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Bioethics and the Scientific Challenge of the Third Millennium: To Defend Life, Obey God and His Natural Laws

by

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The author, former president of the Catholic Medical Association, presented the following paper to the III Meeting of Politicians and Lawmakers of America in Buenos Aires. The meeting, August 3-5 of 1999, was sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Family.

Bioethicists commonly—but erroneously—regard matter as existing prior to its form uniting and being united. In other words, bioethicists claim that the body exists first and the life/soul is subsequently infused into it. Aristotle even went so far as to claim that matter is eternal, but as St. Thomas Aquinas affirms, matter cannot exist without form. Thus, “formless matter” refers to a potential—not actual—state.

Words are often used without regard to their definition—for example, “creation.” To “create” is to bring something into existence from nothing. The power to create is God’s exclusively and while man can change, modify, or manipulate that which has been created by God, he remains the creature and God alone is the Creator. When words are divorced from their meaning, they become weapons of psychological warfare wielded against truth—in particular, against God, Who is Truth. Regrettably, the arsenal of secular and even bioethicists claiming religious affiliations are all too often replete with such weapons, which is why Nat Hentoff has decried bioethics as “a priesthood of death.”

Authentic ethics must be in accord with the Law of Nature—and of nature’s God. As we are reminded by our Holy Father Pope John Paul II in *Donum Vitae*:

For it is only in keeping with his true nature that the human person can achieve self-realization as a "unified totality" (*Familiaris Consortio*); and this nature is at the same time corporal and spiritual. By virtue of its substantial union with a spiritual soul, the human body cannot be considered as a mere complex of tissues, organs and functions, nor can it be evaluated in the same way as the body of animals; rather it is a constitutive part of the person who manifests and expresses himself through it. The natural moral law expresses and lays down the purposes, rights and duties which are based upon the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person. Therefore this law cannot be thought of as simply a set of norms on the biological level; rather it must be defined as the rational order whereby man is called by the Creator to direct and regulate his life and actions and in particular to make use of his own body (*Humanae Vitae*).

This is critical because, as we have already stated, ethics must be rooted in the Law of Nature, which ought to guide all human acts because human acts are actions of a person created by God. Human acts are moral acts governed by the Natural Moral Law, which is the study of the principles of human actions of the person created by God.

We are not surprised when avowed atheists, who deny the very existence of God, disregard the Natural Moral Law. However, it is scandalous when believers, especially those graced with baptism into Christ's Church, violate its precepts, acting as though God did not exist—whatever they may profess with their lips. Such practical atheists remind us of St. James' admonition that faith without works is dead.

It is the responsibility of scientists to act in accordance with the Law of Nature that governs science. In bioethics, the concern is precisely with human nature, human actions, and human behavior in relation to the Law of Nature. This is true because the right of liberty is the right and capability to do good and avoid evil.

The essences of all material things are based on the Law of Nature, which embodies the principles of existence of all that exists in the universe. In moral matters, the basic principle of the Natural Moral Law is "Good ought to be done, evil must be avoided." "Ought" is a special word in moral matters and is the past participle of "owe," which the dictionary defines as: 1. To be bound, as by practical duty, by moral laws, or by conscience, hence, by ideal right. 2. To be necessary, becoming, or expedient. 3. To be a natural or logical consequence. 4. To require, e.g., as this patient ought to be given health care.

Science related to the life of human persons needs to act on principles that protect, preserve and prolong life and safeguard its inherent sanctity and quality. Each person is unique and unrepeatable. Life of the human person is the substantial fact of the union of soul and body that is to be protected, preserved and prolonged. Everyone has an obligation to protect and preserve his or her life. Health care is treatment and care to protect life, preserve life and prolong life. These principles are needed to guard scientific practices to prevent violations of the integrity of each human person from conception until death.

In the conception of a human person, God creates the person and con-creates the soul, intellect and will. This is the norm. The person is individual substance of a nature rational. Each person is unique and unrepeatable. Essential goodness originates in the fact that the person comes from God. Each person has essential goodness and is to be affirmed for himself—not for the generic nature of the species or some accidental quality he possesses.

In marriage as designed and commanded by God, procreation occurs as the fruit of the love between the husband and wife, i.e., father and mother, engendering the life of a new person. When the body becomes visible within the body of his or her mother, the person created is manifest. The person accepts the body at fertilization, which occurs when sperm and ovum are united. This unity is not due to material causes. The sperm originating from and supplied by the father is living; the sperm is one cell. The ovum originating from and supplied by the mother is living; the ovum is one cell. Both have cell life. The sperm and the ovum are the carriers of the genes, the DNA and other preparations that happen because Nature and Nature's God are preliminary to the unity present after fertilization. God creates the person; the person brings together the sperm and the ovum. The zygote receives existence by the action of the human person created by God.

Implicit in our earlier discussion of the misuse of the word "creation" was the truth that it is against right reason to attempt to displace God, which is done when there are attempts to "create" via artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, or other illicit means that violate the Law of Nature intended by the Creator to govern the operation of the universe and its constituent parts as well as the Natural Moral Law designed to govern the ethical actions of human persons. The transgression of each of these divinely ordained laws is evil.

When the relation of cells to the whole being and the relation of parts of each cell to the whole are violated, the Law of Nature, which is the foundation of science is violated by the failure to act in accord with the principles of right reason. Thus, any attempt at cloning human beings

violates the Natural Moral Law because there is violation of the privacy and dignity of man when the matter utilized is obtained in ways that deviate from nature.

Material left over from in vitro fertilization ought not to be used for research. Evil may not be done that good might come from it. We must not allow a good end to sanction an evil means nor should we become accessories to such evil by cooperating with it, either before, during, or after its commission—whether through counsel, command, consent, provocation, praise or encouragement, silence, connivance, partaking (aiding), or defense. Those who aid and abet such mortal sins fall under their judgment and are required to correct the evil effects they invariably generate.

The matter of the human person conceived is not simply a combination of sperm and ovum. Sperm and ovum are the potentiality, which is made actual by the procreation of the body. The person is created. The body of the person is the formed matter procreated when existence of the body united to the soul manifests life. Life is the substantial fact of the union of soul and body. This is evident because what is created is forever. That is why the body can die but what God creates is forever. The separation of the body from the soul is the point of death.

While absence of activity, disintegration, dissolution and destruction may manifest death, they do not constitute death. Death, the absence of life, occurs when the soul no longer informs the matter, which received its existence when united to the soul. Death is in an instant. The mystery of life is positive and factual. The mystery of death is a negative fact when the body is lifeless because it is separated from the life-giving soul.

Acceptance of “brain death” in the face of such evident signs of life as circulation, respiration, functioning of organs and systems, and so forth is contrary to biological facts and right reason. “Brain death” is false. It is not death. To sign an organ donor card that allows your beating heart or other vital organs to be fatally cut out of your body is to dispose of that which does not belong to you, for life belongs to the Creator, not the created.

As previously noted, much—in all candor, most—of what has been dubbed “bioethics” represents an atheistic (professed or practical), materialistic approach to the ethical standards derived from the Law of Nature and the Natural Moral Law that command respect and reverence for the sanctity of human life and that forbid contraception, in vitro fertilization, abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, including those “furtive forms” providentially condemned by the Holy Father in *Evangelium Vitae*, i.e., epivalothanasia (imposed death) by transplantation under the rationalization of the “brain death” hoax.

Deo gratias, we have the Holy Bible and the tradition of the Holy Catholic Church to arm us in the fight for life against the ever more aggressive culture of death. The ethics of the third millennium—including “bioethics”— must be in accord with the ageless Law of Nature and Natural Moral Law, lest the awesome judgment of the Divine Judge pass the sentence merited by our wanton disregard of His just and life-giving decrees.

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