate defeat. This is no signal for the profession to relax its vigorous pursuit of the preservation of life. It is simply an insistence that its ministry is to serve our best interests. And for the Christian, accumulation of extra minutes is not always the measure of best interests.<sup>28</sup>

In continuity with Roman Catholic medical ethics, McCormick maintains that there is a distinction, discernable by both Christians and non-Christians, as to when there is an obligation to maintain the patient's life (morally ordinary care) and when it is appropriate to allow the patient to die (morally extraordinary care.) McCormick maintains that there is no difference between withholding life support, thus allowing the patient to die (i.e., refraining from providing

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<sup>27</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 41.

<sup>28</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 41.

a respirator), and withdrawing that same life support after it has already been started (i.e., removing the patient from the respirator). The latter action is the right thing to do if the burden of treatment is no longer proportionate to the overall well-being of the patient. And he insists that continued physical existence can not be considered as such a high benefit that it always outweighs all other burdens. According to McCormick withdrawal of life sustaining measures is morally right in some cases.<sup>29</sup>

He regards the withdrawal of nutrition and hydration from patients in a PVS to be one such case. For McCormick the moral evaluation of removal of nutrition and hydration rests upon the question of whether it should be considered a form of killing the patient (which is wrong) or a process of letting them die (which is sometimes right.) He understands it to be a case of allowing them to die that is appropriate when the burdens of care, as assessed by the patient, outweigh the benefits of such treatment. In this, McCormick distinguishes himself from a number of Catholic ethicists in that he regards the condition of PVS to be included as a condition

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<sup>29</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Caring or Starving? The Case of Claire Conroy," *America* 152 (1985): 269-73; Richard A. McCormick (with John Paris, S.J.), "The Catholic Tradition on the Use of Nutrition and Fluids," *America* 156 (1987): 356-61; Richard A. McCormick, "The Karen Ann Quinlan Case: Editorial," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 234 (December 8, 1975): 1057; Richard A. McCormick, "Living-Will Legislation, Reconsidered," *America* 145 (1981): 86-89; Richard A. McCormick, "The Preservation of Life," *Linacre Quarterly* 43 (May 1976): 94-100; Richard A. McCormick, "The Preservation of Life and Self-Determination," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 390-96; Richard A. McCormick, "A Proposal for 'Quality of Life' Criteria for Sustaining Life," *Hospital Progress* 56 (September 1975): 76-79; Richard A. McCormick, "The Quality of Life, The Sanctity of Life," *Hastings Center Report* 8 (February 1978): 30-36; Richard A. McCormick, "Searching for the Consistent Ethic of Life," in *Personalist Morals*, ed. J. A. Selling (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 135-46; Richard A. McCormick, "To Save or Let Die," *America* 130 (July 13 1974): 6-10; McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 369-88; McCormick, *Corrective Vision*, 210-32. The last two sources are of particular note in that they are several chapters from more recently published books (1989 and 1994 respectively) and present a more fully integrated view of McCormick's position in light of a larger number of medical cases.

in which nutrition and hydration should be understood as medical treatment rather than palliative care; it may therefore be removed in order to allow the patient to die. For McCormick, it is a permissible act that acknowledges the limited nature of the patient as a human person rather than a murderous act that has the inherent intent of causing the patient's death. McCormick specifically addresses the withdrawal of nutrition and hydration stating that

[I]t would not necessarily involve a death-aim. It need involve a thoroughly Christian assertion that there are values greater in life than living, that we all retain the right to decide how we shall live while dying.<sup>30</sup>

While McCormick accepts withdrawal of treatment, he rejects assisted suicide and euthanasia.<sup>31</sup> In a manner very similar to Hauerwas, McCormick asserts "Assisted suicide is a flight from compassion not an expression of it. It should be suspect not because it is too hard but because it is too easy."<sup>32</sup> McCormick recognizes that the process of dying can be difficult not only for the patient but also for those who care for him or her. Rather than being a way of caring for the patient, assisted suicide is a selfish way in which to avoid the difficulty of caring for the

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<sup>30</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 382. This article in general and this quote in particular contains the implicit rejection of any action which has as its intent the death of the patient. In as much as such action is rejected McCormick rejects euthanasia.

<sup>31</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 96-97. Lisa Sowle Cahill states, "Remaining consistent with Catholic tradition, McCormick has never defended direct euthanasia or mercy killing. Death in situations of critical illness may be brought about only indirectly by acts of omission. In an earlier article on death and dying, McCormick . . . locates life—at least that of the innocent—among the 'basic values' that may never be sacrificed directly. He agrees that although occasionally good reasons may exist for omitting life-sustaining measures, the proposition that there is no proportionate reason for directly dispatching a terminal or dying patient has yet to be refuted. Weighing against direct euthanasia are the possible short- and long-term effects of accepting acts of commission. The 'presumption of a common and universal danger' establishes at least a 'virtually exceptionless' norm against it. This is a social consideration that obviously moves beyond—though not necessarily making obsolete—the older Catholic approach that upholds the 'individual's right to life' in any considerations of direct killing."

<sup>32</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Technology, the Consistent Ethic, and Assisted Suicide," *Origins* 25/27 (December 21 1995): 460.

person in the always difficult and sometimes extended process of dying. The obligations of caring for the patient as a person, while limited by the nature of the human person as finite, hold us to a level of care that does not aim at the death of the patient.

McCormick insists, in one of his considerations of euthanasia, that while there are often times that it is morally right to allow a patient to die there are not times when it is morally right to kill a patient. In an article published early in the consideration of end of life medical care, McCormick argued against those who would permit euthanasia on the grounds that there is no moral difference between the two actions. For those taking such a position what justified omission of life sustaining measures (knowing that the patient would die) would justify commission of euthanasia (doing something in order to bring about the death of the patient). He rejects this position, saying that a consideration of the proportionate burdens and benefits of allowing euthanasia could not be limited to the short range effects on the patient—as they affect the patient both actions result in the death of the patient. Instead, a moral evaluation of euthanasia must consider the long range effects on the patient as well as *all* of those concerned. This leads him to say,

When all the values are weighed, I would tentatively suggest that what is proportionate for allowing a terminal patient to die is not proportionate for directly causing death. And if this is true, it means that omission and commission are not morally identical, at least insofar as the moral significance is traceable to or revealed by, effects.<sup>33</sup>

McCormick holds that the prohibition of direct killing, even in cases when the patient is in the process of dying, ought to be maintained as a “virtually exceptionless norm” against a universal danger.<sup>34</sup> In light of the potential for abuse, and holding “that to allow individuals to

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<sup>33</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "The New Medicine and Morality," *Theology Digest* 21 (Winter 1973): 318.

<sup>34</sup> McCormick, "The New Medicine and Morality," 319.

make that decision for themselves will pose a threat for the common good,” McCormick believes that euthanasia ought never be permitted because “[t]he risk in alternative policies is simply too great.”<sup>35</sup>

This article is particularly noteworthy relative to the issue at hand because of how McCormick envisions the interaction of such Christian moral judgments with the religiously pluralistic society. As part of his argument that the risk of allowing euthanasia is too great he points out that

Certain cultural “reasons” qualify or shade our perception of and our grasp of basic human values and inevitably become the cultural soil of our assessment of proportion, of how we define the “good of persons,” of what means are justified by what ends.<sup>36</sup>

One such cultural bias, according to McCormick, that increases the risk of allowing euthanasia is the repression and denial of death that “has brought about a separation of death from life.”<sup>37</sup>

McCormick asserts that such repression, which inhibits proper moral evaluation of end of life care, constitutes the context within which the current deliberations take place. He proposes that in order to correct this bias Christians ought to engage society in such a way so as to alter the erroneous cultural view of death.

[C]learly our first moral task is to acknowledge and then challenge from a deeply Christian root the cultural attitudes and values that generate and support this repression and prevent clear and Christian thinking about death. Only when this task is accomplished will we be able to make quality-of-life decisions without forfeiting true quality. . . . Death will always remain a mystery. But if we are to maintain our dignity when dealing with this mystery, we desperately need an

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<sup>35</sup> McCormick, "The New Medicine and Morality," 320.

<sup>36</sup> McCormick, "The New Medicine and Morality," 320-21.

<sup>37</sup> McCormick, "The New Medicine and Morality," 321.

attitude toward life that enriches death without glorifying it, and one toward death that enriches life without absolutizing it.<sup>38</sup>

McCormick's position that the ethical evaluation rooted in a Christian worldview ought to engage the practice of medicine and society at large can be seen even more clearly in his treatment of withdrawing nutrition and hydration from PVS patients. Especially in his treatment of such legal cases as those of Paul Brophy and Nancy Cruzan, it is clear that his ethical critiques and arguments are not directed solely to the Christian community or even only to the medical community, but to American society at large. He understands himself to be engaged in an ongoing ethical dialogue that should impact not only Christian and non-Christian ethical evaluations of the specific actions, but should impact social structures such as hospital guidelines as well as state and federal laws.

Much of his material can be seen challenging members of the medical community to evaluate contemporary medical practices more closely. Such material is not directed to exclusively Christian medical professionals but to all of those involved in the medical care of patients. In a chapter titled "If I Had Ten Things to Share with Physicians," McCormick poses the following to *all* physicians:

Don't see death as the ultimate enemy. The medical profession is committed to curing disease and preserving life. That we take for granted. But this commitment must be implemented within a healthy and realistic acknowledgment that we are mortal. The point seems so obvious as to be trivial. In a sense it is.

But living it out is not. The attempt to walk a balanced middle path between medico-moral optimism (which preserves life at any cost, with all means, regardless of diagnosis, prognosis, family history, patient preferences, etc.) and medio-moral pessimism (which takes life when it becomes onerous, boring, dysfunctional and "hopeless") is not easy, especially in a highly litigious atmosphere.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> McCormick, "The New Medicine and Morality," 321.

<sup>39</sup> McCormick, *The Critical Calling*, 365-66.



Additionally, his material is addressed beyond the medical community to society at large. He addresses these issues not just as a Christian ethicist within the Christian community or as a Christian ethicist in the medical community but as a Christian ethicist engaged in the ongoing public ethical dialogue of American society. As a member of American society he examines the legal cases and the judicial rulings in order to provide an ethical assessment of the judicial actions and to evaluate the ethical merit of the courts' decisions. The question by which he critiques the courts' judgments is not "What would be the right decision if they were Christian courts?" or "What would be the decision if the courts ruled from a Christian perspective?" but instead the question he raises is "What is the right decision? Given that these courts help to guide human action in society, what is the right decision that will help to guide all of society to the good?" While it is clear that he addresses this question from a Christian perspective, an approach to health care ethics that esteems values rooted in the Christian narrative, he believes that the ethical merit of his position can be recognized by both Christian and non-Christian alike. This approach asserts that his Christian position regarding end of life care ought to influence (and be realized by) the national laws because it is a thoroughly studied and well structured ethical position.

For McCormick, the ethical insights of the Christian tradition on the issues of euthanasia and end of life care should be used to engage and improve the ethical guidelines of the medical community and the legal guidelines of society as a whole. In his thought the same can be said regarding universal health care.

### **Universal Health Care**

In McCormick's thought the church's role in society ensuring the provision of health care is much the same as its role in society ensuring the prohibition of assisted suicide and euthanasia.

In order properly to address the provision of health care, the Christian community must begin with a consideration of the issue from a Christian perspective and must move from such a consideration to a judgment of what, in light of Christian insight, is the right thing to do. Then, the Christian community, having reached a moral judgment about the issue, ought to engage the larger society in an active dialogue that enables both communities to develop in such a way as to realize more fully the ethically right behavior. Such an engagement is possible because, while the Christian perspective provides a unique moral insight, it is not the exclusive viewpoint from which to make an accurate moral assessment of the issue at hand. The universal ethical reality that is common to both Christians and non-Christians serves as a means by which the church and its Christian insight can play a role in the ongoing public dialogue concerning universal health care. Such a role can take many forms and the church is in no way excluded from political activity.

Thus, this section will begin by examining McCormick's understanding of universal health care from a Christian perspective in order to understand McCormick's judgment about the right Christian approach to universal health care. Subsequently, the section will examine the role that McCormick suggests that the Christian community ought to play within the society in order to facilitate the fullest realization of right health care in the medical community of society as a whole.

However, one thing must be noted before beginning this process. The previous section's discussion of end of life care treats an issue rather individual in nature and moves from this "individual" moral judgment to the ethical implications at a social level. This allows for a fairly clear distinction between the Christian judgment regarding morally right action and the associated Christian role in society regarding that issue. The discussion of universal health care

does not allow for as much of a distinction. In universal health care it is even more clearly the case that “individual treatment decisions cannot be excised easily from a social justice context.”<sup>40</sup> The very socio-political nature of providing universal health care means that there is a much larger social element in any ethical consideration of such action. McCormick’s judgment as to the proper Christian action regarding the provision of health care includes as an essential element a Christian understanding of the nature of the human community. The Christian belief in the nature of the human person as an essentially social creature is what provides the framework for McCormick’s judgment as to the proper Christian response to those in need of health care. In as much as the communal aspect of the human person is part of his or her essence, not an aspect incorporated as part of becoming Christian, the social obligations recognized by McCormick do not exist solely for the Christian community. As a result the Christian element of this moral judgment on the provision of universal health care is not limited to the Christian community’s provision of universal health care. The question at hand should not be understood primarily as “How ought the **Christian community**, in light of Christian beliefs and insights, provide health care?” Rather the Christian element of the moral judgment is the theological insight into the nature of the human person. As a result the question to be answered is “How, in light of Christian beliefs and insights about the human person, ought the **human community** provide health care?” It is easy to see that such an approach begins with a certain presupposition as to the proper integration of the Christian community into the larger extra-ecclesial society. Even so, it may be beneficial to consider the issue of universal health care using the somewhat academic distinction between the Christian judgment regarding provision of health care and the role that the Christian community ought to play in society to achieve that end.

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<sup>40</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 101.

The starting point for understanding McCormick's approach to universal health care is to recognize that he situates it in the context of social justice. In his book *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition*, the chapter that treats the issue of universal health care is titled "Justice in Health Care."<sup>41</sup> For McCormick, a consideration of the just allocation of health care is an aspect of the more general consideration of the just distribution of benefits within society. With that in mind McCormick identifies two aspects in particular that constitute his consideration of justice in health care: access and allocation.

A number of issues can be considered under the rubric of justice in health care. The two that seem most pressing (and controversial) are access to health care (What is our obligation to ensure equitable access to our health care system?) and allocation of resources (Are we allotting an appropriate amount of resources to health care and to the proper health services?).

Obviously these issues are closely related. Problems of access may stem in part from an undue emphasis on expensive high technology and acute care. These issues need to be examined in tandem.<sup>42</sup>

He begins by pointing out that a Christian consideration of American health care should recognize that the health care system, including Catholic health care facilities, "reflect our American culture more than they reflect the fulfillment of a religious mission."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the American values operative in the social construct of health care (i.e., individualistic, impartial, egalitarian, nationalistic, focused on law, punitive) are in tension with the biblical

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<sup>41</sup> Here again McCormick's book is noted by Timothy O'Connell as a valuable resource in this issue of universal health care. He makes particular note of chapter four saying, "But what is really noteworthy [of McCormick's book], I believe, are the remaining two chapters. In one, McCormick argues strongly for concerns of justice in health care. Pointing out how medical ethics can too easily be compromised by the myth of American individualism, he challenges us to rethink this area from the perspective of our common humanity and our shared destiny. The result is an entirely fresh sense of right and wrong in health care issues." O'Connell, "Richard McCormick: Hero of Humane Healthcare."

<sup>42</sup> Richard A. McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 62 (1986): 75.

<sup>43</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 76.

values that, from a Christian perspective, ought to operate in any such social construct. These biblical values (i.e., social, biased in favor of the poor, uneven, universalist, focused on *shalom*, benevolent) provide a different vision of justice than provided by American culture. For McCormick, it is this Christian vision of what constitutes justice within a community that provides the uniquely Christian insight into the provision of health care.

From the very beginning, his own treatment of the provision of health care marks a biblical concern for the widow and orphan.

National attention has been focused recently on the issue of access to health care. This is understandable, given the increasing number of people who are served poorly or not at all by our present powerful and entrenched system. As many as twenty-five million Americans have no medical insurance and many millions more are inadequately insured. The most vulnerable segments of our population—children and women in female-headed households, the elderly, minorities, and the disabled—are those who suffer most as a result of our inadequate health care system. And it is they who are bearing the brunt of budget cuts to check spiraling health care costs.<sup>44</sup>

In response to this uneven distribution of medical hardship McCormick advocates a biblical approach that focuses on the needs of the poor. Guideline seven of “Ethical Guidelines for Catholic Health Care Institutions,” the document that McCormick uses for his book’s framework, requires that a “concern for justice” will of necessity include meeting “the needs of the underserved and the poor.”<sup>45</sup> In his commentary on this guideline, McCormick cites the Christian view of health care as a human right. At the social level, even outside the community of Christianity, health care is not to be regarded as simply another commerce or business.<sup>46</sup> As a

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<sup>44</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 75.

<sup>45</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 79.

<sup>46</sup> In chapter 4, the consideration of Engelhardt showed that he maintained that there was an obligation on the part of Christians to provide health care but that that moral obligation was limited to the Christian community. No such obligation existed at the social level where Engelhardt considered health care a commerce in which those who had the financial resources

human right, there is, on the part of society as a whole, an obligation to ensure that health care is provided to those who can not provide it for themselves.

The very first responsibility is to be aware of the problem [lack of adequate health care]. Several of the popes (for example, John XXIII), the American Catholic bishops, the American Medical Association, and an accumulating bioethical literature have asserted that there is a right to health care.<sup>47</sup>

As a human right considered in the context of social justice, particularly given McCormick's citation of papal encyclicals, one should realize that the principle of subsidiarity applies to the provision of health care. While providing health care for all the poor and "undeserved" lays beyond the capabilities of any individual institution, the individual institutions "do have responsibilities."<sup>48</sup> Because ensuring universal health care lies beyond the abilities of any single facility or even an association of institutions, McCormick recognizes that the responsibility for assuring all people adequate health care rests with society as a whole.

While McCormick acknowledges that it is quite difficult to ascertain the pragmatic details of what constitutes the adequate health care that must be provided, he insists that the basic obligation of providing health care to the poor is clear. And while it is difficult to determine who bears the responsibility for providing this care, McCormick makes it clear that this obligation to provide basic health care is an even clearer obligation for those individuals and institutions who profess to follow the teachings of Jesus.

Of course, there are many analytic problems with this assertion, but its core or abiding truth must be applied to the poor. Catholic institutions, which

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were entitled to whatever those who could provide the medical services would provide. One additional limitation of note in Engelhardt's approach was that in many respects the health care that the Christian community was obligated to provide was rather "spiritualistic" in nature.

<sup>47</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 79.

<sup>48</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 79.

exist to be living embodiments of the ideals of Jesus Christ, must rest uneasy until the poor are served. More positively, they are asked to take on more consciously the problem of the medically indigent. Just what form this takes will vary with time, place, and institutional setting. But one specific is urged: "turn outward." This suggests that institutions should find out the needs of the poor, rather than passively accepting charity cases, and should structure their own inner life to meet those needs. It is salutary to recall that millions of poor people are not categorically eligible for Medicaid. So often in the past, care of the poor was construed as direct service. This is, in our time, inadequate. There must be systematic reorientation so that the institution as a whole is geared to serving the poor. A tall order? Certainly. An impossible one? Not for those who live in hope and with courage.<sup>49</sup>

In this same chapter McCormick points out that the health care needs of those in society are in the process of change and that as a result the health care delivery system, Christian and non-Christian alike, will need to adapt to the changing needs of the community. It is this constant state of social change, with its necessary self-evaluation, that requires ongoing ethical dialogue utilizing the guidance of general moral principles rather than a fixed list of specific moral norms. Thus, the common ethical reality regarding providing health care is able to be discerned from any perspective (Christian and non-Christian alike) provided that there is a due attentiveness to justice. It is this approach that makes justice the primary principle in any consideration of universal health care. And thus, according to McCormick, it is the Christian understanding of social justice that should guide those changes.

Whatever concrete steps an institution takes, those steps will be symbols of a changing consciousness in health care delivery—that such delivery, to be truly human and Christlike, must be more concerned with justice. Those steps will be symbols of a tradition in transition.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 79-80.

<sup>50</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 81.

Such an approach to universal health care is clearly an example of McCormick's understanding of the fundamentally interrelational nature of "individual" and "social" ethics in the area of health care. Lisa Sowle Cahill notes this point when she says,

McCormick's series of questions demonstrates the need for interlocking Catholic social teaching—with its emphasis on the right of all to participate in the common good, the interdependency of rights and duties, the moral significance of social institutions, and the limited but important role of government in supporting the welfare and cooperation of groups within society—with the more traditionally person- and act-centered principles of medical ethics.<sup>51</sup>

Having posited this social justice as the Christian approach to providing health care, McCormick turns to examine how the Christian health care community ought to function in the larger society in order to manifest this "tall order." He begins by citing with approval the ethical guideline regarding distribution of health care resources from "Ethical Guidelines for Catholic Health Care Institutions."

8. The health care institution should take seriously its responsibility to work for an equitable distribution of health care resources, both within the institution and in society as a whole. This includes involvement in areas of law and public policy.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond this, McCormick cites with approval the recommendations of the study "Health Care of the Poor" (a study undertaken by The California Association of Catholic Hospitals [CACH]). He identifies the concluding recommendations of this study as a "good *beginning*" that represent a modest claim.<sup>53</sup> Four of the eleven recommendations endorsed by McCormick specifically mention a call to political action on the part of the association and all eleven imply

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<sup>51</sup> Cahill, "On Richard McCormick," 101.

<sup>52</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 79.

<sup>53</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 80. Italics in original.



activity on the social level outside of the specific community of Catholic hospitals.<sup>54</sup> In order for a Christian health care institution to fulfill its role in caring for the poor and the “undeserving,” it must engage in the structures of society to assure that this happens in **all** health care institutions. The institution establishes its identity as Christian by allowing its ethical principles, rooted in the Christian tradition, to form and inform not only its internal activities as it cares for the patients and their families, but also its external activities as it engages the rest of society to insure justice so that such care is practiced in their facilities as well as others.

Unlike Engelhardt, who is content with society’s assurance of Christians being allowed to freely practice right medical care, McCormick asserts that Christians should act to insure right medical care in all hospitals and health care institutions. Because the provision of health care is an aspect of social justice—an ethical reality discernable from outside as well as within the Christian tradition—the action of insuring its provision is not limited to Christian health care facilities. For McCormick, the nature of the Christian community requires that it work in the kingdom of this world towards achieving the kingdom of God. As with other issues of social justice, the Christian community should operate within the structures of society to ensure that all members of society are treated justly. And for McCormick, it is the Christian understanding of

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<sup>54</sup> Recommendations six, eight, nine, and ten specifically mention political activity and are listed here:

6. CACH should undertake and support political action to resist further cuts in federal and state funding for health care services for the poor.
8. CACH should take a leadership role in its dealings with state and local hospital associations in being advocates for health care of the poor.
9. CACH should support American Hospital Association’s efforts to establish a public policy that would define essential physical and mental health services, particularly as they impact service for the poor.
10. CACH should strengthen its efforts to gather, analyze, and report information and data that monitors the effects of federal and state health program changes and funding shortfalls on the poor in California, as well as in the Catholic hospitals.

justice, with its attentiveness to the widow, the orphan and *shalom*, that makes a special contribution to the social process of discerning the fair way to provide health care for all the members of society. With his understanding of universal health care rooted as it is in the Catholic understanding of social justice, he understands the church to have a role in assuring health care for all people. And he understands that this is to be done not only through the structures of the Christian community but through non-Christian social structures as well.

It is truly a sign of McCormick's insight into the issue of providing health care that in the conclusion of his book *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition*, a book published in 1984, he makes the following statement:

Catholic health care is in a state of transition, as it ought to be. A symptom of this transition is chapter 4, on justice: it is the shortest chapter in this book; in five years it will, or should be, the longest chapter in any discussion of Catholic health care.<sup>55</sup>

### **Summary**

This consideration of McCormick's treatment of euthanasia and universal health care should make several things clear regarding his understanding of how faith works in medical ethics. First, in sharp contrast to Engelhardt, McCormick envisions Christian and non-Christian ethics as sharing the same ethical reality. Second, this shared reality enables participation of the Christian community in the ethical dialogue of society at large. This dialogue enables the Christian community to critique and develop the ethical practices of society at large so that the Christian understanding of the nature of the human person can serve to develop society in such a way that it more fully manifests the evolving kingdom of God. This dialogue also serves as a means for the development of the Christian community to manifest the kingdom of God more fully.

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<sup>55</sup> McCormick, "Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition," 160.

Third, and most important, the role of the Christian community is to engage society so that the Christian ethical insight, gained from the Christian perspective of the human person, can assist society at large to recognize what fosters the development of the human person. Such engagement is exercised in both an indirect and direct manner. Like Hauerwas, McCormick sees the importance of the Christian community as a model ethical community. By living according to the Gospel values, the Christian community more fully manifests the kingdom of God and exerts an indirect influence on society. The “secondary” and indirect effect of good Christian living is the change that occurs in society as a result of the Christian example. But for McCormick the Christian engagement does not cease with such model behavior. Because of his approach of universal metaethical absolutism, McCormick holds that ethical right and wrong can be discerned from non-Christian perspectives as well. While the Christian faith may provide a unique insight into ethics, it is insight into a common ethical reality. Therefore, Christians, as a part of their ethical mission, can and should participate in society in order to change that society so that it more fully manifests the kingdom of God.

This outlook has a deep impact on McCormick’s understanding of how the Christian community ought to address the issues of euthanasia and universal health care. In both cases the Christian understanding of the nature of the human person as intrinsically good, intrinsically social, and intrinsically limited affects the ethical evaluation of the proposed behavior. For euthanasia, the Christian outlook on the intrinsically good nature of the human person prohibits the direct and intentional killing of patient. At the same time, the acknowledgement of the human person as intrinsically limited means that it is morally right to allow the patient to die or even to indirectly hasten their death when relieving their pain. Such an ethical approach means not only that Christian health care facilities ought not practice euthanasia, but that these facilities

(as well as other Christian organizations,) ought to work within the social structures to ensure that euthanasia remains illegal. The Christian community ought to engage society in order to assure that the health care community continues to do the ethically right thing of disallowing euthanasia and does not change for the worse by allowing it. In as much as the Christian community accomplishes this goal, the community helps to maintain, in its treatment of the dying patient, at least one aspect of the kingdom of God.

While McCormick's fundamental approach is the same when treating universal health care, the end result is somewhat different. The difference rests in the current practice of society in regards to the ethical issue at stake. In regards to euthanasia, the American society (with the exception of Oregon) does not allow what is ethically wrong. As a result, the role of the Christian community in engaging society is to **help maintain** the *status quo* of health care as it pertains to euthanasia. By way of contrast, the contemporary American society does not assure universal health care and thus, as McCormick perceives it, fails to be ethical in its treatment of the "poor and undeserving." As a result, the role of the Christian community in engaging society is to **help change** the *status quo* of health care as it pertains to universal health care. Such an ethically wrong social practice requires activity on the part of the Christian community to foster development and change within the medical community as well as within society at large in order to assure adequate medical care for all members of the society. In as much as it achieves this goal the Christian community will help to more fully manifest the kingdom of God.

It is worth noting that while the moral obligation of the Christian community is to **maintain** the *status quo* of society regarding euthanasia and to **change** the *status quo* of society regarding universal health care, both moral obligations call for the Christian community to actively engage society in order to help society as a whole more fully reflect the kingdom of

God. Having now considered all three authors in their treatment of euthanasia and universal health care as examples of how Christian ethics ought to function in a religiously pluralistic society, the final chapter will compare the similarities and differences between the authors' understandings of the role of the Christian community in public moral discourse.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### COMPARISON, CRITIQUE AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has attempted a thorough examination of the impact that each author's understanding of the role of faith in Christian ethics has on that author's understanding of the proper role that Christian ethics ought to play in the ethical arena of a pluralistic society. In concluding the dissertation, this chapter will do the following. It will begin with a brief summary of the ethical method of each of the ethicists under consideration in their approach to the role of faith-(in)formed ethics in a religiously pluralistic society. This will include attention to the specific issues of euthanasia and universal health care. The second section of this chapter will make a comparison of these three ethicists and particular aspects of their methods that differ. As part of this second section, the chapter will identify certain differences in their methodologies as the underlying cause of their conflict regarding euthanasia and universal health care. Section three of this chapter will set forth several tentative conclusions regarding the relationship of Christian ethics and the ethics of a religiously pluralistic society. The chapter will conclude with an identification of a few items related to the central theme of the dissertation which would benefit from a more thorough investigation.

#### **Summary of Ethical Methods**

Since the methodology of each of the ethicists under consideration has been addressed in the previous six chapters, this section will serve as a very brief summary of the authors' approach to Christian ethics and how that approach impacts their position regarding the ethical issues of euthanasia and universal health care.

## Engelhardt

As was noted in chapter four, Engelhardt makes a sharp distinction between the Christian community and the rest of the non-Christian world. This sectarian approach results in his ethics being dualistically divisible into a Christian ethics, which is founded on the individual's recognition of and commitment to Christian faith as the ethical norm, and all other non-Christian ethics, which are founded on the principle of permission as the sole common ethical norm. In this approach the principle of permission requires that each person is permitted to pursue the good as he or she understands it, so long as this does not impede others from doing the same. The fundamental inability of human persons outside of the Christian community to discern moral truth accurately necessarily results in an ethically pluralistic society. Thus, the metaethics of the broad society is non-normative metaethical relativism, which Engelhardt refers to as "thin" ethics. In this "thin" ethics, also known as the libertarian approach to ethics, the only limits on human behavior is prohibiting violence and disallowing coercion that prevents others from freely pursuing the good as they understand it.

Within Christianity the correct noetic experience of God, achieved only through the ecclesial community, enables those in the Christian community to recognize moral truth. Through grace and ecclesial guidance, *theosis* is possible so that the individual can truly know human nature as it ought to be. It is this knowledge that is necessary for proper moral judgments. Thus, those within the "traditional" Christian community will be the only ones able to make accurate moral judgments. There is a fundamental and unbridgeable gap between Christian and non-Christian ethics.

Engelhardt's focus on the church community as the key to morally correct ethics yields a method in which the role of Christian ethics in society is very distinct and separate from the

ethics of the rest of society and its religiously pluralistic nature. As a result of this gap there is an irreconcilable disagreement between Christian and non-Christian ethics. Since the ethics operative at the social level is, or should be, a libertarianism founded on non-normative ethical relativism, the best that Christians can pursue at the social level is a society that enables them to live a “good” life according to the Christian understanding of good. If this is achieved, the traditional Christian community would be able to live lives founded on the noetic experience and directed toward bliss-filled eternal unity with God. Therefore Christian ethics functions in two ways. In society, it attempts to achieve and protect a libertarianism of society while restraining society from imposing any ethical norms. In the church community, it attempts to achieve and protect an ethics faithfully conveyed through the traditional community of “The Church.”

The practical result of this dichotomy is two ethical approaches to health care that are irreconcilably different not only in their ethical conclusions but in the ethical justification of those conclusions. This results in an inability of non-Christian ethics to engage in any meaningful ethical dialogue with Christian ethics. Thus, as was seen in chapter four, there are two different biomedical ethics—non-Christian and Christian biomedical ethics.

Society, since it should operate according to libertarianism, should allow people to engage in whatever biomedical practices they freely choose to practice. Within non-Christian biomedical ethics there is no ethical norm that would prohibit rational patients and doctors from engaging in euthanasia so long as those participating are doing so freely. It is merely one manifestation among many of people misusing their freedom in conjunction with the principle of permission in order to act wrongly. This same focus on the individual’s freedom to pursue the individual’s perception of good means that there is no ethical basis on which to require provision of universal health care. Health care is, like any other commodity, available to the extent that



one is able to afford it. There is no universal moral ground that enables society to force those people who have the financial means to provide health care to those people who are too poor to afford it. Engelhardt does acknowledge that if the social community freely chooses to provide such social benefits as universal health care, the freedom of the community allows it to do so. But he is clear that this is only an exercise of communal freedom and can not be understood as a requirement based on an ethical norm that such health care ought to be provided to all people.

In sharp contrast to this libertarian non-Christian biomedical ethics Engelhardt portrays a Christian biomedical ethics that is focused on the good of the human person as an individual in the process of *theosis* and of health care as a limited good in as much as it contributes to achieving that end. Engelhardt insists that the nature of libertarian society must permit Christian hospitals to operate according to Christian bioethical norms. Because killing innocent people is wrong regardless of the intention or motivation, Christian hospitals would refuse to engage in euthanasia. And, because there is a Christian obligation to care for the poor, Christian hospitals should be free to realize their obligation to care for the poor who are ill and can not afford medical care.<sup>1</sup>

#### Hauerwas

As was seen in chapter five, Hauerwas' focus on character as the key to ethics results in an ethics that places a great deal of importance on the community that serves as the context for the development of moral character. Character (who we are,) depends on vision (how we see the world), which is formed by a narrative that is preserved and conveyed by a specific community. One such community is the Christian community of believers. But because there is no universal

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Engelhardt's focus on *theosis* as the ultimate goal of human life means that true care for the patients in Christian hospitals would focus on spiritual development rather than on physical cure.

story or narrative there is no universal morality. Moralities are unique according to the time and place that form their context. The lack of universal moralities results in Hauerwas' denial of any sort of meta-ethics and Hauerwas' self-limitation as a Christian ethicist capable of doing ethics only from within a Christian narrative.<sup>2</sup> This self-limitation implies that the only way in which Hauerwas' ethics interact with those of society at large is indirectly. That interaction is a side effect of living ethically proper lives from within the Christian narrative in which Christians make themselves like Jesus.

Christian ethics is the way in which faithful believers live Christ-like lives in order to live as members of the "Kingdom of God" while still living in the "Kingdom of this world." Necessarily there will be conflict between Christians and the rest of the world. What is unique about the Christian story is ultimate trust in the will and power of God and it is this trust that serves as the basis for Christ's non-violent response to evil and injustice even to the point of death. Christian ethics helps to teach Christians to act like Jesus, especially in the encounter with evil. Christians are to respond like Jesus—trusting in God, faithful to the love of God, and non-violently resisting the evil of this world. In this the mission of the Christian community is not to engage society actively so as to change it, but faithfully to live the Gospel, trusting that society will change according to God's will.

After "the Fall," humans wrongly place their trust in their own power rather than in God's. The false narratives which serve as the context for such belief in self-direction must be rejected in order to live the proper Christian narrative of trust in God. Any use of persuasion,

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<sup>2</sup> As was noted in chapter one, even though this ethical approach claims to be a self-limited Christian normative ethics with no other ethical claims, it should be understood as an ethical approach that only becomes comprehensible within a metaethical approach of supernatural metaethical absolutism.

coercion or force to attempt to change society is an action that no longer trusts God and is resorting to an idolatrous trust in human power. The best way for Christianity to change society is only indirectly by example. When it focuses its moral abilities *ad intra* on how best to live the gospel, the Christian community has the greatest potential *ad extra* as an example leading others to live rightly.

Hauerwas' approach to Christian medical ethics focuses on the character of the medical community, in particular on the priority of care over cure. From a Christian perspective Jesus' narrative provides a model for how to respond to evil, suffering and death by trusting unflinchingly in God. The most important aspect of this approach to Christian medical ethics is that the Christian narrative provides Jesus as an example of accepting pain and suffering without resorting to violence or losing trust in God's promise. The proper moral character of the patient as an example of how to live in the face of evil without losing trust in God, and the moral character of the community as one which exercises God's care for others even in the face of seeming hopelessness, speak very clearly in rejecting euthanasia and providing care for those unable to afford it.<sup>3</sup>

Even in non-Christian medical ethics Hauerwas sees the character of the medical community as fundamentally focused on care over that of cure. Much of the erroneous social ethical positions regarding this issue can be traced back to a misunderstanding of the character of medical care. By prioritizing cure over care contemporary society justifies euthanasia when cure is not possible. But those faithful to the original character of medicine know, like Christians,

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<sup>3</sup> However, one should note that since the focus of medicine is not on cure, the obligation to provide medical care cannot use the effectiveness of curing the patient as a means of evaluating the quality of the medical care which is provided. In this respect Hauerwas' health care is much like Engelhardt's in its focus on spiritual health by trusting in God rather than physical health by curing the ailment.

that such an approach is wrong. Care, being present to the person who is ill, must take priority. Such presence can only take place on a personal level of voluntarily being with other persons in their time of distress. This used to be the case with hospitals, but they are sliding away from such a good position of caring communities into becoming medical businesses focused on selling cure for profit.

On the societal level Hauerwas sees it as right for society to maintain the classic approach to health care and to continue to prohibit euthanasia. If medicine is going to maintain (or reappropriate) its traditional essence of care, then such actions as euthanasia must continue to be outlawed. Unlikely as it may seem, this same focus on the traditional essence of care can also make such a thing as socially structured “universal health care” a wrong course of social action. Like contemporary medicine, it wrongly focuses on cure rather than on care by insisting that the quality of medical “care” is dependent on how updated the medicine is and insisting that poor people have the same right to effective care as do the rich. However, when the focus is care rather than cure it is clear that care need not be technologically up to date or medically effective. Moreover, true care must be exercised by individuals freely and lovingly. Any attempt to use social laws to bring about “care” forces the medical actions while undermining the true nature of care as individual, free and loving.

#### McCormick

As has been noted earlier in this dissertation a number of times, McCormick’s approach to ethics adopts the fundamental aspects of natural law. The ability to discern good and evil, moral right and wrong, is not lost as a result of “the Fall” and only regained by integration into the Christian community. Instead this ability remains intact as an essential aspect of human nature. Due to the survival of such a universal moral ability it is possible for all people, both

inside of and outside of the Christian community, to discern what is in accord with our true human nature. Thus, meaningful ethical dialogue, a dialogue that fosters deeper understanding of human nature and thus a fuller understanding of the good of the human person fully and adequately considered, is possible both within and across various social contexts.

Because the graced ontological reality of the human person is the common fundamental criterion of all ethics, and as a result of the common social reality within which the pursuit of the common ontological reality of the good takes place, there is an ontological identity between Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics. Christian ethics, though common in content with non-Christian ethics, is distinct in its context and can thus serve as a uniquely helpful voice in the common ethical dialogue. In its unique transhistorical transcultural reality, Christian faith can provide insight into the common moral reality which has as its center charity. Christian faith also provides the moral strength and guidance necessary for members of the Christian community to pursue the actions that manifest that common ethical reality. But, in as much as the full knowledge of God and the human person is not yet complete, even for Christians, Christian ethics must remain open to learning through ethical dialogue with non-Christians engaged in the ethical conversation.

Such an approach leads to a pursuit of health care ethics in which the Christian narrative provides particular insight into the common ethical reality of how to care for the physical well-being of others. Christian health care ethics helps the medical ethics of society by bringing forth general themes and guidelines that, while rooted in the Christian worldview and narrative, are moral elements that can be discerned by all people. These themes and guidelines assist in the process of making health care an activity that best fosters the good of the human person.

What is unique regarding the engagement of the Christian and the Christian community with this issue is that they have a unique perspective on what it means to care for the whole person and that their Christian perspective recognizes both the inherently social nature of the human person and the importance of physical life which is of fundamental but not absolute value. Thus, medical care can be seen as a social obligation within a context that also allows for death to play its appropriate role. This Christian position can be seen to be an important voice in an ongoing dialogue that helps society to restructure itself in the field of health care.

From McCormick's perspective the issues of both euthanasia and universal health care are examples of this process. The Christian recognition of human life as a fundamental but not absolute good helps those engaged in the ethical dialogue of medicine to recognize that while it is not right to keep people alive as long as is physically possible it is wrong to deliberately end their lives through euthanasia. In addressing the issue of universal health care, the Christian recognition of the human person as an inherently social creature helps those engaged in the ethical dialogue recognize that humans do have social obligations, which in this issue include the medical care of other people. Christians and non-Christians alike should, by careful ethical reflection and dialogue, recognize the moral norms operative regarding these issues. As part of what it means to be human, all people in society ought to seek to bring about the good of the human person on a social level (foster a society that helps to enable all people to pursue the good), and so society needs to continue laws and regulations against euthanasia. Society also needs to change its laws and regulations regarding caring for those ill people who are too poor to provide themselves with health care. Like any issue of social justice, society should institute structures to assure that this is the case. With this understanding, McCormick sees the Christian community as fully engaged in the ongoing ethical dialogue of society with the goal of helping

society to maintain its prohibition of euthanasia and to develop a program of providing universal health care.

### **Comparisons of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick**

In examining the methodologies of Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick, many of the differences in their understanding of how the Christian community ought to interact with the larger society can be traced back to three key elements. The most fundamental of these three elements is how their Christian faith affects their understanding of the human person. In turn, this element influences two other key elements: their understanding of the role of the Christian community and their understanding of Christian influence or control in the human community. It is important to understand that it is these underlying differences in their meta-ethical approach, especially as it relates to their anthropology, that have the most significant impact on how each author understands the function of Christian ethics in the public arena.

#### **The Human Person**

A foundational element in the thought of these ethicists is their understanding of the human person in light of Christian faith. Accepting and endorsing Christian faith includes accepting a certain understanding of the nature of the human person. This faith-informed anthropological understanding is the key to each ethicist's belief of how well, if at all, those persons outside the Christian community can discern moral truth and in turn can properly discern the validity (or errors) of the moral claims of the Christian community. Thus the role that Christian ethics is to play in a religiously pluralistic society is dependent on the anthropology of the ethicist in question.

Because a Christian anthropological understanding places the human person in some relationship to God, the understanding of the human person can often be most clearly seen by

considering the understanding of God. The understanding of God as both fundamentally good and as creator entails a belief in the fundamental goodness of all creation. And the Christian understanding of the human person as *imago dei* entails a certain belief in the essence of the human person as good in a unique way. Similarly, the understanding of God as redeemer entails a belief in a certain brokenness of the human person that necessitates such redemption. The Christian belief in a God that is at once creator and redeemer is indicative of a Christian anthropology that holds as part of its belief a tension between the essential goodness of the human person and the brokenness of the human person.

The difference caused by an emphasis on either creation or redemption has its greatest impact on the understanding of human nature. The focus of ethics on the human good, the *telos* of humanity, is profoundly affected by how one understands the nature of humanity *status quo*. The emphasis on a God of creation, with its emphasis on the goodness of creation, results in an ethics that focuses on how to discern and pursue that goodness. An approach of such an ethics formed by a belief in the human person as *imago dei* emphasizes the innate, and still intact, ability of the human person to know and do the good.

By way of contrast, an emphasis on a God of redemption, a redemption made necessary by the brokenness of human nature, results in an ethics that focuses on the inbreaking of God as the only means by which human persons can come to know and pursue the good. The more profound this brokenness the less possible it is for the human person to recognize or do the good apart from the “interference” of Christian faith. A strong emphasis on redemption has a corresponding metaethical understanding of a human inability to know and do the good apart from the redemption made possible through the Christian faith. From this point of view, with its



strong emphasis on redemption, Christian ethics is radically different from all other non-Christian ethics.

While all three ethicists under consideration endorse the fundamental unity of God as both creator and redeemer, they differ in their emphasis on one aspect or the other. In as much as both Engelhardt and Hauerwas focus on redemption, it is to be expected that they also emphasize the brokenness of the human person. As was seen in chapter two, both Engelhardt and Hauerwas portray Christian faith as bringing about such a dramatic change in human persons that Christian ethics can only really be understood by other Christians within the faith community. The brokenness that is inherent to all people prior to the effects of Christian redemption prevents the effective ethical discernment necessary to make good moral judgments. Moreover, it is to be expected that Christian ethics does not “make sense” to those outside the Christian community and therefore the Christian community should expect to be set off from the rest of society. From a different position that emphasizes the nature of God as creator, McCormick portrays ethics as a universal process in which all humans, Christian and non-Christian alike, discern and pursue the good of the human person. In this perspective, Christian ethics assists humans in achieving the goal to which they are inherently directed—full realization of being *imago dei*. Embracing Christianity does result in a changed vision which assists in the process of ethical discernment, but it is ethical discernment of the common reality of the human good. And it should be remembered that for McCormick the intact, though damaged, nature of the human person makes such ethical discernment possible from non-Christian positions as well.

#### The Role of the Christian Community

These positions regarding anthropology structure how each of the ethicists see the Christian community interacting with the ethics of a religiously pluralistic society. The ethics of

both Engelhardt and Hauerwas are structured by an anthropology that emphasizes the brokenness of human nature in the contemporary context. As a result those outside the Christian community lack the capability to discover or recognize the ethically correct aspects of human existence and behavior. This results in a sectarian aspect to Christian ethics in which the Christian community provides the proper context for correct ethical judgments. These judgments are not expected to be recognized as right outside the Christian community and therefore the role of Christian ethics in the non-Christian society is quite limited.

For Engelhardt, the sole role of the Christian community in the secular society is to operate according to the “thin” ethical method of metaethical relativism in such a way that the freedom of the Christian community is preserved so that Christians are able to practice freely their “thick” ethics.

While Hauerwas’ anthropology also emphasizes the “post Fall” brokenness of human nature, he is less willing to allow this brokenness to dictate how society should function. This is readily apparent in his rejection of “secular” ethics. In as much as one must accept a certain narrative and worldview for such ethical systems to make sense, the “secular” ethics that currently function as social norms are no less prejudiced than any other. Society’s approach to ethics is not the “neutral” libertarianism that Engelhardt would portray it to be. Christians need not withdraw from culture and society to live in sectarian isolation. Instead Christians are called to live as members of the Kingdom of God while immersed in the kingdom of this world. Christians who live a life of Christian ethics in secular society should expect to be in tension with society and will be prophetic voices that denounce the false views and erroneous narratives of contemporary society.

The sole role of the Christian community is to live according to its unique nature of trust in God; a trust that is most clearly demonstrated by a refusal to use violence to impose its vision of the world. Because of the brokenness of human nature, the Christian community is unique in that it does not seek to control the *status quo* but advocates a trusting acceptance of God's control. Hauerwas believes that such a life will ultimately affect the non-Christian society, but such an effect cannot be the goal of Christian behavior. To act non-violently with the goal of changing society is merely to act in a different manner in order to exert one's own control rather than to live a life of the Gospel with a true and full trust in God.

In contrast to both Engelhardt and Hauerwas, McCormick refuses to split the ethical community into Christian and non-Christian. Instead the community of ethics is all of humanity within which the Christian community exercises a role of guidance within a common ethical journey. Through its insight and tradition the Christian community is able to help all members of society to recognize what contributes to the full goodness of the human person. And since this insight and tradition is itself a process of ongoing discernment, the Christian community must remain open to developments and changes in ethical understandings, even changes that may begin outside the Christian community.

#### Christian Influence and Control in the Human Community

The combination of the particular anthropologies and the view of the Christian community has a particular effect on the authors' understanding of Christian influence and control. The clearest contrast in this aspect is the one between Engelhardt and Hauerwas. While both assert the brokenness of humanity and the fundamental necessity of both the Christian faith and the Christian community for right ethics, how that Christian faith functions and what

constitutes the Christian community are fundamentally different. The concept of control is key in this difference.

Engelhardt acknowledges the fundamental necessity of a community in order for some form of “thick” ethics to exist. For Engelhardt, the Christian community is so vitally important to Christian ethics because it is only within this community that the Christian faith can be in control of the ethical environment. Thus, Christian ethics becomes a way of being in control of the particular community which, in turn, enables the noetic experience to be the ultimate norm of all existence, including ethics. In order for this noetic experience to exercise the profound influence that Engelhardt envisions, the control of the faith community must be equally profound. This level of control cannot be realized outside the Christian community because the ethical arena of society at large operates according to an individualistic metaethical relativism within which no group or worldview can legitimately exercise control over others. It is because of this that an individual’s choice of which community to join is so important.

Despite this importance of community, Engelhardt has an extremely individualistic approach to that community. His focus is fixed on the individual and the choice that the individual makes as to which community she or he will be a part of. His understanding of the individual seeking to pursue the noetic experience is one of virtually complete autonomy. There is a sense in which all individuals in Engelhardt’s libertarian society are as individually free as people in John Rawls’ original position.<sup>4</sup> According to Engelhardt, what is crucial is for persons

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<sup>4</sup> In his book *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) John Rawls articulates the “original position” as a means of ascertaining justice as fairness. In this “original position,” from behind a “veil of ignorance” which prevents them from knowing what role they will hold within society, people determine what they believe to be a just structure for society. By this “veil of ignorance” Rawls suggests that persons can make well informed decisions without being guided by self-interest. From within this completely neutral and uninfluenced state, free of their prejudices, they have some insight and knowledge of the effects

to make the right choice as to membership in a community of “thick” ethics—to embrace the faith of “traditional Christianity” as the linchpin of their existence. Although he repeatedly laments how liberal cosmopolitanism unjustly influences society and its members, the near absolute autonomy in his libertarian society seems to avoid or overlook the impact that the communal context does have on the exercise of an individual’s choice. His focus on social ethics as “thin” ethics seems to be one in which liberty, as the sole norm of content, fails to acknowledge the importance of the already existent community of “thin” ethics as the context of an individual’s decision of commitment to any particular community of “thick” ethics.

However, at this point, after the individual’s commitment to the Christian community, Engelhardt’s focus on the role of community becomes absolute. It is the community that one commits to that is of greatest importance because it provides the moral content of one’s existence. Moreover, such a community is defined not by a commitment to some nebulous concept such as pacifism, but by the commitment of individuals to abide by particular communal norms self-imposed by the community which has been freely chosen by the individual. These norms are the way in which the community exercises control and the more complete the control the “thicker” the ethics of the community. The individual must embrace all such norms to be a member of the Christian community. The choice to reject some of the norms by which the community defines itself is the choice to excommunicate oneself from the Christian community.

These norms have authority upon a person by virtue of the individual’s free choice to accept them. The norms of the Christian community exert no real binding control outside of the

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of their choices and therefore they are able to consider possibilities of how to structure society and to decide what constitutes true justice. (See pages 17-22.) Engelhardt’s emphasis on the importance of the individual’s decision regarding religious commitment seems to suggest a similar sort of “original position” in which the individual is completely neutral, uninfluenced and free to contemplate possible choices to communities of “thick” ethics.

Christian community since the only control that society imposes is that of ensuring that all such decisions of commitment are made freely. It is this difference between a secular society which can exert no control and a Christian community that exerts complete control that lead to the existence of the church as a sealed sectarian community with little or no real communication between itself and the rest of society.

For Engelhardt's Christianity, clearly defined norms regarding moral authorities (saints, ecclesial leaders, embraced tradition, etc.) and lived practices (Eucharist, liturgical practices, permitted or prohibited activities, etc.) identify the boundaries for who is in or out of the Christian community. To acknowledge these moral authorities as binding norms, and to live life according to their moral guidance and judgment, is to make oneself a member of this traditional community. Engelhardt's affirmation of "traditional Christianity" as such a community entails a commitment to the ecclesial norms of the Orthodox church. There is then, for Engelhardt, a very clear community that one is either a part of or not, that is the all important context for the noetic norm crucial to all personal existence and moral decisions.

For Hauerwas, being Christian is about recognizing that it is God that is in control, not human beings. Being Christian is about imitating Christ on the cross and trusting divine providence even when all is lost according to a worldly evaluation of the situation. The Christian community is a city on a hill with a covenantal mentality like the Hebrew people of God that gauges a good life by being faithful to the covenant of Christ, not by any worldly measure of success. Being Christian is about living in a particular way, namely the life of trust in God which includes trusting that the ultimate outcome depends on what God does, not on what human beings do. To envision the Christian community as the means of controlling the world in such a way as to establish the Kingdom of God in the here and now is to abandon the

key of what it means to be Christian, namely trust in Divine providence. The Christian community, living a life of the gospel and trusting as it does in the providence of God, serves as an example to the rest of the world. For the Christian community to turn its attention away from the *ad intra* focus on being the gospel to the *ad extra* reality of changing society (seeking to make a better society, and seeking to establish the Kingdom of God) is to abandon its nature of being the church. This is why seeking to establish Christian influence by controlling the *status quo* of society is so wrong.

For Hauerwas, working for the kingdom through physical acts becomes wrong when one begins to make actions such as feeding the hungry and caring for the ill a means to the end rather than an end in themselves. When such actions are pursued as effective means of bringing about the kingdom they undermine trust in God's providence. The rightness of the action is not judged by how effective, but by how "pure" the actions are in seeking to live the life of Christ and the life of the gospel narrative in community. The realization of the kingdom of God rests with God, not the Christian community's effectiveness at fulfilling the corporal works of mercy.

However, for Hauerwas, that community plays a more significant role in ethics than it does for Engelhardt because it is the community that so profoundly influences the moral vision and character of the individual person. There is an acknowledgement of the influence exerted by the community that one is raised in, and Hauerwas sees this influence as one that can not be escaped. Engelhardt's vision of an individual, free of a communal commitment, choosing to become a member of the Christian community is, by nature, impossible. But Hauerwas' notion of the Christian community is rather nebulous in the sense that his Christian narratives and visions are not as clear as Engelhardt's norms and are thus not as clearly embraced or rejected. According to Hauerwas, what is most crucial about defining any community is its narrative and

the vision that results from that narrative. “Worldly” denominational boundaries are not as crucial for defining a Christian community as are the shared narratives and visions that may, in many cases, cross those boundaries. For Hauerwas the narrative of the gospel story, understood as the norm for non-violently confronting the evil of this world, serves as the basis for holding a pacifism grounded in a complete trust in divine providence as the defining aspect of the true Christian community. This pacifist community exists across many boundaries of “worldly” ecclesial communities, but since this vision is the primary criterion of what it means to be the true Christian community, it is this community that constitutes the real church. And by trusting completely in divine providence and being faithful to Christ’s covenant rather than seeking to control the world and establish the kingdom, the Christian church serves as an example for all to emulate.

While Engelhardt advocates that Christianity withdraw from society and seek to establish control within the Christian community, and Hauerwas advocates that Christianity separate itself from the rest of society by living a life which recognizes the control of God rather than seeking to establish its own control, McCormick advocates that Christianity engage society in order to help manifest God’s control within the human community. To be a Christian community Christians should seek to proclaim the gospel not only by living by gospel values within a community of shared belief, but also by seeking to bring about the kingdom. The Christian community preaches the good news of the gospel by actively engaging human society to make contemporary society more closely resemble the “Kingdom of God.” Such action is attentive to the extra-ecclesial ethical aspects of the world. The Christian community trusts that, even apart from a commitment to Christian faith, human nature retains the ability to discern good from evil. The perception of basic human values is shaped by the cultural context, but the values are shared



by all people regardless of culture. Thus, it is possible for the Christian community, after discerning the good through a combined use of reason and faith, to work at influencing the rest of society so as to more fully manifest that good. Because of their intact ethical ability, humans outside of the Christian community can recognize what constitutes the good of the human person and act in such a way that society as a whole contributes to realizing that goal. McCormick sees all of humanity as an ethical community within which the Christian community plays a special role of helping all people to recognize what contributes to the true human good. The Christian pursuit of the ethical life is not only an *ad intra* development of Christian community but also an *ad extra* labor of cooperation with all humanity so as to transform the world for the better.

Like Hauerwas, McCormick's approach recognizes that divine control rather than human control is ultimate. But McCormick insists that the Christian community's responsibility for right action does not end at the church door. This responsibility is manifested not only by living a life of the gospel within the Christian community or by serving as an exemplary "City on a Hill" set apart from society, but it is also manifested by working within society to help establish a more fully human community. The realization of a better social reality is an intentional goal, not a side-effect, and therefore there is an attentiveness to the effectiveness of such actions. In this sense there is an effort to control not only the actions of the Christian community but the development of society as a whole. But it is important to realize that McCormick's approach does not regard exercising control in order to achieve a more humane society as a betrayal of trust in the control of God. Instead it recognizes that, as stewards of creation and disciples of Christ, the responsibilities of faithful Christians include exercising influence and control in order to work with non-Christians in order to realize more fully a society that fosters the human good. For McCormick being the Christian community entails working to make society more fully

manifest the “Kingdom of God,” trusting that even those outside the Christian community can assist in the process and knowing that the kingdom’s ultimate manifestation is an eschatological reality.

These fundamental differences regarding anthropology, the nature of the Christian community, and the role of that Christian community in society are what lead to the different positions regarding the issues of euthanasia and universal health care. Engelhardt asserts that traditional Christians know, through the teachings of the community and the experience of the saints, that euthanasia is wrong and should be prohibited in Christian hospitals. But it is only by the Christian faith that such knowledge is reached. The corrupt nature of the “post Fall” human person means that there is no common moral measuring stick which can be used in a pluralistic society to institute social regulations prohibiting such activity. Thus, euthanasia must be permitted in contemporary libertarian society. And similarly, though Christians may recognize their duty to provide health care to those in need, the lack of any common ground in ethical dialogue, aside from freedom, means that there is no way to establish universal health care as a moral norm for the larger society.

Hauerwas’ approach to universal health care is somewhat similar to that of Engelhardt. Christians should recognize their obligation to care for the ill even when the patients are too poor to afford the care. But the care that Hauerwas insists upon cannot be forced by laws and regulations. It must be freely offered by people who put into practice an attitude of loving presence. And it is not the job of Christianity to change the social structure in such a way as to provide this care. In his Christian ethics Hauerwas’ evaluation of euthanasia as always and everywhere wrong is also very much like Engelhardt’s. But by appeal to care, rather than cure, as the ultimate norm for medical ethics, Hauerwas asserts that if the medical community is to

remain true to its nature it too must reject euthanasia as acceptable medical practice. And, according to Hauerwas, Christianity ought to help medicine remain true to this focus on care. It is here that Hauerwas' inconsistency is most apparent. If there is no universal narrative to serve as the context for a shared moral vision, then why must the medical community accept that medical treatment of a dying patient prohibits euthanasia? Moreover, what shared criterion can exist that refuses euthanasia as a real way of caring for a patient? While Hauerwas' assertion of the absolute necessity of Christian faith to understand what constitutes the good denies Christianity an active role in the formation of a pluralistic society, he is unwilling to leave the arena of medical ethics as empty and ungrounded as Engelhardt does. Hauerwas places care as the ultimate moral norm for medical ethics. But his insistence on care as the *norma normans non normata* only works if there is some innate ability of human persons to transcend the brokenness of their ethical nature and discern care as an ultimate good which all people share in common.

Finally, McCormick's trust in the intact moral nature of the human person provides a common ground upon which Christians may engage society on the issues of both euthanasia and universal health care. While he acknowledges that the Christian faith can help in recognizing the immorality of euthanasia and the moral obligation to provide health care to the poor, his insistence on the ability of all persons to make the same recognition enables the Christian community to work in such a way as to establish social regulations that prevent the evil of euthanasia and provide the good of universal health care.

### **Conclusions**

Having completed this summary and comparison of the ethicists' understanding of Christianity's role in society, some conclusions can be made regarding the relationship of Christian faith, Christian ethics, and the role of those ethics in a religiously pluralistic society.

The most fundamental of these conclusions is that the role of Christian ethics in the larger religiously pluralistic society, as that role is envisioned by Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick, depends less on how each ethicist views Christian faith functioning within Christian ethics than it does on how that ethicist's faith-informed anthropology affects his vision of the context within which Christian ethics operates. The understanding of the nature of the human person is what determines the vision of how, if at all, those outside the Christian community can discern moral reality and can evaluate the moral claims of the Christian community.

Engelhardt's understanding of a fundamental corruption of human ethical capacity as a result of "the Fall," an understanding informed by his Christian anthropology, denies the possibility of meaningful ethical dialogue across the boundary between Christian ethics and any other ethical approach. Given this, there is no reason for Christian ethics to engage in the public moral discourse because Christian ethics would be regarded as meaningless non-sense by those who were not part of the Christian community. True Christian ethics can only be meaningfully understood within the Christian community and should therefore be focused *ad intra*. The fundamental ethical corruption relegates most of the human community to a life of evil and sin. But since the only way to recognize such evil as evil is from within the Christian context, Christian ethics cannot seek to change or control society and instead must withdraw from social ethical debate and allow the evil to continue while focusing internally on the lives lived within the Christian community.

To a lesser extent the same *ad intra* focus of Christian ethics is true of Hauerwas. But, unlike Engelhardt, Hauerwas does not advocate a sectarian sort of withdrawal from society at large. Hauerwas insists that Christian ethics must be focused *ad intra*, but this is less a matter of an ineffectiveness of Christian ethics in a larger society than it is a matter of the basic approach

of Christian ethics. There is no reason for Christian ethics to engage in the public moral discourse because that is not the role of Christian ethics. True Christian ethics is not about attempting to control the moral landscape by persuading people to act in a particular way. Instead true Christian ethics is about living a life of peace and having faith and trust in God's control of the outcome. This focus on the surrender of control to God is the result of Hauerwas' understanding of "the Fall" as the human attempt to seize control from God. Thus, any attempt by "Christian ethics" to control the world in order to make it more like the kingdom is another attempt to assert human control and is a betrayal of what true Christian ethics ought to be.

In contrast to Engelhardt, McCormick's anthropology envisions the moral capacity of the human person as wounded by "the Fall," but not destroyed. Therefore, McCormick asserts that meaningful ethical dialogue is pursued both within the Christian community and within the human community as a whole. In contrast to Hauerwas, McCormick does not envision exercising control to make the world more like the kingdom as analogous to original sin. As a result, McCormick asserts that true Christian discipleship entails working with society in order to exert influence and control so as to limit evil and foster good. Rather than providing specifically normative ethical judgments, faith provides a more general outlook and orientation regarding the human person and what constitutes the human good. This outlook operates as an intermediary position between faith convictions and ethical conclusions which results in a less direct correlation between faith convictions and specific ethical judgments. However, this approach has the benefit of allowing these religiously rooted ethical judgments to function with a greater degree of influence within the public arena. Not only is there a reason for Christian ethics to engage in the public moral discourse, there is an obligation to do so. Such an approach depends

on the ability of those outside the Christian community to recognize what is truly good and it depends on the Christian community's ability to recognize itself as a steward of God's creation.

This consideration shows that the role of Christian ethics in a religiously pluralistic society is primarily a result of the faith-informed anthropology because it is that anthropology that forms the ethicist's understanding of the nature of the extra-ecclesial society. While that same anthropology informs the ethicist's understanding of how faith functions within Christian ethics, the interaction of Christian ethics with society at large is not as much a matter of how reason and faith function within a particular Christian ethics as it is a matter of how that Christian faith forms a particular vision of the world.

Beyond this fundamental conclusion of the importance of faith-informed anthropology to the role of Christian ethics in society, there are several secondary conclusions. The first is to note that, despite any articulation to the contrary, any Christian ethics that makes a normative claim regarding how people outside the Christian community ought to behave, and how Christian behavior ought to effect some sort of transformation, entails a belief in the ability of non-Christians to discern moral truth. This is clearly the case with McCormick who affirms an intact human ability to discern moral truth that is present in all people—Christians and non-Christians alike. The presence of this ability to discern moral truth is not quite as clear with Hauerwas, who denies the concept of natural law (or at least corrupts the term before accepting it) and claims that moral truth can only be discerned within the community of the "Kingdom of God." But Hauerwas advocates that non-Christians ought to recognize the Christian community as a city on the hill and a Christian life as an exemplary way to live. This implicit acknowledgement of the ability of non-Christians to discern moral truth is even more evident in Hauerwas' medical ethics when he argues that all those involved in medicine, Christian and non-Christian alike, ought to

recognize the morality (or immorality) of certain actions and behavior. Even Engelhardt, who insists on an absolute moral relativism in society at large and denies that any moral claims can be universally recognized, advocates a libertarianism that depends on the ability of all people in society to make a universal recognition of the fundamental value of individual liberty over other approaches to social structure.

Another secondary aspect to be considered is the consistency of the ethicists' position. Consistency of ethical theory is an important evaluative criterion of any ethical system. A better and more comprehensive Christian ethical theory will tend to achieve consistency between how it understands faith to function in ethics and how it understands Christian ethics to function in the world. McCormick's contention of the universal nature of ethical claims and the nature of ethical judgments as fundamentally open to understanding by all people is consistent with his understanding of how Christian ethics functions in a religiously pluralistic society. This enables Christian ethics to assume a role in the ongoing public dialogue about right and wrong without insisting that a religiously pluralistic society accept Christian faith claims as valid moral norms. However, the difficulty presented by McCormick's approach is to determine what makes "Christian ethics" distinctive from other sorts of ethics. The issue becomes one of determining what unique contribution Christian faith makes to either the content of ethical judgments or the process of arriving at those judgments. Is Christian ethics only one point of view among many of a common ethical reality? One less than ideal possibility would be to see Christian faith as providing only motivation for being good. Another more adequate understanding would be that faith provides a paradigm that assists in providing a better vision of the human person, thus resulting in a better judgment of the human good which all people pursue.

Engelhardt's contention of the absolutely unique nature of Christian ethics and the absolute necessity of Christian faith for correct ethical judgment is also consistent in that, aside from the primacy of liberty, his ethical conclusions do not make a normative claim on any non-Christian community. Accordingly, ethics in a pluralistic society is "thin" in that it consists of a minimal agreement between "moral strangers" about mostly procedural aspects of disagreeing with each other while at the same time allowing for as much individual freedom as possible. "Thick" ethics of actual substantive agreement can only take place within a community of "moral friends" formed by commitment to certain basic premises. For Christian ethics these basic premises are grounded in the experience of God in Christ and the associated faith commitments that flow from this experience. Moreover this experience is mediated in and through the church of "traditional Christianity." Thus, from Engelhardt's view "Moral content is purchased at the price of universality. Universality is purchased at the price of moral content."<sup>5</sup>

When considering Hauerwas the issue of consistency becomes problematic. Hauerwas' assertion of the unique nature of Christian ethics, particularly his insistence on the necessity of the Christian narrative for making good moral judgments, is inherently contradictory with his claim of the effect that Christianity ought to have on "converting individuals" as well as his claim that the Christian community ought to affect society in a positive way. For the Christian community to function as a city on the hill and draw non-Christians into the faith community, non-Christians must be able to discern the Christian life as good. The same is true when Hauerwas maintains that non-Christians involved in medicine should recognize the priority of care over cure. His insistence on care as the norm for medical ethics entails a belief in the ability

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<sup>5</sup> H. Tristram Engelhardt, *Morality, Universality, and Particularity: Rethinking the Bioethics of Community*.



of those who do not share the Christian narrative to recognize the good of the human person. This inconsistency seems to call into question one of his two positions. If he is right on the necessity of the Christian narrative for right ethics, then those outside the Christian community cannot recognize the goodness of Christian life or the proper role of care as the moral norm in medical ethics. If he is right about the latter assertions, then the Christian narrative cannot be as indispensable for right ethics as he maintains.

An approach to Christian ethics such as McCormick's is more consistent in its claim of the normative nature of ethical judgments for both the Christian community and the rest of society, but it in turn raises questions regarding what makes Christian ethics distinct. An approach such as Engelhardt's more clearly maintains the distinct role of Christian faith in ethics but in turn sacrifices any normative claim of Christian ethical judgments on the community outside the church. An approach such as Hauerwas' attempts to maintain both a distinctively certain role of Christian faith in ethics as well as a certain normative nature of those ethical judgments outside the Christian community, but in doing so winds up with an inconsistent ethical method.

A final consideration may be given to how, if at all, any of these approaches could work together. Engelhardt's approach excludes the possibility of cooperating with either Hauerwas or McCormick. Hauerwas' structure is similar to Engelhardt's concerning the corruption of human nature and the resultant absolute necessity of faith, but Hauerwas' understanding of the way in which that faith is conveyed is fundamentally flawed from Engelhardt's perspective. Hauerwas lacks a solid conception of the church and the Christian community. Engelhardt could not work with McCormick because from Engelhardt's perspective McCormick doesn't qualify as a Christian ethicist for at least two reasons. First, McCormick doesn't recognize the true nature of

the human person as fundamentally flawed and fails to recognize the true impact of sin on the human person. This results in his second failure, namely that McCormick's approach does not acknowledge the nature of the Christian community as fundamentally different from the rest of society and thus fails to recognize its absolute necessity for good ethics and morality.

Similarly, Hauerwas' approach cannot include either Engelhardt or McCormick.

Engelhardt's approach of libertarianism is founded on the sort of enlightenment claim to a universal non-cultural neutral nature of the human person that Hauerwas would reject.

Moreover, Engelhardt's goal of a libertarian society presumes the possibility of persons to live a bifurcated life in which the neutral status fosters a society that operates according to no specific moral commitments and the Christian faith fosters a community that is so committed to non-shared faith and ethical convictions that the community is virtually sectarian. Hauerwas would point out that in addition to being false to an integrated human nature such a sectarian approach fails in the fundamental nature of the Christian community as a city on the hill. Hauerwas would reject McCormick's approach on much the same grounds as did Engelhardt. McCormick fails to recognize the flawed nature of the human person, the unique nature of the Christian community, and the necessity of that Christian faith for enabling the human person to live rightly.

McCormick's approach would most certainly exclude an approach such as Engelhardt's. McCormick would see Engelhardt's petition for a sectarian Christian community as fundamentally false and contrary to its true nature as a community of evangelization. However, it might be possible for McCormick to accept Hauerwas' approach in a certain limited fashion. McCormick can envision a broad diversity within the Christian community as it pursues the good and within that diversity recognize a diversity of vocations among individual Christians. The role of some Christians is to preach, teach and baptize; others are called to more corporal works

of mercy; and within this diversity of vocations some have a particularly prophetic calling. Within this worldview, McCormick can recognize an ethicist like Hauerwas as a prophetic voice directed *ad intra* with a message of purification for the Christian community. Hauerwas' insistence on complete trust in God, could be interpreted as a prophetic call to the Christian community, that it should trust God *while continuing to engage the society*. Though Hauerwas would reject such an interpretation, doing so would not significantly change McCormick's basic view of the church and society or his view of Christian ethics as that ethics functions in the religiously pluralistic society.

It is clear that faith commitments entail some sort of development or change in one's understanding of the human person and thus in what constitutes the human good. Faith provides moral insight. It provides an insight into the human person and what constitutes the good of this human person—insight into this individual, social, physical, spiritual, *imago dei* human person. In turn, this insight into the human good and into the true *telos* of ethics ought to provide a particular orientation to the human good. And while the insight of Christian faith is unique in its articulation of the goal of our ethical journey, the goal of that journey is a common goal for all people. Moreover, the unique understanding of that *telos*, an understanding that is rooted in our Christian faith commitment, does not provide specific details regarding how that end is to be achieved. Since human knowledge of anything, including and perhaps especially the *telos* of human existence, is always incomplete, people must recognize that the identification of this ultimate goal is itself an ongoing process. Such knowledge must always be open to development and in particular to a deeper and fuller understanding of the human person. These changes in understanding will inevitably affect our understanding of what constitutes the human good which, in turn, will impact our ethical evaluation of individual actions, moral character, and the

human community. In this process of ongoing moral discernment, Christian ethics is more like a sextant on a ship than a print out from *MapsOnUs*. Like a sextant for the ships, Christian faith serves as a means of getting one's bearing in order to sail closer to a still distant goal. Christian ethics assists in discerning the goal of a life well-lived, and it helps in plotting the course and assessing one's progress toward that goal. It requires consistent use with a periodic reassessment of the goal, the *status quo*, and the best way between the two.

### **Areas for Further Study**

At least three areas present themselves for further investigation, one more individually detailed in its focus and the other two focusing on a broader consideration of the material at hand. First, the importance of each ethicist's anthropology on his understanding of the role of Christian ethics in a religiously pluralistic society suggests that a more detailed investigation of each author's anthropology would be beneficial. This individually focused investigation would include a thorough consideration of the development of the author's anthropology especially as it relates to issues of ethical judgment. Such a consideration would include an assessment of both the theological and social context of this anthropology. By doing this, it would be possible to ascertain the most important aspects of each ethicist's anthropology and proceed from there to a consideration of how those aspects relate to his ethics.

A second, broader, area of investigation would be to examine these ethicists' positions in light of their denominational differences. While this dissertation carried out a thorough examination and comparison of the similarities and difference between the ethicists' understanding of the role of Christian ethics in a religiously pluralistic society, it was beyond the scope of this investigation to consider whether the differences between these authors are only that of the authors under consideration or if the differences are indicative of more systematic

denominational differences inclusive of other ethicists. An examination of the denominational differences between Engelhardt, Hauerwas, and McCormick would need to include an examination of other ethicists from each of the authors' denominations in order to determine how representative the ethicist may or may not be of his tradition. Inter-denominational considerations may be useful in such an approach.

A final area of consideration, broader still, would change the focus from a study of Christian ethics to a study of the social context of Christian ethics. All three ethicists considered by this dissertation operate within an American society that proclaims religious freedom and has a predominantly Christian population. A study of Christian ethical systems located in a non-Christian or anti-Christian society could provide significant insight into the influence that social context may have on Christian ethics. And this would be particularly helpful in showing how the different social contexts influence the ethicist's vision of the Christian community as social actor.

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI offers a consideration of faith and reason as they relate to a just society. He emphasizes that, by its nature as an encounter with the living God, faith functions as a purifying force for reason. His comment regarding the resultant relationship between Church and State seems to serve as an appropriate closing to this dissertation.

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring

about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #28.

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