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Christian Morality and The Space Age

James V. McGlynn

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I suppose that if we were asked for the dominant characteristic of our age, we would say that we are living in an age of change. Comparing our present age with what many Catholics like to call the Golden Age of the 17th century, we find that whereas St. Thomas had essentially the same picture of the physical world as Aristotle had a few hundred years before him, most of us have had to absorb radical changes of outlook within our own lifetime. Perhaps even the majority of us can remember when relativism was a brand new concept and quantum mechanics had not been developed. Or to take our own field of medicine, I for one can remember when sulfis first appeared and I can remember the hopelessness feeling we had when a cousin of mine was down with tuberculosis before the discovery of any of today's wonder drugs. No doubt many of you have had to do much more than the generation before you to catch up on medical developments since you received your degree and hung up your shingle.

Our world has changed and is changing with almost startling rapidity. Who can say what tomorrow's discoveries will be? Just last week we had a new breakthrough in the use of computers. A new mechanical brain has been developed to handle the program-
the Harvard Observatory, tell us million. And yet, even with such boundless universe of today's suitable conditions for the presence of organic life. That is, there are at least one hundred million planetary systems with suitable conditions for the presence of organic life. That is, there are at least one hundred million possible homes for other rational beings. Hence, far from being unique, man might be one of a hundred million species of rational beings and might well be one of the least intelligent of these people.

Meditating on this sobering thought, the man of our world might become extremely humble. Now instead of being created "a little less than the angels," he might be just another rational being on one of the less significant planets in one of the least important solar systems in just another galaxy. Many of today's materialists have panicked at this thought. Rejecting any idea of God and rejecting the traditional theological orientation which put man at the center of the universe as the apex of God's creation, they now have found that instead of hitching their wagon to the evolutionistic star of human achievement, they had tied their hopes to a trivial little meteor which is destined to burn out almost as soon as it begins to glow. The disillusionment has led some to despair and others to a sense of futility. For both types the byword is "Don't hope for too much!"

What about the Christian? The is no less changing for him or any other human being. The sort of adjustment, therefore, must the Christian make as he sees the old boundaries of the universe open up? Must his idea of man's place in the universe be revised? Must he also learn not to hope for too much?

Before we try to answer this question, let us consider just that it is we are being asked to adjust to. What is this new universe opening before our eyes? and how does man sink into insignificance before it? That the universe is immense beyond the wildest dreams of earlier ages is certainly true. That the conditions necessary for organic life, and hence for rational beings like ourselves, can be found on other planets in solar systems would seem to be not only possible but even probable. If we take what Professor Shapley considers to be a conservative estimate, there are one hundred million possible planetary systems in which organic life could be found. Of this, it would seem highly improbable that not one of these one hundred million systems would have intelligent beings. Fr. O'Connell of the Vatican Observatory, as quoted in the Catholic press a few weeks ago, also thinks it "brash and even presumptuous" to deny that other intelligent material beings exist in the universe.

Actually, I suppose, we have to admit that we are in very same position as our Earth's ancestors were in 1492. They not know whether Columbus was going to fall off the edge of the world or find some new beings, possibly more intelligent than themselves, possibly touched by original sin. Would it be a race they could live or one which might enslave or destroy them?

They simply did not know. Perhaps all of this was not very well formulated in their minds, just as it is not very well formulated in most of ours today. But the growing fear and uncertainty is there. We really don't know just what to expect.

There are three basic possibilities. First, we may find planets suitable for human life but on which there are no rational beings so that we would be free to colonize them without infringing in any other rational being's domain. Secondly, we may find planets with intelligent beings already living there, but beings who are less intelligent than we are and with a less advanced civilization and culture than ours. Thirdly, and this is the fearful prospect, we may find planets which are inhabited by rational beings who are much more intelligent than we and who are so far advanced technically and scientifically that they could easily enslave us or exterminate us as the European colonists have practically exterminated the Indian population of America.

Now to get back to our problem, does this expanding horizon bring any essential change in the outlook of the Christian moralist? Obviously, a naturalistic morality, which determines right and wrong solely in terms of man and the rest of the visible universe, is going to have to change its ideas radically when the place of man in this universe is radically changed. Does the hold also for the Christian moralist? Anyone who understands the basis of Christian morality will know that it is not essentially modified by the presence or absence of other
intelligent beings. Whether there are two or two million billion intelligent creatures in the universe, our condition before God is essentially the same.

I say essentially because we are related to God as individual human persons. It is true, of course, that man is a social animal and has various obligations to his fellow men, as you yourselves experience, perhaps acutely at times, in the practice of medicine. But morality is not a group enterprise. Someone else may pay our debts and someone else may be able to take care of our families, someone else may even, in the rare case where it is necessary, patch up one of your patients after you have given the wrong treatment, or straighten out a student to whom I have given the wrong answer. Other people can do all of this but only we alone can fulfill our moral obligations. When it comes to right and wrong, each of us stands alone before God. In our innermost self, when we are alone with our conscience, we know that we are really not alone. God is there with us. And our moral obligations result from this personal relationship which we individually have to God.

Consequently, Christian morality will be fundamentally the same whether there is one human race or a million. The difference will be that if and when we discover other rational beings, we will have to remember that they, too, are intelligent beings, persons with souls, people who have the same relationship to God which we have. We must therefore treat them as human persons, children of God, whose rights as persons we must respect. Thus if they are developed intellectually as fully as we are, we will have to exterminate them. The moral value of a human person does not depend on whether he be a brilliant scientist or a poor mongol. Or, now we must add, an alien from another world. This would equally for all space beings, no matter what their level of intelligence and culture. We must treat them as children of God and work for peaceful coexistence in justice and in charity.

This is a problem of the space age which is purely theoretical at the present time but one which may become practical even in our lifetime. I would like now to take up a more practical problem, which may have repercussion in your lives as physicians and surgeons. The problem is: What is the morality of sending men into outer space?

Not long ago the air force announced that it had picked two hundred men from whom the first U.S. space explorer will be chosen. These were screened down to thirty-six, finally to twelve from whom the actual space traveler will be picked. Recently, it has been announced that the contract has been let for the capsule in which the space man will travel. Delivery is expected in two or three years. From all this it should be obvious that certain of your colleagues are right now faced with the question of the morality of sending men into space. For their experiments and their decision will be decisive. If they say no, the military will decide. If they say yes, the military will decide. How can these decisions be made?

To begin with, there is no moral problem about space travel as such. We have got beyond the fears which some men had about the immorality of new inventions. People have been very reasonable. When bathing became popular fifty or sixty years ago, some diehards thought it immoral. People with the same mentality predicted God's judgment on the world for man's use of aircraft, saying that if God had wanted us to fly, he would have given us wings. It does not take much philosophy to answer this. Plato saw it in the dry logical way points out that whereas God gave lower animals special protective coatings—fur, feathers, shells, etc. and natural instincts; in place of these He gave man intelligence. It is not cake much philosophy to answer this. Plato saw it in the dry logical way points out that whereas God gave lower animals special protective coatings—fur, feathers, shells, etc. and natural instincts; in place of these He gave man intelligence. It does not take much philosophy to answer this. Plato saw it in the dry logical way points out that whereas God gave lower animals special protective coatings—fur, feathers, shells, etc. and natural instincts; in place of these He gave man intelligence. When bathing became popular fifty or sixty years ago, some diehards thought it immoral. People with the same mentality predicted God's judgment on the world for man's use of aircraft, saying that if God had wanted us to fly, he would have given us wings. It does not take much philosophy to answer this. Plato saw it in the dry logical way points out that whereas God gave lower animals special protective coatings—fur, feathers, shells, etc. and natural instincts; in place of these He gave man intelligence. When bathing became popular fifty or sixty years ago, some diehards thought it immoral. People with the same mentality predicted God's judgment on the world for man's use of aircraft, saying that if God had wanted us to fly, he would have given us wings. It does not take much philosophy to answer this. Plato saw it in the dry logical way points out that whereas God gave lower animals special protective coatings—fur, feathers, shells, etc. and natural instincts; in place of these He gave man intelligence.
stances. And as Catholic Americans we can be proud that our government has never considered such suicide flights. Instead we have begun an extensive program to evaluate the dangers which will be met in space and to discover ways of protecting the pilots who will explore space. The important field of space medicine is engaging some of our best young doctors precisely because our government accepts the basic Christian concept of the value of human life.

But if we cannot in conscience send these explorers to certain death, what must their chances be before we can morally authorize such space explorations? The general rule is that the greater the danger, the more serious must be the reason for performing the action. There is no mathematical proportion possible here. We must try to judge prudently and honestly. In the case of sending a man out into space we should have reasonable assurance that we can bring him back safely. Of course there is always the chance of something going wrong, but given the value of such exploration to national prestige and national defense, we can take this chance. It would be wrong to send someone off into space without taking reasonable precautions—for instance to send a man up in a rocket before we have sufficient knowledge of radiation hazards, re-entry problems, etc. Our space agency is to be prudently cautious on this matter, too, for they are currently studying the reports from our satellite launchings to find as safe as possible for our men. The Christian must clamor only against this violation. As long as it continues we foresee no conflict between Christian morality and sending men into space. The enterprise is laudable, the means used are not evil, and the risk being run is proportionate to the good result which is sought and desired.

Just a word in conclusion. The Christian need not fear the space age. In his morality he has all the principles needed to guide him through these new experiences. The solid rock of divine truth on which our morality rests will never weaken and never change. We can look into the space age with confidence and hope. New problems will arise but Christian morality will be well able to solve them.

Father McGlynn of the Philosophy Department of the University of Detroit gave this address to the Detroit Catholic Physicians' Guild at their annual Communion breakfast in March.

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The Impediment of Impotency and The Condition of Male Impotence
A Canon Medical Study

REV. PAUL V. HARRINGTON, J.C. and CHARLES J. E. KICKHAM, M.D., F.A.C.S. (Conclusion of this study which began in the August, 1958 issue of LINACRE QUARTERLY)

PART II
MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In hypogonadism, the hypoplasia of the interstitial cells causes eunuchoidal manifestations due to deficient endocrine elaboration. The scrotal contents may lack testicular elements entirely because of cryptorchism when neither testis has descended, or the testes may be extremely small, difficult to feel and soft in consistency. These latter conditions indicate a failure to develop in early life or demonstrate a primary atrophy. These victims manifest variable physical patterns depending on the degree of gonadal deficiency. There may be extreme obesity with feminine body configuration, absence of normal hair distribution, voice changes, and a general loss of secondary male characteristics. Loss of libido and accompanying impotence are frequently seen as results of such deficiency.

The site of the primary defect will be either the pituitary or the testis, and the diagnosis can be established by biopsy of the testis when possible and the urinary assay of the gonadotrophic hormones. Cytological sex chromatin tests are also significant. The conditions associated with hypogonadism have been classified into three categories: 1) Testicular aplasia or atrophy due to prepubertal failure of the testes — 2) The "so-called" Klinefelter syndrome — a heterogenous assemblage of cases generally characterized by high gonadotrophin, small testes with variable degrees of eunuchoidism, gynecomastia and hyalinization of seminal tubules. Many of these persons, by the available sex chromatin tests, are shown to be genetic females and in fact are female pseudo-hermaphrodites — 3) Hypogonadotropic eunuchoidism. The first and second groups are the result of a primary testicular defect, while the hypogonadotropic group, which is the most frequently noted, is of pituitary origin and is caused by deficient production of gonadotrophin. This latter defect results in a secondary depression or loss of testicular activity with the result that the testes fail to undergo maturation and, if the condition is not treated early and adequately, they remain...