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[Book Review of] *Knowledge, Value and Belief,* edited by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Daniel Callahan

Patricia Fauser

Book Reviews

Knowledge, Value and Belief

H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Daniel Callahan, Editors

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Scholars familiar with the growing literature in bioethics will welcome this second volume in a projected four-volume series entitled *The Foundations of Ethics and Its Relationship to Science.* The result of interdisciplinary studies at The Hastings Center, the first two volumes attempt to go beyond the consideration of particular moral problems to explore the broad theoretical and contextual interrelatedness of science, technology and ethics.

In a long introductory article, Tristram Engelhardt sketches the philosophical context of questions raised and synthesizes the main insights achieved by the authors. Four broad issues are addressed in the present volume: 1) whether an adequate account of ethics requires an appeal to transcendence; 2) whether rationality is unitary or fragmented into unreconcilable accounts of reality; 3) values and obligations inherent in the professions; and 4) which interdisciplinary discussions provide a coherent overview of science and the humanities (p. 6).

The first set of papers examines the appeal to the existence of God as the foundation of ethics, especially with regard to motivation for acting ethically. In reviewing Kant's account of the metaphysical foundations of ethics, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that a commitment to history as a moral progression provides a more tenable *summum bonum* than belief in God to motivate ethical action. The individual's acceptance of absolute moral principles must be viewed as part of a larger history of a group or institution.

But Paul Ramsey agrees with Kant that a complete system of ethics requires an appeal to God at least as a practical postulate. Ramsey develops a view of the moral life in which moral norms are derived from the religious dimension itself in such a way that "religion is ethics and ethics is religion" (p. 59). The ensuing discussions bring out the decisive influence of rationality on the moral life, including the religious way of life.

This appeal to the centrality of rationality in ethics is challenged by David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas in their emphasis on the importance of narrative to account for moral character and virtue. These authors stress the contextual nature of morality and argue that the foundations of ethics are partly irrational, stemming from participation in a particular moral narrative.

In his commentary, Edmund Pellegrino agrees with Burrell and Hauerwas that ethics is more than a process of solving problems and must include moral narrative to accommodate individual nuances of moral life. Nevertheless, Pellegrino argues that Burrell's and Hauerwas' account of ethics fails to provide adequate grounds for deciding which narratives are morally superior and hence is open to charges of subjectivity and relativism.

Articles by Hans Jonas, Gunther Stent and Bernard Towers attempt to provide generally compelling accounts of the ethical order, focusing on the "standard account," an ethical viewpoint which a disinterested observer should be able to achieve and use in solving moral problems. In "The Concept of Responsibility: Its Place in an Ethical Theory for the Technological Age," Jonas argues that in a dynamic view of reality such as science and cosmology present today, the central

fact for ethics is that actions with which we now have to deal have "an unprecedented causal reach into the future" which "moves responsibility into the center of ethics, where it has never stood before" (p. 169). Jonas claims that man's sheer existence provides an ontological basis for his moral responsibility to continue the life and quality of living of the human species.

Callahan draws out the implications of Jonas' theory of responsibility for a technological age, but he questions whether Jonas' ontological imperative can be maintained when no goals are provided toward which human life should strive. Callahan agrees that the parent-child model for responsibility can be fruitfully applied to the relationships between science and mankind, especially as the human race looks increasingly to science and technology for survival in crises.

With Teilhard de Chardin, Towers is much more optimistic that the evolutionary development of the universe is toward increasing complexity of consciousness, and that the scientific account of evolution can provide the groundwork for a theory of moral responsibility. What is needed today, according to Towers, is an open, pluralistic ethic, adaptive to diverse and changing circumstances, thus guaranteeing the establishment of a worldwide community sharing personal and social goods in peace and stability.

But Stent rejects as "hard-core scientism" the notion that descriptive science can provide the basis for moral responsibility. He argues for a structural account of knowledge to reveal "an ethical deep structure" innate and common to all men, which gives rise to a "concrete moral code of the surface structure through a transformational process" (pp. 242-243).

In striking a critical balance between the two positions, Patrick Heelan notes that Towers' theory of developing consciousness does not rely on unambiguously scientific description but assumes that these explanations have a mutuality with goal-oriented or person-oriented accounts of the evolutionary process. In Heelan's judgment, Towers' theory of evolving complexity-consciousness is not truly successful without a Teilhardian appeal to the transcendent to demonstrate that there is indeed a psychic convergence operative in mankind today.

On the other hand, Heelan sees Stent's structuralist theory of the basis of ethics as incapable of providing a rigorous account of the plurality of ethical principles found in societies. Deep structures may be said to influence the form of ethical conduct but not its content.

The remaining articles address less speculative but important contemporary topics. Stephen Toulmin makes a useful contribution to the growing body of literature on professionalism. He establishes criteria for professionalism and focuses on problems arising from conflicting duties faced by professionals in the exercise of their skills. Toulmin suggests that the hierarchy of priorities which professional codes imply should help resolve the conflicts generated by the various roles upon which an individual is called to play.

A different explanation of conflicts and their resolution is offered by Thomas Nagel. Conflicting values and claims faced by professionals may be viewed as part of a larger moral problem caused by a disparity between the fragmentation of value and the singleness of decision (p. 279). Nagel discusses five basic classes of value, rejects the hierarchical ordering of these classes as a method of resolving conflicts, and suggests instead that Aristotle's model of practical wisdom employing a variety of different conceptual frameworks is still the most effective way to resolve conflicts of value.

Eric Cassell brings out the same interdependency of individuals and conflicting claims in his account of error in medicine which, in his view, is complex and contextual. The physician must function as scientist, technologist and member of a particular community with its own expectations of medicine and technology. Cassell analyzes how these understandings of medicine generate views of medical error, and the ways in which concepts of disease dictate medical practice.