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Book Reviews

The Foundations of Christian Bioethics, by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger Publishers.

Bioethical controversies, such as abortion, cloning, and health care resource allocation show that there are always different accounts of the moral life. Political struggles concern not merely which policies will best achieve the desired objective, but which outcome itself is desirable; that is, which moral understanding should be established (e.g., pro-life or pro-choice). Given the great diversity of moral viewpoints in contemporary secular society, alternative moralities compete without an apparent principled basis for definitively establishing one as uniquely true. Even Christian bioethics is fragmented: the moral assessment of abortion, assisted suicide, embryo experimentation, homosexual marriage, and third party assisted reproduction varies significantly among the Christian religions. Moral truth appears deeply ambiguous. How then is one confidently to choose and rightly to act? Such is the challenge which H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. explores in his controversial, ground-breaking, and powerful volume, *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics*.

Should one simply acquiesce to individual preference, current convention, cultural custom, or claims to moral consensus? Or should one seek moral content to guide public policy through appeal to intuitions, consequences, casuistry, the notion of unbiased choice, game theory, or middle-level principles? All such attempts, Engelhardt argues, confront insurmountable obstacles: one must already presuppose a particular morality so as to choose among intuitions, rank consequences, evaluate exemplary cases, or mediate among various principles, otherwise one will be unable to make any rational choice at all. As he points out, even if one merely ranks cardinal principles, such as liberty, equality, justice, and security, differently, one affirms different moral visions, divergent understandings of the good life, varying senses of what it is to act appropriately. How then does one break through the seemingly interminable bioethical debates to truth?

The answer, according to Engelhardt, is to be found in the content, practices, and living world of Orthodox Christianity; that is, the traditional Christianity of the first millennium.

It is here that the puzzle is solved and the door found in the horizon of immanence: Christianity's disclosure of an immediate experience of the uncreated energies of a radically transcendent, personal God. Here philosophical solutions and theological truth coincide: the truth is a Who. Such a theology is pursued ascetically through prayer bound to repentance expressed in worship... To the question of "How can I know the truth?" one receives first and foremost instruction in ascetic transformation (xiii).

Here morality is not primarily an academic discussion, an exercise in consensus formation, or the results of discursive rational argument. Moreover, unlike natural law theory, which seeks guidelines for human conduct in the general tendencies of nature, where the enterprise of morality and bioethics can be undertaken in great measure by relying on rational principles open to all, Engelhardt testifies to special religious and metaphysical premises which, he acknowledges, are not open to general secular defense. In contrast, he argues that morality, and by extension bioethics, is first and foremost a way of life. In particular, a way of life rooted in worship and asceticism directed toward a personal and loving God. Only in this context, he argues, can one come to know truly how one ought to choose to live.

Consider, for example, his approach to procreative issues, such as abortion and in vitro fertilization. Rather than couched in the language of "rights" to life, reproduction, or control of one's body, his exploration turns on an understanding of the deep metaphysical foundations of humanity as well as the appropriate role of sexuality and reproduction in the Christian life. With regard to abortion, the concern is not with philosophical hairsplitting regarding when ensoulment occurs, but rather that abortion is inconsistent with the life of a Christian. Abortion at any time is unacceptable because persons must be acknowledged as such from their beginnings in their mothers' wombs. "The taking of human life, even the life of unborn children in order to preserve the life of the mother, always falls short of the pursuit of holiness: abortion is always wrong" (238). With regard to in vitro fertilization, attention must be given to the extent to which technologically transforming their reproductive act turns the couples' hearts away from God and instead towards themselves and human power, whether this engagement transforms the mutuality and companionship of the couple by an all-consuming passion to have a child, whether the sperm and/or ova from other than this married couple are used, which would involve a form of adultery, and whether there is zygote or embryo wastage, which would constitute a form of abortion.

... [T]hird-party-assisted reproduction must (1) maintain a focus on holiness, (2) not involve third parties as parents, (3) not significantly

displace reproduction from the intimacy of the husband and wife, (4) not displace the nurturing of their child from the body of the wife, and (5) not put the children produced at significant risk of death...(254).

At stake are not the impersonal constraints of a philosophical system, account of human nature, or rational argumentation, but rather the personal spiritual orientation of the couple towards God Who, Engelhardt argues, requires locating childbearing within the intimacy of the marital union.

Similarly, Engelhardt recasts suffering in terms of its place in salvation. Where secular philosophy cannot comprehend pain, disease, disability, suffering, and death as meaningful apart from the loss of the pleasures, beauty, and engagement of this world, from the perspective of Orthodox Christianity suffering remains, but its meaning is transformed. Since this life is not all that there is, the full meaning is to be found beyond death. Suffering, he argues, can help us learn humility, curing the effects of sin. Its role, therefore, is therapeutic; appropriately directed it leads one to God. Medicine only postpones death; it ameliorates human suffering, but does not cure death. Thus, Engelhardt argues, obsession with social justice and equal access to health care simply uncritically accepts the secular aspirations, often taken for granted, concerning the importance of health care. It ignores the place of health care within a fully Christian life. From an Orthodox perspective:

In addition to providing basic adequate medical care, there should be the provision of special opportunities for prayer, access to the Mysteries, anointing with oil from the vigil lamps of wonder-working icons, and blessings with the relics of saints... Though medical care would be an important focus, the staff would be directed first and foremost to ensuring that the medical care was compatible with the care of the soul (383).

In short, he concludes, interventions of medical care, usually taken for granted, ought to be fully relocated within the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven.

Engelhardt's synthesis of detailed medical information, acute philosophical analysis, comprehensive historical reconstruction, and traditional Christian moral theology illuminates in exacting detail the living Orthodox tradition. Though Engelhardt's conclusions are often sympathetic to Roman Catholic bioethical views, his exploration is not that of natural law theory, social justice, or philosophical personalism, but of mystical transformation. It is an account of how one ought to live in order to seek redemption through God's uncreated energies. Even where one may disagree with particular points of analysis, this is an important, stimulating, and challenging book with conclusions that philosophers,

theologians, physicians, and other health care professionals ought honestly to confront, because the challenges of contemporary high-technology medicine to Christian integrity cannot be ignored.

**-Mark J. Cherry
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Change Your Brain, Change Your Life: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Anger, and Impulsiveness, Daniel G. Amen, M.D., New York: Three Rivers Press (Random House) 2000 ed., 337 pages, USA \$15, Canada \$22.50

This book is a valuable resource for health care professionals, social workers, teachers, pastors and others including non-professionals. It can help one to understand better human behavior and how one's own brain functions. Complex information is made easy to understand and apply to daily life.

Dr. Daniel Amen is a clinical neuroscientist, psychiatrist, and director of the Amen Clinic for Behavioral Medicine in Fairfield, California (website: www.amenclinic.com). He is a recognized expert in the field of the brain and behavior. Dr. Amen has pioneered the use of brain imagery, especially SPECT (Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography), in psychiatry and has published many professional articles and several books. The Amen Clinic has an international reputation for diagnosing and treating ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder), aggression, head injuries, anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Until recently scientists did not have the technology for evaluating a working brain. While EEGs and MRI and CAT scans serve useful purposes, they do not provide the sophisticated information into the workings of the deep structures in the brain which SPECT imaging provides. With this tool, Dr. Amen and other colleagues in the United States have been able to understand better how abnormal brain patterns cause specific mental and emotional problems such as depression, over-anxiety, ADD and impulsivity, obsessiveness, and problems with memory and anger. These correlate roughly to five major areas of the brain: the Limbic System, Basal Ganglia, Prefrontal Cortex, the Cingulate System and the Temporal Lobes. Recognizing abnormal patterns of brain activity and relating them to patients' symptoms and histories has proven helpful in providing more effective treatment, with both behavioral and medical prescriptions, in many cases. While protecting patient confidentiality, the book includes a summary of many actual cases with illustrations of some of the related brain scans.