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[Book Review of] *How Brave a New World?
Dilemmas in Bioethics*, by Richard A. McConnick,
S.J.

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analyzes the meaning of homosexual activity. Homosexual acts are forms of bodily massage which share in the nature of masturbatory activity, and yet are more than masturbatory acts, since they do reach out to another person. They do not achieve, however, physical union; on the contrary, their acts lack bodily coadaptation and this lack of physical complementarity symbolizes the deeper defects on the psychological level.

Nowhere does Boswell discuss the meaninglessness of homosexual activity: its sterility, lack of family history, increasing preoccupation with physical beauty, and ruthless competition.

While Boswell admits the incompleteness of his study, considering its vast historic sweep, he does not stress sufficiently the bias of selectivity which causes him to single out John Chrysostom and Peter Damien as "hostile" opponents of homosexual activity. His usually scholarly approach is hardly in evidence in the unsuccessful way he asserts that St. Thomas played to the crowd in condemning homosexual acts as against nature. No documentation is provided for this position. Nor does he show that Thomas's position broke with the past Christian tradition.

The book should be read for its erudition, unfortunately marred by bias.

— John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S.
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How Brave a New World? Dilemmas in Bioethics

Richard A. McCormick, S.J.

Doubleday & Co., New York, N.Y., 1980.

This is a collection of the writings of Richard A. McCormick, S.J., centering around the general topic of bioethics. All but one of the chapters have been previously published. The unpublished chapter deals with the question of policy regarding sterilization in Catholic hospitals. The collection is headed by a chapter devoted to general reflections about bioethics. The author then takes up the subjects of proxy consent to experimentation, abortion, contraception, technological reproduction and genetic engineering, the preservation of life and the quality of life. An appendix is attached in which the author explains and defends proportionalism as a moral methodology or general moral norm.

Father McCormick allows for proxy consent to experimentation (on children) where the risks, pain, inconvenience, etc., are minimal. His chief opponent in this issue is Paul Ramsey who argues that proxies have no authority to give consent to experimentation that is not in the immediate interests of the patient. On the subject of abortion, the author states that the "substance" of the traditional position regarding killing leads one to conclude that abortion is permissible where another human life or the equivalent is at stake. The author does not accept the traditional opinion regarding contraception and sterilization, but would allow both where there are serious reasons for family limitation. He suggests a hospital policy regarding sterilization which can be interpreted either as acceptance of sterilization or legitimate material cooperation.

While condemning AID and IVF outside of marriage, McCormick would allow, at least theoretically, AIH and IVF within marriage for couples who cannot other-

wise have children. He also extends the traditional option regarding extraordinary means to prolong life even to ordinary means in certain cases. More specifically, he does not consider what might be ordinary surgery obligatory in the case of infants so defective that they will never have the physical or even moral capacity to relate to other human beings.

McCormick's presentations are always competent, careful and complete, but this reviewer does not always find them compelling. It is impossible, in a short review, to discuss all the positions he takes, so we must be selective. I would tend to agree with his allowance of proxy consent to experimentation involving minimal risk, inconvenience, etc., but I am not sure I would want to base it on a general obligation to the common good to participate in experimentation. It would be difficult to establish this *in individuo*. I would rather say that if a competent person may legitimately consent to experimentation, and if competent people often give such consent, a proxy has reason to give this consent for an incompetent patient in those situations in which a competent one would likely give it.

I have several difficulties with the sample statement of policy on contraceptive sterilization. Putting the issue in terms of intervention/non-intervention in sterilization procedures is somewhat misleading. It gives the impression that the hospital is just a bystander. The issue is not just one of non-intervention but of *actually providing facilities*. The hospital really provides everything but the doctor and the patient. This should not be overlooked in a moral assessment. Also, I do not see how the same statement can be an expression of both formal and material cooperation, as the author states. It seems to me that these are mutually exclusive, and have to be if the distinction is to remain valid. I would say that the first part of the statement seems to involve approval (formal cooperation) if the sterilization contributes to the overall good of the patient. The second part of the statement sets down one of the conditions of material cooperation (refusal to cooperate will cause more harm than good), but in itself it is not enough. If approval to the sterilization has already been given, the cooperation can no longer be simply material. At best, such a statement of policy would be ambiguous, and therefore confusing to all concerned. Finally, it is hard to see how a "policy" of continuing cooperation (as this seems to be) would not gradually undermine either the hospital's stand against sterilization or at least its credibility in this regard. It is extremely difficult to keep long-term cooperation material especially when it is as comprehensive and as intimate as this would be. Opposition to a practice gradually turns into indifference and ultimately into acceptance. But even if the opposition could be maintained, it would be very hard to convince others that the hospital did not really approve the practice with which it continued to cooperate.

The author sets down a norm for abortion which he claims represents the "substance" of the tradition regarding the morality of killing; that it is permissible when another life or the equivalent is at stake. Since there is a clear tradition which specifically deals with and condemns induced abortion, I am not sure why the author consults a general tradition regarding killing to solve the problem. But even if one takes this route and argues from the "substance" of the tradition regarding killing, I do not agree that it can be reduced to any kind of life-for-life (or the equivalent) equation. This simply does not do justice to the careful distinctions that have been worked out in the course of history. For instance, there is no allowance in the tradition for taking innocent human life. If there is any equation, it is life for certain injustices (unjust aggression or certain crimes). And in the case of unjust aggression, there is no demand that one's life be at stake to make self-defense legitimate. So the substance of the tradition is not a simple life-for-life (or the equivalent) equation. If one followed the tradition, it would be permissible to abort the fetus only if it were an unjust aggressor or a criminal. Since it is innocent, it deserves the same respect the tradition gave to all innocent people.

The reader will find *How Brave a New World* profitable reading. He or she will also find that although the author relates the problems he discusses to Catholic tradition and teaching, he does not always follow the one or the other.

— John Connery, S.J.
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Bioethics and the Limits of Science

Sean O'Reilly

Christendom Publications, Front Royal, Va., 1980, 174 pp.

This is a very useful and informative book. My only quibble would be that the title and subtitle should be reversed: *The Limits of Science (in) Bioethics*.

The large question of bioethics — life and its definition, death and its definition — are examined in close detail. There is also an appendix on in vitro fertilization (pp. 160-169). A host of other proposals and applications in contemporary bioethical discussions is not taken up. I do not mention that as a criticism because the notion of science, scientific method and the limits of both are examined in detail and that kind of disciplined reflection should precede highly detailed proposals and applications and it usually does not in popular reporting and contemporary discussions.

The book is 10 concise chapters, basically of two parts. Dr. O'Reilly first defines the terms of discourse (ch. 1). Many like to contrast so-called "exact" or "hard" sciences with "soft" or "imprecise" science so it comes as a surprise that scientific data are always inexact, measurements are approximate, and generalizations known as laws are all approximations. Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" means even the most precise descriptions of nature must be in terms of probabilities. Faith, order, value, these are all carefully defined as is increasing entropy.

Chapter 2 outlines scientific achievement but notes as well the "law of limits" which does not detract from real scientific achievement but is an honest recognition of limitation.

Next come "What is Life?" (ch. 3) and "The Origin of Life" (ch. 4). The first explains, in digestible form, factors and terms that have entered common speech (e.g., DNA, RNA) but are not widely or really understood.

The chapter on "The Origin of Life" is, perhaps, the most tightly reasoned in the book. O'Reilly poses devastating scientific questions to any theory of "uniformitarian evolutionism." Is creationism a scientific theory? No, not in the sense that science is now defined. Creationism, like evolution, can neither be proved nor disproved by scientific method, but unlike evolution it can be shown that the creation model fits all that science has discovered about matter. If Jerry Falwell's people digest this chapter, there will be no stopping them!

"The Facts of Life" (ch. 5) presents an airtight biological case that individual human life begins at conception.

"The Facts of Death" (ch. 6) helps detoxify some slogans in current use along with a close scrutiny of the concept of "brain death." The determination of death in the vast majority of clinical cases is certain, "but we must emphasize that no