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health AND human *flourishing*

RELIGION,
MEDICINE,
AND
MORAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

CAROL TAYLOR, C.S.F.N.
and ROBERTO DELL'ORO, Editors

explore the significant role of narrative in emerging from the isolation of suffering more generally.

50. Brison, *Aftermath*, 54.

51. Ibid.

52. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 174.

53. See Brison, *Aftermath*, esp. 21, 49–66; also Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, chapter 9; and Scarry, *Body in Pain*, esp. chapter 3.54. Blum, “Particularity and Responsiveness,” 720–21.

55. The compounding of vulnerabilities is dramatically apparent in health care contexts, particularly in the care of patients or the treatment of research subjects. Relationships with patients and “subjects” are characterized by clear disparities of knowledge, need, and power and thus introduce a broad array of vulnerabilities; the welfare and dignity of those most dependent and needful is profoundly subject to the quality of care they receive. See Pellegrino and Thomasma, *Philosophical Basis of Medical Practices* and *For the Patient’s Good*.

56. I am grateful to participants of the Theological Anthropology for Bioethics Conference for urging me to include discussion of the crucial role of solidarity in human flourishing, an insight central to the Catholic common good tradition.

57. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 130.

58. Here, in the Aristotelian sense, clearly intended by MacIntyre.

59. There are, of course, already professions and enterprises oriented around compassion and solidarity—e.g., the “healing” professions, relief organizations, and many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). I am suggesting the need for a general cultural shift.

60. MacIntyre highlights what he refers to as “the virtues of acknowledged dependency” (119), including “the attentive and affectionate regard of others.” *Dependent Rational Animals*, 120–22.

61. See Cahill, this volume, for a discussion of actual, ongoing work grounded in the Catholic common good tradition and embodying a social ethic that gives a central place to human solidarity.

CHAPTER

3

Pluralism, Truthfulness, and the Patience of Being

William Desmond

“Truth exists. Only lies are invented.”

—George Braques

Truth and Construction

How we understand truth cannot be disconnected from how we understand ourselves or from how we understand how we humans are to be. “How we are to be” indicates the human being as a creature with a certain *promise of being* that calls out to be realized in one way or other. Some ways will enable fulfillment of the promise if we are true to what we are. Some ways may betray the promise if we are false to what we are. The intimate connection of being human and being true is not a merely theoretical issue but has inescapable ethical and indeed religious significance.

In philosophy we are familiar with a plurality of significant theories of truth. I will mention a few of them. There is the correspondence theory: Truth is the correlation, more or less exact, of our intellect to things. There

as food for human beings and their livestock. But no one would say that corn has dignity, in either an attributed or an intrinsic sense.

Thus, discourse about “dignity” in the sense of the attributed dignities (with a small d) appears reserved for natural kinds that have Dignity in the intrinsic sense (with a capital D). In general, then, because we are most secure in the judgment that intrinsic Dignity belongs to human beings, the word *dignity* is reserved for discourse about human beings, even in the attributed sense.

These attributed dignities are thus a subset of noninstrumental attributed values, reserved for beings that have intrinsic Dignity (viz., human beings). In this attributed sense, one speaks, for example, of visiting “dignitaries.” One claims that a certain task is “beneath one’s dignity.” One speaks of a person “behaving in an undignified manner.” All of these, and other nonintrinsic, noninstrumental uses of the word *dignity* require a valuer—oneself or another person—to attribute the value. These uses of the word *dignity* do not refer to the value that a human being has by virtue of being a human being. That is to say, they are not referring to intrinsic values. But neither are these typically instrumental values. They do not refer to the usefulness of a human being to himself or herself or to another. These attributed dignities contribute in important ways to human flourishing. Attributed human dignities also refer to more than the preferences of individual human beings. Alongside the virtues and developmental values that derive their value from the intrinsic value (Dignity) of human beings, they help to constitute human flourishing. A complete moral theory would relate all these values to a fuller account of human excellence and flourishing, but a discussion of these issues would take us far beyond the main themes of this chapter.

As shown in table 4.1, I will consistently use the phrase “intrinsic Dignity” to refer to the special type of intrinsic value that belongs to members of those natural kinds that have kind-specific capacities for language, rationality, love, free will, moral agency, creativity, aesthetic sensibility, ability to grasp the

Table 4.1 Classification of Basic Kinds of Value

Attributed		Intrinsic		Derivative	
Instrumental values	Noninstrumental attributed values (including attributed dignities)	Simple intrinsic value	Intrinsic dignity	Developmental values	Virtues

finite and the infinite, and so on that merit this designation. I will use the phrase “attributed dignities” to refer to the noninstrumental values that are attributed to members of any natural kind that has intrinsic Dignity.

Dignity: Kinds, Not Classes

Some wish to advance the claim that there can be a class of individuals within the human natural kind, none of the members of which have Dignity. Generally, they draw a distinction between members of the kind who are persons, and those who are not. For some of these commentators, the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a member of the class of persons extends beyond the human natural kind to include members of other known natural kinds, such as higher primates and certain kinds of sea mammals. Some members of the human natural kind are not, according to this view, persons, and therefore have neither Dignity nor whatever moral protections follow from having Dignity. These typically include embryonic and fetal members of the kind, those who suffer from postcoma unresponsiveness (“persistent vegetative state”), anencephalics, the severely mentally retarded, and the severely demented.

This view of personhood can certainly be debated. Boethius’s classical definition of a person as “an individual substance of a rational nature”¹⁹ can easily be translated into the language of natural kinds by saying that a person is an individual member of a natural kind that meets the threshold criteria for Dignity—rationality, freedom, capacity for grasping the finite and the infinite, morality, love, creativity, and so on. Being a member of such a kind, being a person, and having Dignity, even on this reformulation of the classical view, are coextensive and inseparable. The task of disaggregating these concepts should seem daunting to anyone who approaches the question seriously. Wiggins nicely describes what makes the disaggregation of the concepts of person and *human being* so odd and difficult even to consider when he states, “a human being is our only stereotype for *person*.”²⁰

But suppose one were to set aside these difficulties in order to persist boldly in the argument that only certain members of the human natural kind have Dignity. Even so, there are logical implications of such a move that raise serious questions about its validity. We have defined Dignity as an intrinsic value. Intrinsic value means the value something has by virtue

powerful, cannot grasp the richness and integration of the human condition. For this richness to be grasped, the revelations of science need to be integrated with the insights of revelation, as well as all the other ways we come to know ourselves and our condition. Thus scientists must sit down with theologians, philosophers, and even nurses and physicians, and engage in constructive dialogue. Otherwise, those who would take us beyond our human nature may, instead, drag us beneath it.

NOTES

1. See D. Cockburn, ed., *Human Beings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

2. Examples of these different approaches include analytic philosophers such as D. Cockburn, *Other Human Beings* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), and William Alston, "Perceiving God," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 11 (1986): 655–65, who interpret this rejection of the concept of human nature to be the result of a misguided epistemology and a false competition between physical science explanations and everyday explanations of human relationships. Feminists, such as Annette Baier, "Extending the Limits of Moral Theory," *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 10 (1986): 538–45, emphasize the need to be more inclusive of concepts of human nature in our moral theories. Sociohistorical philosophers (C. Taylor, *Sources of Self* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989]) and those focusing on praxis (R. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988]) argue for moral discourse to expand and not rigidly to limit its scope so that it can be more relevant in addressing contemporary ethical concerns such as biotechnology.

3. M. A. Surani, "Stem Cells: How to Make Eggs and Sperm," *Nature* 427 (2004): 106–7.

4. N. Bostrom, "Human Enhancement: Answering the Why Question," available at www.transhumanism.org/tv/2004/BostromonWhy.ppt (accessed January 24, 2005).

5. British Broadcasting Company (BBC) News, "Surgeon Defends Amputations," available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/625680.stm (accessed January 29, 2005).

6. In addition to the Transhumanists, earlier works also mentioned these goals. For example, see J. Glover, *What Sort of People Should There Be?* (New York, Penguin, 1984); D. Suzuki and P. Knudtsen, *Genethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); L. M. Silver, *Remaking Eden* (New York: Perennial/Avon, 1997); and L. Walters, J. G. Palmer, and N. C. Johnson, *The Ethics of Human Gene Therapy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

7. H. Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

8. Cf. H. J. Eysenck, *Intelligence: A New Look* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998).

9. F. Post, "Creativity and Psychopathology," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 165 (1994): 27–34.



Toward a Richer Bioethics: A Conclusion

Edmund D. Pellegrino

We have sought as best we can to clarify, promote and defend
"being human." Where might we seek help in thinking about
"life lived humanly."

—President's Council on Bioethics, *Being Human*

In these words, President Bush's council on bioethics expressed its need for a "richer bioethics" with which to confront the challenges to our humanity inherent in the human use of contemporary biotechnology.¹ The council thus reminded itself, and all of us, of the pertinence for bioethics of what Ernst Cassirer rightly called "the Archimedean point, the fixed and immovable center of all thought."² By this he meant the question of man's self-knowledge, the anthropological question "What is man?"

This is the question set aside by previous committees, commissions, and reports. Yet it is the foundation stone on which the theory and content of any system of bioethics is ultimately set. It is the question that can no longer be taken for granted. In the end, the way we answer this question frames the wide range of different norms, principles, values, or intuitions that characterize today's bioethical discourse.