Stan van Hooft

Life, Death, and Subjectivity

Moral Sources in Bioethics

VALUE INQUIRY BOOK SERIES vibs

LIFE, DEATH, AND SUBJECTIVITY

Moral Sources in Bioethics

VIBS

Volume 160

a volume in
Values in Bioethics
ViB
Matti Häyry and Tuija Takala, Editors

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Rodopi

Amsterdam - New York, NY 2004

Cover Design: Studio Pollmann

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of "ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence".

ISBN: 90-420-1912-3

Printed in the Netherlands

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began research for this book while a visiting scholar at the Hastings Center in Garrison, New York in 1998. I am grateful to Daniel Callahan and his colleagues for their encouragement. A section of chapter three was read at the 2003 conference of the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy. A section of chapter five was read at a conference on Process Philosophy and Theology in Brisbane, Australia in 1999. A section of chapter seven was read at an international conference on Applied Ethics held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in December 1999. My thanks go to the organizers of those conferences for their kind invitations and critical comments. Chapter seven has benefited from correspondence with John Lizza. I am also grateful to Verena Tschudin, Geoff Hunt, and John Strain for intellectual stimulation during my time as a visiting Fellow in the International Centre for Nursing Ethics at the University of Surrey, UK. Tony Coady and his colleagues at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne have also been of assistance to me. And Dawn Freshwater, professor of nursing at Bournemouth University has been an inspiration. Thanks also to Bruce Gillespie for his editorial assistance, and to Deakin University for financial assistance in preparing the manuscript. Peter Herissone-Kelly of the Centre for Professional Ethics at the University of Central Lancashire was also of considerable assistance in editing the final drafts. Finally, I would like to thank my wife Lynne and daughters Christine and Kate for their loving support.

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INTRODUCTION

> If man always encounters the good in the specific form of the particular practical situation in which he finds himself, the task of moral knowledge is to see in the concrete situation what is asked of it or, to put it another way, the person acting must see the concrete situation in the light of what is asked of him in general.
>
> Hans-Georg Gadamer[1]

1. Health Care as a Practice

Health care is a vast and global human practice. Individual doctors and health care workers, hospitals and other clinics, commercial health organizations, governments at national, state and local levels, charitable organizations, international aid agencies, and the World Health Organization, all spend and receive vast sums of money seeking to save the lives and enhance the health status of the people who are their patients or clients or for whom they are otherwise responsible. A large range of professions is involved, including medicine, nursing, psychiatry, dentistry, health administration, physiotherapy, counselling, alternative medical practices, psychotherapy, nutrition science, chiropractic, biological and genetic research, and much more. Further, these professions have subdivisions and specializations. Amongst the medicos, there are specialists, general practitioners, surgeons, and many more. Nurses might specialize in oncology, aged care, midwifery, and community health along with numerous other fields. There are as many forms of alternative health care practice as there are systems of belief in the curative effects of rituals, substances, and therapies. Psychotherapy takes multiple forms and appeals to many traditions and theories, while those therapies that seek to relieve the stresses and injuries of the musculature and physique of the body present consumers of health care in industrial societies with a range of choices unimaginable in previous times.

It might appear at best useless and at worst misleading to lump all of these professions and traditions together under the one term: “health care practice.” I do so to draw attention to the fact that all of these activities, however different many will be from each other, are concerned in one way or another with the health of the patients or clients who ask for the help of the professionals in question. Health, broadly understood, is the primary focus of this practice. Whether it is the bringing into the world of new life, being in attendance at the cessation of life, or engaging in the many activities that cure malady or relieve the suffering arising from ill-health during the course of life, health is the goal shared by the myriad forms of health care activity that I am pointing to. Moreover, I consider that the term “care” applies broadly to that large range of activities. Whether the activity at issue is an allocation on the part of a government of funds to its public hospital system, or a curative procedure administered by a doctor, or the pursuit of a public health promotion policy by nurses and social workers, or attending to a dying patient in a hospice, or any of the vast range of activities falling within the purview of the many professions that pursue health, the common element is a tending to the health-related problem of

another human being or group of human beings. The fundamental stance of the health professions is that of helping others who are in need because of the state of their health. Whether this is done from motivations of concern for others, commercial gain, cultural advantage, or social power is irrelevant to seeing the activity as fundamentally and formally one of directly or indirectly caring for others in their health-related vulnerabilities.

In referring to this large and amorphous grouping of activities as a "practice" I am alluding to a use of that term on the part of the moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre uses the term "practice" to designate:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[2]

In order to explain the significance of this quotation it will be necessary to outline briefly the theoretical problem with which MacIntyre was grappling when he wrote it. MacIntyre had suggested in his book *After Virtue* that the contemporary Western intellectual tradition as it stems from the Enlightenment is bereft of any secure basis for moral norms. Our modern way of thinking gives us no objective basis for the duties, rights, and standards of behavior that constitute what we call morality. He recommends that we return to an earlier Aristotelian tradition of thinking about ethics. In this tradition what we should do in any given situation was indicated not by universal, objective, and absolute norms that arise from a realm beyond everyday human reality, but by the requirements of virtue. In its turn, virtue was understood in teleological terms, that is, given that a person or society has a goal to achieve excellence, whatever form of behavior or disposition toward behavior would conduce to the attainment of that goal, and to the advancement of the relevant practice, would be seen as virtuous. The goals, goods, and aspirations of a society or a tradition are the basis upon which that society or tradition would admire some actions or traits of character as virtuous while it regards contrary actions or traits of character as vicious.

Specific forms of life, cultural traditions, and practices posit goals for human endeavor. For example, it is a widely accepted belief in Western industrial societies that society exists in order to allow people to pursue happiness. This goal of happiness, however it is defined, is widely accepted as a fundamental human purpose in such societies. In contrast, we might suggest that people in some ancient Eastern cultures pursue a form of contentment consisting in the extirpation of desire. Accordingly, there will be differing conceptions of virtue and human excellence in those different cultures. In modern Western societies, virtues that emphasize initiative, individualism, and achievement will be highlighted, while attitudes of surrender, quietism, and the suspension of self will be preferred in those more ancient cultures of the East. Applying this thought to smaller entities than cultures, we might think of specific communities or professions and point to goals that everyone in that community or profession shares or should share. So, members of a religious community share the goal of service to God, while members of the legal profession aspire to pursue justice. In these contexts differing conceptions of human excellence will obtain and different patterns of behavior will be admired.

I assume that, whatever the specific objectives of individual practitioners or organizations are, the health care professions as a whole share the goal of restoring or preserving the health of patients and members of the broader community. It is this goal that specifies the "internal good" that MacIntyre suggests is definitive of a practice. While there may be other goods or values that are important in health care, such as efficiency and social status, these are not "internal" to the practice in the way that health is. Even though specifying the goals of a profession can be a fascinating and contentious exercise, as recent discussions within the profession of medicine show,[3] the point that MacIntyre would make is that every practice has a goal or set of goals which are internal to it in the sense of being the central goods around which the practice revolves. The practice would alter its fundamental nature and raison d'être if its fundamental values were different. My application of this thought is to say that the fundamental values of the practice of health care are life and health.

2. The Virtue of Caring

MacIntyre speaks of "standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity" in his definition of a practice. The import of this is that, if a practice can be specified, then virtues that are appropriate to it can also be specified. If the non-universal goals that are internal to professions, cultures, or "practices" can be identified, then virtue can be defined as traits of character or as habits that conduce to the attainment of those goals. As MacIntyre puts it:

> A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.[4]

There are virtues that enhance the moral status of their bearers in broad and cross-cultural practices such as the pursuit of happiness. Such virtues include honesty, courage, enterprise, generosity, and justice. There are also virtues that are specific to, or emphasized in, given practices. So humility is admired in monastic communities, love of justice is admired in the law, and caring is admired in the health care professions. The virtues that it behooves any given individual to acquire will stem from a variety of practices of differing scope which that individual might be involved in. We are all human beings in a given cultural context pursuing the goals that that context teaches us are the admired ways of being human. It follows that there are virtues that it would be good for us to display irrespective of our profession or specific way of life. But we are also participants in more specific practices subject to the norms and standards that apply to those practices. There are a number of such standards that apply to the health care professions. Edmund Pellegrino has provided the following list: fidelity to trust and promise, benevolence, effacement of self-interest, compassion and caring, intellectual honesty, justice (which need not be impartial in the health care context), and prudence (which includes deliberation and discernment).[5] Moreover, different professions within the broad field of health care might stress differing virtues from within or outside of this list. For example, medical research scientists are required to display a love of truth and scholarly rigor, while nurses have made much of the virtue of caring.

But nursing is not the only health care profession for which caring is a central virtue. I would suggest that the fundamental virtue in the practice of all of the health care professions is that of caring. It follows from my point that health is the goal of the health care professions that caring about health and caring for patients or clients in relation to their health are virtuous stances for health care workers to adopt. While this suggestion is, as yet, fairly empty of specific content and is not intended to exclude or devalue the many other virtues that are relevant in health care practice, it fulfils MacIntyre's requirement that, in order to be a virtue, a characteristic mode of behavior must enhance the practice itself, as well as conducing to its internal goals. There is no doubt that "human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" by caring practitioners in health care. A virtuous and caring health care worker is not only effective in realizing the internal goals of that practice, namely, enhancing the life and health of patients, but is also a contributor to the standing and development of that practice. Such a practitioner contributes to the goods of that practice.

Accordingly, it is one of the central assumptions of this book that caring for the health status of patients is one of the most crucial virtues of health care professionals in all fields. Care for the health or health-related well-being of patients and others in the community is a fundamentally virtuous attitude for health care workers to display and their professional activities should be expressive of such caring. This book will not seek to elaborate on this point since much has already been written on this topic, especially in the nursing literature. The work of Patricia Benner,[6] Jean Watson,[7] Madeline Leininger,[8] Simone Roach,[9] and others has now been absorbed into the mainstream of nursing studies. The research of Carol Gilligan[10] and the writings of Nel Noddings[11] have demonstrated the centrality of caring, conceived as a distinctly feminine quality, in a broad conception of ethics. Following this, such feminist writers as Sara Fry[12] and Peta Bowden[13] have used the notion of caring to articulate what is distinctive about nursing as a profession dominated by women. A significant body of writing has also emerged in order to explore what the concept means in practical terms or when it is operationalized.[14] And there continues to be philosophical and conceptual inquiry into the meaning of the concept both in the context of nursing and in more general terms.[15] There has, however, also been critique.[16] Most importantly, it has been suggested that, as an ethical notion, "caring" is vague and does not tell us what a health care worker should do in specific situations.

For my part, I will not seek to remove this vagueness or provide concrete guidelines for action in this book. This book is not a book on ethics in that sense. Instead, I argue that in order to be virtuous and, more specifically, in order to be caring, a health worker must be possessed of certain kinds of knowledge. Aristotle's analysis of virtue suggests that fully mature persons act virtuously when they act in the light of a distinctive kind of judgment which he calls practical wisdom or *phronésis*. This kind of judgment expresses the value orientation of the agent and sees what a situation demands in the light of those values. In this way there are at least two components involved in such judgements: an evaluative and a cognitive component. The evaluative component expresses the agent's value commitments while the cognitive component assesses the situation accurately and appropriately. As Aristotle puts it, a virtuous agent has to "feel rightly and think rightly."[17] So, in the case of health care workers who evince the virtue of caring, sound judgment will be influenced by their

caring orientation, and it will discern what is relevant to the health and well-being of all relevant parties in the situation which is being confronted.

The cognitive component of such a judgment will not only be particular knowledge of the specific context in which the judgment is made, however. Health care workers who are caring in their practice also have appropriate knowledge of what is at issue in the ethical problems that arise in health care more generally. That is why I have subtitled this book, "moral sources in bioethics." Instead of offering an ethics in the sense of a set of guidelines, principles, or moral theories which should inform health care practice, I will elaborate on a kind of knowledge that I take to be constitutive of a caring attitude, where such an attitude is a prerequisite for acting well in the health professions. So what is this knowledge that leads to caring, to sound judgment, and thus to virtuous activity in health care?

There will be bodies of knowledge central to any practice and, specifically, to the practice of health care. Most obviously, this knowledge will include the technical scientific knowledge which, when applied to health problems, constitutes the very practice in question. I will leave to one side the difficulties that arise from there being different and often conflicting traditions of knowledge in different branches of health care practice. For example, mainstream medical science still has difficulty accepting some forms of alternative curative practice. Moreover, there will be interpersonal knowledge, whether based on psychological science or personal rapport, which allows the technical knowledge inherent in the practice to be applied with sensitivity and care. While it is this knowledge, often embodied in the experience of health workers instead of in book learning, which grounds the "microethics"[18] of the patient–clinician relationship and renders it a caring one, it is not the knowledge upon which I want to focus.

Insofar as the purpose of this book is to offer thoughts relevant to an ethics for health care, it will be important to consider the nature of the ethical knowledge inherent in that practice. It is widely thought that such knowledge is centrally concerned with relevant ethical principles or guidelines. So, for example, it is considered important by many educators in this field to impart knowledge of relevant moral principles. While there can be no doubt that health workers should be aware of the norms that apply to their profession, whether these norms are spelt out as general principles, institutional or professional codes of ethics, or the law, it is my contention that there is a further form of ethical knowledge that virtuous health care workers should bring to their practice.[19] In brief, this knowledge is expressed as a sensitive awareness of the central values internal to that practice as they are embodied in a particular situation. What is the nature of this knowledge?

Charles Taylor has argued that all people engage in "strong evaluation." Such evaluations, he says,

> involve discriminations of right and wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged.[20]

Taylor argues that these strong evaluations constitute inescapable frameworks for our ethical thinking and exist prior to the rational processes of constituting the principles or making the principled decisions with which the formal discipline of

moral philosophy usually concerns itself. Indeed, such evaluations constitute a factor in our very identities and come to expression not just in our actions but also in the fundamental outlooks on life and on the world, which are the bases of our decision making. However, Taylor argues that they are not to be accounted for as arising from instincts or natural inclinations in the way that apparently altruistic behavior in animals might be. Instead, they give expression to what he calls a "moral ontology": that is, a set of substantive stances toward such fundamentals as life, death, the well-being of other people, and the nature of human dignity. While they may be acquired, in part, through the cultures and practices in which we participate, they are enlivened and deepened by our rational reflection upon them and by our own commitment to them. Such commitment, in turn, is both an articulation and an elaboration of the ethical knowledge that comes to expression in strong evaluations. In short, the suggestion is that people always already have an inchoate form of ethical knowledge which constitutes a part of their sense of themselves and of others, and which is expressed in the way in which particular situations are evaluated for the ethical challenges that might be inherent in them.

Taylor also speaks of what he calls "moral sources" when he highlights the motivational importance of our implicit moral knowledge and strong evaluations. It is not enough for us to have a more or less articulated ethical worldview. It is important also that such an outlook moves us to act in accordance with it. In my own terms, I would say that it is important for us to be moved to care by the values we espouse. For example, in pre-Enlightenment times, strong evaluations would have been tied strongly to a belief in God. Not only were moral norms thought to be inherent in a God-created reality, but moral behavior was also seen as a form of serving God. In this way such a faith was a "moral source," in that it alluded to a reality beyond the self that empowered individuals to act in accordance with what they took to be a theologically grounded objective morality. Taylor does not think, however, that with the passing of the ages of faith the only moral sources available to us in our contemporary context are either a desiccated cultural memory of such objectivities or a mere subjective commitment based on existential choice. Nor does he think that the formulations of moral theorists, especially utilitarians, adequately identify the moral sources of our actions. We inherit from the Christian era a general attitude of benevolence to others, but what moral sources, which are deeper than our mere feelings or desires, can sustain that attitude now? The intervening periods of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism have bequeathed to us a deep respect for our own autonomy as rational beings, a respect that applies to all rational beings universally, and a deep respect for nature as a source of goodness or as a source of creativity expressed in art. While moral theory appears to be tied to forms of instrumental rationality which privilege utilitarian or proceduralist forms of thought, ethical action frequently expresses deep and widely shared evaluations that our pragmatic culture systematically obscures. To a large extent we have lost touch with our moral sources. Our avowed moral norms may have an inadequate basis in the implicit evaluations that our cultures provide to us. Theoretical confusion and practical indecision are the result.

Accordingly, contemporary moral theory should go beyond debates about the rational bases for the moral norms that we take to be unquestionable or about the way in which widely accepted moral principles might apply to new and unfamiliar situations of ethical complexity, in order to explore the moral sources which our culture makes available to us, and which we express when we act and

think ethically. Taylor argues that we should overcome the inarticulateness or even suppression that prevents us from tapping the motivational power that knowledge of these sources would provide. If acting virtuously is acting in a way that expresses the deepest ethical resources of our characters, then we must embrace not only moral reasoning, but also our caring motivations and implicit values.

This book argues that amongst the strong evaluations that come to expression in the ethical decisions of health care workers and amongst the moral sources that motivate such workers to act well are conceptions of human life, death, and subjectivity. It will be clear that respect for human life is a moral source of a great deal of ethical decision making in health care practice. It is less clear what precisely this means. It will also be clear that death, or at least the wish to avoid it, is a shadow that hangs over the entire ethical outlook of health care practitioners. Again, we will need to explore this in some detail. If one of the moral sources that Taylor has identified for the entire ethical outlook of the Western tradition is that of respect for self-responsible rationality in human beings, then subjectivity is a concept that captures both the ethical significance of this moral source and its connection with the concepts of life and death. In short, this book seeks to articulate some of the moral sources or strong evaluations available in our culture that are especially relevant to the practice of health care.

3. The Role of Bioethics

Before elaborating on this project I should anticipate a possible objection. It will be claimed by many that the most important form which ethical knowledge takes in health care practice is bioethics. Bioethics as a sub-discipline of philosophy and applied ethics and as an element in education for the health professions has undergone astounding growth in the last few decades. It has become an institution in its own right, with a large number of journals, books, research centers, professional organizations, international conferences, courses, and discussions throughout the world. While it would be foolhardy to seek to characterize this flowering of intellectual activity in simple or summative terms, I think it is fair to say that most bioethicists would see their discipline as an application of practical reason to the moral problems that arise in health care and in medical research. The key term in this description is "reason." It is an assumption made by most bioethicists—one that they inherit from the philosophical discipline of ethics—that the task of bioethics is to resolve rationally the ethical problems faced by health care practitioners. Quite often the strategy used will be that of articulating or positing overarching principles and then applying these by a kind of deductive process to the situation which has given rise to the problem. Classic examples of such principles are: respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice.[21] If bioethical discussion moves from this level of principles to a more theoretical plane it will be to show that the overarching principles themselves will be grounded in even broader principles such as those of the Natural Law theorists, who base them upon the inherent goals of human nature, or Kant's categorical imperative that we should treat all persons with dignity, or the utilitarians' dictum that we should do what conduces to the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The assumption that underlies this way of thinking is that bioethics is a principle-based, rationally grounded decision procedure for solving moral quandaries in health care. It leads some

bioethicists to argue that even a decision taken on the basis of caring will not be morally adequate unless it can be legitimated by ethical reason based on principles.[22]

But, as Taylor has argued, not all of morality can be understood as grounded in reason in this way.[23] The regard that we give to the humanity of another may be well expressed or articulated by the principle of autonomy or by Kant's insistence on the dignity of the human person, but such an expression is not fundamental. As I have argued in a previous book, such a regard is grounded in levels of human existence that are deeper than practical reason. It is grounded in caring as an existential mode of being.[24] As Taylor would put it, it is an expression of an implicit strong evaluation that operates as a moral source but of which our culture provides little opportunity for articulation. General principles, being expressions of objective and rational thought, do not capture the depth, pervasiveness, and subtlety of those aspects of interpersonal interactions that mark them off as virtuous. Accordingly, bioethics addresses only a part of the normative structure of the practice of health care: namely, the explicit and public elements of decision procedures that can be articulated as arguments based on principles. It only rarely addresses or thematizes the fundamental values, "strong evaluations," "moral ontology," and motivations that inform that practice and the decision making that takes place within it.

That is not to say that there is no role for bioethical discourse in health care practice. On the contrary, it is especially apt when we are concerned with issues of public policy, institutional guidelines, research and clinical protocols, professional standards, or law. When it comes to discussing such issues as the just distribution of health care resources, or the legality of physician-assisted suicide, or a Catholic hospital's policy on procedures to procure an abortion, public, rational, impartial, and principled discourse is required. It is a moot point whether, in a liberal and pluralist society, such public policy issues should ever be discussed with reference to what people think is morally right or wrong, but such universalizable moral concepts as "rights," "duty," "responsibility," and "justice" are surely relevant to such discussions. However, the danger of such concepts is that principle-based thinking can become insensitive to the particularities of a real situation—including the moral convictions of its participants—and apply its guidelines with a cold bureaucratic efficiency. Adherence to principles can even become in some few cases a fanatical insensitivity to the particular needs and troubles of specific patients in favor of a dogmatic application of what are considered universal and absolute norms. Such a distortion on behalf of principles is the very antithesis of caring.

My own approach to moral theory and moral principles is methodologically pluralist. As I have just indicated, I acknowledge the relevance of moral principles in the field of bioethics. More specifically, in bioethical questions that relate to public policy, a utilitarian approach appears, on the face of it, appropriate, since it is crucially relevant whether such a decision enhances the general welfare or not. When it comes to clinical decision making in which the autonomy of the individual patient is at issue, a Kantian stress on respect for persons appears apt, as does the Kantian insistence on the *prima facie* existence of moral duties toward others. The value of life that is stressed by Natural Law theorists is also relevant to health care situations, though it is hard to see how that value can be accorded proper recognition if there is not also concern for other relevant values which may lead to conflicting courses of action. I have already indicated how important I consider virtue to be in health care practice and that I

consider caring to be the most central of these virtues (although a stress on the virtue of caring does not obviate the need for consideration of what is demanded by justice or other moral principles). How do we apply this pluralist conception of moral theory to practical ethical problems?

As I use the term, practical ethics is about what we should do in specific and real circumstances in our lives. It asks the question: What should I do? and it asks it of a specific agent in the context of a specific practice. As such it differs from the question: What should be done? While this question can still be contextualized, it abstracts from the specificity of the agent and asks what anyone in that situation should do. A different question again is: What would be the right thing to do? This question appeals to a notion of rightness that many moral theorists, including many bioethicists, hold to be universal in some way instead of being tied to a practice. As such, this question abstracts from the particularity of the situation and appeals to a general principle that is to be applied to it. Citing a principle, in turn, gives rise to many questions in moral theory about the foundations of principles and of the rightness of an action. But this line of inquiry leads away from the specificity of the situation and obscures the need to grapple with its ethical exigencies. Practical ethics demands a focus on the particular. Preoccupation with general principles can distract from such a focus.

Of course, the suggestion that there are limits to the scope of reason in ethical thinking and that our personal values and "strong evaluations" are of considerable importance in specific situations should not encourage the thought that a dogmatic or fanatical adherence to personally held absolute values or norms would be acceptable. Health care workers do not exist in a social vacuum with only their individual consciences as a guide. I do not endorse a moral subjectivism that would establish moral norms just on personal opinion or feeling. The practice of health care contains a body of more or less articulated principles and also establishes what the values and virtues of health care workers should be. And yet this does not obviate the need for critical ethical reflection on the part of the individual health care worker. I am not endorsing a crude relativism that would suggest that the only valid moral values are the actual and operational values within a practice. If the practice of health care in a particular time and place has succumbed to the pressures of the market place and pursues efficiency and productivity at the expense of sensitive patient care, then there is need for reform. This reform may come from the intuitions of individual health workers who find the situation intolerable or it may come from a reflection on the traditions and value heritage of the practice itself. Reflection on the values of the Hippocratic tradition, for example, can serve to impugn the routinization of patient care and the objectification of patients that so frequently occurs in clinical settings in the industrialized nations.

But what would be the basis of such intuitions and of such critical reflection? This brings us back to the question of what kind of knowledge should inform virtuous decision making in health care practice. If knowledge of bioethical principles or of broad moral principles is relevant only to a limited extent, then what knowledge is it that is more important?

4. Caring Knowledge

This book will focus on that branch of practical ethics concerned with the making of particular judgements and practical decisions in morally complex health care

situations. It addresses the way in which individual agents face and resolve moral problems and with the way in which they shape themselves as moral beings. It also explores the kind of awareness that they bring to the complexities of the clinical situation. The knowledge that is apposite here is not only a general knowledge of bioethical or moral principles, but also a personal knowledge of, and commitment to, the values that are inherent in the specific health care situation and in health care practice considered more broadly.

The knowledge which health care workers should bring with them into health care situations, along with general knowledge of the relevant sciences and social norms, is knowledge of those features of the persons with whom they are dealing which are relevant to the practice of health care. Virtuous health care practice is based upon a sensitive awareness of the values that are morally salient in a clinical situation. While it would not be surprising if those values were universal in meaning and application, though mediated by specific cultural understandings, my focus will be upon the role that they play in the lives of virtuous health care workers. Specifically, I suggest that virtuous health care workers are those who have a more or less articulate grasp of the value and significance of life, of health, of what it is to be a person who is suffering malady or mental distress, of pain and suffering, and of death. To understand what life is and means, what suffering is and its significance in human life, what the impact of our death is upon the way we live, and so forth, is to be possessed of the kind of knowledge which will make us sensitive to the health-related problems of others and more aware of our own value commitments. I have dealt with a number of these themes in a series of articles published over recent years.[25] In this book I focus on the most central of these themes: namely, life and death.

I call such knowledge "caring knowledge" because it is inherently motivational and directed toward the welfare of others. This is not theoretical knowledge in the sense of information that informs practice while being only contingently related to that practice. It is knowledge that shapes attitudes and structures motivation. It is not necessary to ask of this knowledge whether it should be applied. It is knowledge the possession of which leads us to apply it. If I know what the value of life is, I will be moved to act in a way that is respectful of life. If I know what it is to be a person who is facing death, I will act in a caring way toward persons in such situations. Of course, I am not suggesting that there is one true form of such knowledge. There is a bewildering range of differing conceptions of the value of life in the world, and there is a variety of theories about, and attitudes toward, death. The word "knowledge" implies a degree of objectivity and warrantability that is not available in the field of values. However, I am not pressed by this thought to the conclusion that a health professional's perspective on such matters is a matter of purely personal perception or attitude. Health care being a culturally situated practice, there will be understandings and perspectives which are normative or virtuous within that practice. So there will be a limited range of difference in outlook that can be tolerated within the practice. Moreover, insofar as patients or clients of the practice will have attitudes and values of their own in relation to health, life, illness, and death, specific health care workers will have to transcend their own views with sufficient objectivity to allow themselves to be sensitive to the views of the people with whom they are dealing.

As a result, there will be no attempt in this book to establish normative perspectives on the morally salient features of health care situations that everyone within the practice of health care should accept. Instead, there will be open

discussion and reflection on those values so that health care professionals can enrich their awareness of them. A more objective reflection on the values that are central to health care practice can deepen and enliven the virtue and the caring of health care workers in relation to their own convictions and commitments and in relation to those of their patients. A profound awareness of what is at issue in clinical situations can enhance the motivation and the sensitivity of clinical workers and so enhance their caring practice. The education of health workers should include (and often does) discussion and reflection upon the values which the practice of health care pursues. It is on the basis of knowledge of such values that both routine health work and ethically difficult decisions can be carried out. Whether or not a particular action needs to be informed by bioethical guidelines, there should certainly be a caring and sensitive awareness of what is important in that situation.

Suffering, death, and the finitude of our subjective being are the basis of a virtue conception of ethics, in that it is suffering, death, and finitude that elicit in us our caring for others. Our reflection upon life, vulnerability, and mortality will not only involve thinking about what our caring should be about, but it also elicits such caring. Whereas bioethics presents us with what is often seen as a top-down, command conception of ethics in which principles and norms are worked out by rational experts and are to be obeyed or applied, a caring and virtue conception of ethics sees ethical thinking as a bottom-up process in which the "strong evaluation" and particular point of view of the agent springs from, and expresses, their own humanity and sensitive awareness of what is important. Such awareness then leads to caring and virtuous behavior without any *a priori* necessity for reference to overarching principles.

5. Methodology

This book aims to develop or enhance the kind of sensitive awareness that grounds caring and virtuous health care practice. It does so with some humility. The first reason for this humility is the acknowledgment that merely reading a book can hardly make a person virtuous. The primary source of caring and sensitive awareness in virtuous health workers is the deep ethical structure of the identity of those workers. Further sources are the real experience of health care situations, the actions of impressive colleagues, and reflection upon these.[26] However, with the increasing pressures upon health care workers there is less time for such reflection, either collectively within an organization or privately in times of quiet. It is my hope that this book might provide a stimulus for such reflection. Moreover, it is my claim that any educational program for the health care professions that aims to teach ethics should not confine itself to a discussion of principles, but should also engage in reflection upon the values inherent in health care practice. While this book can contribute to such reflection, the experience of exemplary practitioners and of novice professionals themselves can often be even more important.

The second reason for my humility is that I am a philosopher. Accordingly, I lack the experience and first-hand knowledge of clinical and other health care situations that should inform the reflections that I present. While it is true that a number of health care institutions and professionals have been host to my inquiries and have provided me with compelling experiences that have informed

my writing, the primary source of the insights offered in this book is the tradition of Western philosophy.

What can this tradition of philosophy offer health care? There will be many answers to this question and bioethics is only one of them, but my own view can be summarized in the following way. Philosophers ask at least two fundamental questions of any phenomenon: namely, "what is it?" and "what is its significance?" The first question calls for definition and, through it, a more articulate understanding. The second calls for an articulation of what is important or valuable in the phenomenon in question. Science seeks understanding of phenomena by offering explanations or explanatory theories. Philosophy seeks understanding by defining what is at issue in terms that respond to, and develop, the intuitions that any intelligent person could have on the matter, and by showing the importance that that phenomenon can have in human life. So, for example, if the topic were death, science would seek to explain what happens when death occurs (and in this way it can offer a kind of definition of death), while philosophy would articulate what death is in the ordinary conceptions that people have and which are embodied in the discourses that surround death. Such a definition would also uncover what people's attitudes to death might be and suggest attitudes that it might be valuable to have toward death. Unlike science, philosophy moves from facts to values.

A methodology that we might pursue in an inquiry on death would be to survey people who have a connection with death—such as health care workers, bereaved family, or the dying themselves—and to summarize such a survey. This form of qualitative research would belong more properly to the disciplines of sociology or psychology, however. The goal of philosophy is not factual information, but insight. Accordingly, the traditional method of philosophers is not that of data gathering but of deep reflection on experience informed by reading other philosophers and by their own sensitive awareness of the issues involved. The goal of such a reflection will be clarification, understanding, consistency in the world-view that is held, and insight into the values involved. Philosophy does not seek explanations in the way that science does, and it does not aim for the same standards of objectivity as the physical and social sciences. It cannot avoid being the reflection of a particular individual: an individual with a necessarily limited range of real life experiences and a limited range of reading and scholarship. However, it does stand on the shoulders of the philosophical giants so as to be able to see further. The great philosophers of the Western tradition have articulated reflections and theories that provide an entry point of tremendous profundity for any person wishing to reflect deeply on the issues before us. It is one of the methods of philosophy to engage in reflection on these philosophies and to align them with our own insights and experiences. While the restricted scope of those insights might impose limitations, the wisdom of philosophical traditions provides insights from which much can be learnt.

Specific branches of philosophy from which this book will draw heavily include not only ethics, but also philosophical anthropology. This term is not widely used in the Anglo-American traditions of the discipline but is well known in continental Europe. It refers to studies that seek to articulate what it is to exist as a human being. Philosophical anthropology explores the nature of human existence and of the experiences that define our humanity. It describes the structures of relationships between the world and ourselves and between ourselves and other people. It seeks to explore why the activities central to our cultures—activities such as religion, art, and science—are important for us as

human beings, and why such values as virtue and health are central to our lives. It seeks to do so with a minimum dependence on theory and postulation. For example, it questions the traditional metaphysical descriptions of human beings as being made up of a body and mind because it fails to find this hypothesis confirmed in experience. Instead, its focus is on "subjectivity." I will elaborate on what this means in chapter one. For the moment it is enough to say that it implies a phenomenological methodology conceived broadly as reflection on our own experience where such experience is deemed characteristic for others in similar situations. Phenomenological reflection seeks to express what is otherwise hidden in the assumptions, evaluations, and attitudes that we bring to our lives.

I should add that, as I understand it, philosophy is secular in its assumptions and its methodology. One scholarly tradition that also uncovers what people's attitudes to death, for example, might be, and suggests attitudes that it might be valuable to have toward death, is theology. Informed by a religious faith, death might be seen as a gateway to a supernatural life and an attitude to death that might be advocated is that it is a punishment for humanity's sinfulness. Modern philosophy has distinguished itself from theology and can therefore not propose such religious views. This is not to say that it cannot or should not take account of them or even accept them. There is much to be learnt from religious conceptions that can contribute to our sensitive awareness of such issues and to our wisdom in relation to them. But philosophy is methodologically committed to assumptions and premises that can be rationally validated. Religious faith cannot be so validated. Its very nature as faith implies that it goes beyond what reason can establish in its own terms. Whether this is a limitation upon philosophy when it enters into a discussion of such issues as the nature and value of life and death is a question that touches upon deeper issues than I can discuss here. There will be those who will assert that such issues can only be adequately dealt with from a religious perspective. For my part, I consider that our immediate and deeply felt experience of these issues provides a basis which is sufficiently rich to ground profound reflection. The methods of philosophy can structure such reflections and reach deeply into our most precious convictions. I am not convinced that such reflection also needs religious faith in order to attain profundity and wisdom. Indeed, it may be that if we consider religious faith as a possible answer to the questions that these issues raise, then beginning our reflection from a position of faith would prematurely foreclose on the range of possible insights that could be produced. Religion may be but one answer to the existential problems that our being alive, vulnerable, and mortal brings with it. Philosophical reflection should remain open to as wide a range of meaningful answers as possible.

While the limitations that I have just acknowledged require humility on the part of a philosophical author, they also require a more active engagement on the part of the reader. I do not claim expertise in your field. I offer you a stimulus for thought. You must measure the adequacy of the thoughts that I present to you against your own experience of health care, including as it does the daily grind of your practice as well as the moments of exceptional profundity. You will have experienced ethically difficult decisions, scenes of emotional depth, incidents that have made you angry, sad, or joyful. If the philosophical thoughts that I present can help you understand those moments and learn from them, and if this experience can deepen your commitment to your profession and your caring for patients, then both my contribution and yours will have been a success.

6. Structure of the Book

This book focuses on life and death. In part, it does so because these concepts are central to the moral ontology undergirding a large number of bioethical debates: namely, those that concern such "life and death issues" as abortion and euthanasia. However, I am aware that the range of ethically sensitive issues in health care is much greater than these and, indeed, I am not concerned to try to resolve bioethical debates on these or other issues. The more important reason why the book discusses life and death is that these concepts gather into them a great many of the intuitions and evaluations that health care workers evince in their practice. They are the central moral sources of the ethics of health care. A great many of the concerns of health care, such as health, suffering, pain, and disease, are articulations of our more basic concerns, strong evaluations, and understandings of life and death. Our deep and inchoate understandings of the concepts and experiences that are involved in life and death structure our practical attitudes and our motivations to act in caring ways.

The first chapter of the book attacks a family of philosophical doctrines gathered together under the title of "essentialism." These doctrines invite a metaphysical approach to ethical issues that a contemporary postmodern and scientific outlook would reject. I argue that it is a consequence of Darwinism that the concept of a human essence is not useful in attempting to demarcate those creatures who should elicit our ethical responses from those who need not do so. Moreover, essentialism has been at the root of many forms of prejudice and injustice in the history of human civilizations. The chapter also introduces the concepts of an "intentional system" and of "subjectivity" in order to argue for this anti-essentialist position. Moreover, these concepts will be useful in later discussions of the ethical significance of being alive. The chapter completes the conceptual preparation for the rest of the book by introducing the notions of "intersubjectivity" and "existence." The first of these builds upon the concept of subjectivity in order to indicate how relationships with others may be ethical in nature instead of exploitative or objectifying. This in turn will have significance for situating the normativity which arises from the other's being a person. The second situates the theses of this book within the context of the existentialist tradition and its anti-essentialist philosophical anthropology. The implications for bioethics of these concepts will be profound. It is assumed that these concepts capture the bases of the strong evaluations and moral ontology of contemporary health care workers and their patients more fully than do the essentialist metaphysical doctrines upon which so much bioethics seeks to base itself.

It is our ethical response to persons that forms the subject of chapter two. This chapter contains some critique of traditional and mainstream approaches to problems of bioethics. Quite often, such approaches are based upon the special moral status that is said to attach to human beings or persons as such, so that many bioethical issues come to turn on whether a given organism fulfils the criteria of personhood. Again, it is essentialism that is the source of the confusion here. Moreover, the conception of personhood inherent in Kantian and utilitarian moral theory is somewhat impoverished. But the central point which I make in this chapter is that we do not accord moral status to persons because that is what their being persons demands of us. Instead, we accord moral status to them because of our caring for them, and this may lead us, in our specific language community, to want to call them "persons." My central thesis is that the process of acknowledging the moral status of persons and our own responsibilities to

persons is not based on the objective ascription of criteria of personhood, but on the intersubjective caring rapport that we establish between ourselves and others. The moral sources of the norms relating to persons are based upon intersubjectivity instead of upon an essentialist metaphysics of persons. I explore the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas in order to explicate this suggestion. I argue that a virtue approach enriched by the conception of ethics developed by Levinas gives us a deeper understanding of our ethical responses to vulnerable persons in the health care setting than essentialist moral theory.

Chapter three engages with a number of theoretical debates. It addresses the deep division that has emerged in recent years between a caring perspective and a justice perspective in ethics. Given that health care is a caring profession, there is a strong tendency in its ethical literature, especially that of nursing, to favor the caring perspective. At the same time there is also an insistence that the norms of morality based on universal and objective imperatives should be respected. Most bioethicists base their arguments on the second position. However, as I have indicated above, such a focus on principles leaves the heart out of ethics. Accordingly, I discuss two recent attempts to bridge the gap between these two approaches: one by Onora O'Neill and the other by Paul Ricoeur. I favor the second, in that he posits a fundamental ethical aim which mature human beings implicitly pursue: namely, that of living well with and for others in just societies. Ricoeur argues that this aim motivates the justice perspective with its stress on duty and obligation and thereby expresses our fundamental caring for ourselves, for others, and for social justice. In this way the moral sources of health care ethics extend to the very basic ethical comportment attributable to us as human beings. Accordingly, it can be argued that health care ethics is a specific form of a general concern that all mature persons have, and which takes ethical form in the context of both individual decisions and public policy debates.

Such decisions and such debates frequently concern matters of life and death. Accordingly, chapter four begins to explore the idea that "life is sacred." Instead of understanding this idea merely as a practical injunction not to kill, it explores it as a metaphysical claim that is traditionally held to be the basis for that injunction. So, this chapter deals with life as a biological phenomenon and approaches it with the philosophical questions, "What is it?" and, "Does it have intrinsic value?" It explores scientific conceptions of life as well as those arising from more traditional metaphysical views. It endorses a non-reductionist, non-mechanistic, materialist view of life based on scientific systems-theoretic models. I argue against the views of "process" philosophers inspired by Alfred North Whitehead, who suggest that for life to have emerged, primordial matter must have been alive in some incipient sense. In contrast, I endorse the view that because of the centrality of chance and of the laws of physics, life can have emerged from non-living matter without any external or metaphysical interventions. In questioning the "continuity view of nature" of the process philosophers I am able to show that life is indeed special in the order of reality even though it is a thoroughly naturalistic phenomenon. Life is truly wondrous and also vulnerable. It is because of this that it both merits and motivates respect and a virtuous attitude of care toward it.

The fifth chapter explores the question of how the recognition that life is precious should affect the motivational stances of a virtuous person. It seeks to explore the concept of life as a moral source instead of as an object of moral duty by seeking to understand the qualitative nature of life as apprehended phenomenologically by living creatures such as ourselves. I ask whether this

quality has an ethical dimension. I begin by exploring the conception of life as "appropriation" put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche and also found in Alfred North Whitehead. I offer a critique of Nietzsche's overly individualistic conception of life as "will-to-power," and in Whitehead's philosophy I find conceptions of life that stress experience, freedom, and transcendence. I interpret these conceptions as bespeaking an element of "subjectivity" in self-conscious living things. I then explore the philosophy of Albert Schweitzer in order to argue that respect for life and an ethical stance toward living nature arise from a recognition of this subjectivity inherent in living things and from a determination to be true to our deepest intuitions as to what that recognition elicits in ourselves. Exploring these deepest intuitions, I provide a theoretical basis for Schweitzer's principle of respect for life by arguing that we owe living nature a debt of respect because we have ourselves emerged as living and self-conscious creatures from that nature. How this quite general principle applies to more specific living things, including plants, animals and other human beings, is a matter that I do not explore thoroughly, though I do offer some comparisons with the ideas of Peter Singer. But I do suggest that the stringency of our obligations rises in proportion to the degree of possibility of some kind of intersubjective rapport with the putative objects of our moral concern.

I explore the practical implications of conceiving subjectivity as a moral source in chapter six. Whereas a great deal of bioethical theorizing turns on the notion of "person" and draws from the criteria of personhood a variety of moral obligations, I suggest in this chapter that it is the concept of subjectivity which is pointed to in such theorizing. But this concept does not operate as an objective standard against which ethical action is to be measured. Instead, it operates as a moral source for the moral motivations that lead to ethical action. Subjectivity takes the dual form of a self-project and a caring-about-others. Accordingly, we are led, in pursuit of our self-esteem, to genuinely care for others. Indeed, our very existence as subjectivity bespeaks our membership of a community of others in which ethical stances become mutual and reciprocal. It is in such a community context that the moral standing of other persons is grounded. Intersubjectivity is also the basis of a narrative conception of our living in which the ethical value of what I do is a function of the phase in my life in which I do it and of the other persons in relation to whom I do it.

Insofar as this book is about bioethics, I cannot avoid spelling out some practical implications of my views. While it would be inconsistent with my focus on particular situations in favor of broad principles to spell out guidelines, issue permissions, or impose obligations, I do need to illustrate how my theoretical position alters the way in which we might think about ethically complex situations of the kind that are met in health care and in related policy discussions. Accordingly, chapter six includes a brief survey of frequently discussed beginning-of-life issues and indicates how my view that it is the acceptance of the community that grounds the ethical standing of newly living human beings might lead to virtuous action. My view also implies that there are limits to the scope of public policy decisions on such issues in liberal pluralist societies.

Chapter seven turns to the end of life. It seeks to develop a philosophical understanding of what death is which respects the intuitions of health care workers who are hesitant about taking organs from breathing bodies that have been declared dead. It does so by arguing that the concept of death is univocal across all biological cases. It takes the death of a mosquito as a paradigm case of what death is and suggests that it is the transition from being an intentional

system to being a decomposing corpse. However, this definition does little to solve a number of bioethical problems that turn on the definition of death: problems such as when organs may be harvested from a patient in a permanent vegetative state. I discuss authors who suggest that in such circumstances it may be said that the person has died but that the body lives on. I contest such suggestions because to say that a person has died while the body lives on is to distinguish personhood from corporality in a way that reinstates the old body/soul and body/mind dualisms in a new form. What is physically present is a human organism. For fully and even most partially functioning human organisms, both bodily and mental or intentional predicates can be applied. This is because the organism is a person. But if the organism has reached a point of damage where the only predicates that we could apply to it are those that relate to living organisms without any attribution of distinctively intersubjective, mental, conscious, or autonomous functions or other intentional predicates, then the patient has ceased to exist as a person.

To say that the person has died while the organism lives on is to misunderstand the notion of "person." It is to speak dualistically as if the person were an entity that could die at a different time from that of the death of the organism. If we think of "person" as a non-dualistic concept, then the cessation of those functions that allow the attribution of mental or intentional predicates while physical and organic predicates which bespeak life could still be attributed would imply the death of the person as a whole. The organism may continue to function in some respects (just as the hair and nails of a dead person may continue to grow) but there has been the cessation of the integration which constituted it as the body of a person. The organism may continue to function as a reduced form of human body, but not as a person.

Can it then be correctly said that the person has died and that the body has become a corpse, albeit one that breathes? Perhaps it would be better to say that the person is dying or that the patient has ceased to exist as a person even though it is still alive. Either way, the philosophically correct formulation is not one that would help us solve the bioethical problems. That problem is not one of definition of terms: whether of "death" or of "person." To solve *that* problem a practical decision has to be made. As for our non-technical understanding of death, I suggest that it implies that the organism has ceased to operate as an intentional system. In the case of mature human beings, this also implies that they cease to exist in the mode of subjectivity. But this is a mystery to be respected, instead of a criterion to be used for making ethical decisions.

Chapter eight takes its cue from some arguments of Daniel Callahan that suggest that health professionals should not be so desperate in seeking to stave off death or engage in "technological brinkmanship" in trying to do so. There should be room for a peaceful death as a proper goal for health care. This chapter explores the bases of such an acceptance and suggests some conceptual means whereby such an attitude to death might be understood. It does so by reviewing a number of views of philosophers from antiquity to the present grouped under three headings: those who advocate an attitude of indifference, those who reject death and rail against it, and those who suggest that death should be accepted and even welcomed. The chapter briefly discusses the views of Epicurus, Albert Camus, Socrates, Christianity, Thomas Nagel, Ernest Becker, Emmanuel Levinas, and Martin Heidegger under these headings. Is death always an evil? Is it always an affront to human dignity? Can it be part of a coherent life narrative? Can it be seen as part of a benevolent scheme of things? Can it even be seen as

something desirable in itself? The chapter argues that the dignity of death arises from the way a death might be a lesson in life for others. The role of the health professional is to do all that is reasonable to prolong life. But when all that can reasonably be done has been done, it is to secure such a dignified death. An understanding of the values that constitute death as a moral source of ethical action is essential for that role.

One

SUBJECTIVITY

> Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts upon me, but, on the contrary, because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world. We are *true* through and through, and have with us, by the mere fact of belonging to the world, and not merely being in the world in the way that things are, all that we need to transcend ourselves.
>
> Maurice Merleau-Ponty[1]

Ethics, whether theoretical or applied, begins with a conception of humanity. It may be that such a conception is implicit in the norms that are enunciated or in the human excellences that are admired, or it may be that they are spelt out explicitly, but in all cases, the reasons that moral norms are adhered to or that ethical decisions are made will have a philosophical anthropology as their horizon. This is especially true for bioethics in which the problems range from the manipulation of the biological design of human life itself to life-and-death decisions that affect the most vulnerable human beings in our communities. It is true also for health care ethics conceived more broadly in that this practice embraces a deep and implicit conception of finite, vulnerable, and mortal human reality and the ills to which it is subject. In this chapter, I will introduce concepts that we will need later, along with methodological strategies that will be used throughout the book. These concepts are minimal but necessary constituents of any philosophical anthropology that seeks to ground ethical thinking in health care.

1. Anti-essentialism

Recent sociological analyses of morality in contemporary society call into question the traditional project of moral theory to ground norms in metaphysical theories.[2] In the past our moral convictions were justified with reference to eternal destiny, the will of the gods or of God, our human nature, pure reason, or a universally valid pursuit of happiness. Postmodernism would see such approaches as partaking of one or another "grand narrative" which contemporary skepticism and the break-up of a single dominant culture has called into question. From the postmodern perspective agents have their moral convictions shaped by society and upbringing, instead of formed rationally and autonomously on the basis of theological or philosophical beliefs. But, given the various and often conflicting formative influences to which individuals are subject in contemporary society, their formation as moral agents is various and fractured. What, then, can moral theory do? Can it seek a unitary set of moral imperatives on the basis of the old certainties? There is no doubt that current philosophical literature displays many such attempts. However, this book takes a different perspective: one that I call "anti-essentialism." While this position is consistent with postmodernism, it

is actually older and it does not need the complex conceptual apparatus of postmodernist writing to elucidate it. In order to illustrate what anti-essentialism amounts to, let us consider a concept that is central to the concerns of bioethics and health care ethics: namely, the concept of "life."

We often speak of "life" as if this noun designated something definite and identifiable. But the noun "life" refers to an abstraction. There is no object in the world that answers to the nominative description "life." The concrete object that would be in question in any particular case of "life" is a living organism. The science of biology, even as it describes itself as studying "life," is actually studying living organisms and seeking to explain what it is that allows them to live. It describes those processes and features that allow a particular object to be described as alive or as living while it formulates theories that are articulated using such abstract nouns as "life." But philosophy needs to stay close to the actual reality of things and to our experience of them. Accordingly, the methodological suggestion that I would want to make is that we endeavor to think less in terms of abstract nouns like "life" and more in terms of verbs and adjectives that describe processes which we can experience, such as "being alive" or "living."

The significance of this form of words will emerge gradually as we proceed in our inquiry. For the moment, however, we can hint at what is at issue in such a move when we reflect on the difference between saying that a virtuous person characteristically responds to "life" in a certain way and saying that a virtuous person responds to a living organism in a certain way. The latter formulation envisages a particular situation in which the virtuous person is engaged in an encounter with a living being which calls for a specific and concrete ethical response. A dead possum may have fallen out of a tree with a live offspring in its pouch. I find it in my suburban driveway and decide to take the living baby possum to a veterinarian in the hope of saving its life. This would be a virtuous response to the real need of a living creature. Yet I do not think it quite captures the nature of this response to describe it as a response to "life." The word "life" sounds too abstract and rationalistic to capture the emotional content and immediacy of my response. I am responding to this particular living creature. To speak of someone as responding to "life," or as having a commitment to "life," or as revering "life," is to describe their general intellectual commitment instead of to describe their particular ethical response. The word "life" is more at home in a discourse of ethical principles than it is in descriptions of particular ethical actions. In such contexts we speak of a "right to life," or the "value of life," or the "sacredness of life." We speak of the state's responsibility to protect the life, liberty, and property of its citizens. We speak of a moral duty not to take human life and, perhaps, the life of other animals. And we speak of conditions under which a person might forfeit his or her right to life. This is all discourse that relates to moral principles. It refers to generalities and abstractions. It is an important discourse because we need general and abstract concepts in order to articulate and debate the moral principles we hold dear. But it does not capture the existential reality of a concrete encounter with a living organism which elicits an ethical response in a virtuous agent. Just as moral principles are a kind of shorthand for the collective ethical wisdom of a given cultural and historical tradition, so the concept of "life" which often appears in the articulation of moral principles is a kind of shorthand for the phenomena of living organisms which appeal to our ethical intuitions in their particularity.

Given that my focus in this book is on the particular and immediate ethical encounter between health care workers and their patients, I prefer to avoid abstract concepts and to use terms that focus upon the immediate and concrete. Accordingly, I will refer henceforth to *living* things and to an organism's *being alive*. In this way, it is a process or function of an entity—its being alive—which we will be trying to understand. And it will be the ethical importance of this process that we will explore in the following chapters.

A further reason for this methodological preference is that, as we will see in the fourth chapter, it is not always possible to distinguish sharply between things that are alive and things that are not. As biologists explore self-replicating and homeostatic molecules, they will be dealing with entities that enjoy some of the features of being alive but not others. Is a complex crystal that preserves its own structure and passes it on to atoms that come into contact with it alive? We mostly say that it is not. Is a cell in a living body that performs its functions in the whole organism but could not survive on its own alive? We mostly say that it is. What this shows is that there is no clear and definite dividing line between being alive and not being alive even if there are paradigm cases of each. Again, scientists often speak of a time when "life" emerged on the earth. And theologians often speak of a time when God created "life." But this is misleading. While there was a time when there clearly was no life on earth and a later time when there clearly was, there is no one moment in time when "life" came into being. It was a gradual process. We can express this in more technical terms by saying that there is no *essence* called "life." Life is not some definite phenomenon that is essentially and definitively distinct from non-living phenomena. It is not true that there is one *type* of thing in nature which is inert and another *type* of thing which is living. There is continuity in nature and the qualities of living things are emergent properties based upon the physical structures of matter.

The philosophical doctrine that my strategy of using verbs instead of nouns is seeking to circumvent is called "essentialism." Essentialism comprises three key ideas. First, there is the idea that nature is divided into discrete kinds of things that are completely and definitively distinct from each other. For example, there is the view that living things are fundamentally different from non-living things. Or there is the view that human beings are fundamentally different from other animals. Second, there is the idea that these kinds and the differences between them are eternal and necessary. Traditionally expressed in the doctrine that God created "natural kinds," this idea actually goes back further to Plato, who postulated eternal and changeless "Forms," which were the archetypes that worldly things copied and instantiated. It follows from this theory that, if a particular thing is an instance of an eternal kind or essence, then it must necessarily and for always have certain properties.

Third, as an implication of this theory of Forms, essentialism suggests that each kind of thing has a non-natural or metaphysical "essence" which gives that kind of thing its distinctness. By calling this essence "non-natural" I mean that it is not to be accounted for on the basis of experience or by the laws of natural science. Experience and empirical inquiry will disclose the "accidents" (that is, the changeable appearances) of a thing, but its essence is to be grasped by understanding and theory. Vitalism was an example of such a view when it suggested that the essential difference between living and non-living things could be explained by alluding to a "principle of life" or "vital force." Another example would be the view that grounds the essential difference between human beings

and animals in the theory that only human beings have a rational soul. The notion of a "rational soul" in this account is a non-natural or metaphysical notion that is not accepted within science and is not the object of actual empirical experience. (Anyone who does claim to have experienced a "soul" directly will usually be giving a poetic, theoretical, or metaphysical interpretation to a rich and moving experience the object of which is otherwise difficult to articulate.) The more contemporary view would be that any differences between kinds of things that occur in nature are real only if they can be accounted for in terms of material and causal processes that fall within the purview of natural science or everyday observation. To think in this way is to think in "naturalistic" terms. In contrast, to account for such differences in non-scientific or metaphysical terms is to commit the fallacy of essentialism. For example, the theory that God created the world and all the things in it in accordance with a definite and unchanging typology and that He made definite species and made all the fixed distinctions between things implied that every type of thing was essentially and eternally different from every other type of thing. Today this view is under question in many fields of science and scholarship but especially in biology. So to speak of eternal and discrete *types* or *kinds of reality* or *essences* in nature is misleading.

Another form that essentialism continues to take in contemporary debates is to suggest that certain entities or classes of entities have a definite "nature." In this way it is said that some things have an "animal nature" or that persons have a "human nature." Many implications, including ethical ones, are drawn from such claims. To say of an organism that it has an "animal nature" is often to say that it is immoral or amoral,[3] while to say that it has a "human nature" is often to imply that it must absolutely not be killed. While I do not want to discuss these ethical claims until later, I do note that they are based upon an essentialist way of thinking which is not tenable within a contemporary scientific worldview.

Another example of essentialism is sexism. To give you a classical example, here is Aristotle: "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and one rules and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind."[4] I am sure I do not need to offer an exposition or a critique of these sentiments. I offer them only as a striking example of essentialism. Certain things are said to have ineliminable features by virtue of their natures and, as a result, they have a lower or higher status on an imagined hierarchy of excellence. Aristotle grounded this view on several biological theories about women and men and their sexual functions which we now know were empirically incorrect, but the key point is that he attributed a different metaphysical "nature" to each gender which made one essentially inferior to the other.

There are strong reasons for rejecting essentialism. The first of these is Darwinism. It is a commonplace of modern biology that human beings evolved from other life forms. Indeed, it is a commonplace that all the life forms that inhabit the earth today evolved over aeons of time from earlier life forms and from non-organic matter. I do not want to recount the scientific evidence for this consensus here. It is worth noticing, however, that those who for religious or other reasons reject this scientific consensus do so because they want to maintain the package of dogmatic views which links essentialism, *a priori* moral principles, and metaphysical speculations about realities beyond this world. This way lies doctrinal and moral dogmatism. The most obvious implication of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is that natural kinds—as exemplified in biological species—are not eternal or changeless realities. Species change all the time. The human species has changed over the large spans of time

that are required for natural selection to do its evolutionary work. It immediately follows that there is no human essence and no changeless metaphysically based typology that marks off human nature from the rest of the animal kingdom or from the world of things more generally. We are natural beings.

It is striking to note the unwillingness of even many progressive thinkers to fully accept the implications of Darwinism. Simply put, these implications are that human beings are not special. As Stephen Jay Gould puts it, commenting on the philosophical anthropology of many commentators:

> Again and again, we encounter sweeping visions, encompassing everything from the primordial dust cloud to the chimpanzee. Then, at the very threshold of a comprehensive system, traditional pride and prejudice intervene to secure an exceptional status for one peculiar primate . . . The specific form of the argument varies, but its intent is ever the same—to separate man from nature.[5]

The point that the Darwinian theory of evolution drives home insistently is that human beings are not distinct in any essential way from nature and from other animals. Of course there are differences. Just as fish can swim better than we can, and birds can fly without machine assistance, and just as gazelles can run faster than wombats, so we can think and plan better than other animals. We are a different species with different abilities from other species. But do we have a different essence? Can our natures never change? Do the laws of nature apply to us any differently from the way in which they apply to other animals? Do we possess metaphysical principles or non-natural powers that other animals do not possess? Once we grasp the full implications of Darwinism we are forced to answer "no" to these questions.

Indeed, there is recent archaeological and paleontological data that suggest that human beings are not even unique in respect of those abilities that we have traditionally taken to mark us off as special. It has been discovered that *Homo sapiens* lived for many thousands of years alongside another hominid species in the lands around the Mediterranean about one hundred thousand years ago. This species was Neanderthal man. It appears that about 800,000 years earlier, a hominid species called *Homo heidelburgensis* traveled north out of Africa and evolved further in what is now Europe to become Neanderthal man. Neanderthals successfully colonized Europe for about 150,000 years, including the ice age. They had a skeletal shape and cranium much more akin to apes (albeit with large brain cavities), but cave findings have shown that they manufactured and used stone tools, that they lived socially and buried their dead with gifts and ceremonies, that they had the kind of bone structures needed for speech, and that they used symbols to communicate with each other.

Back in Africa, in the meantime, the evolutionary processes were continuing to the point where *Homo sapiens* emerged. Their skulls were shaped quite differently, with a large brain cavity and a chin and, genetically, they were more distinct from Neanderthals than modern humans are from chimpanzees. These hominids also traveled to Europe, developed tools (mostly superior to those of the Neanderthals), a social life, and rudimentary language. These were our forebears. While a distinct species from the Neanderthals, they coexisted with them for many thousands of years and are thought to have engaged in various interactions with them. *Homo sapiens*, however, were more adventurous and creative, and by virtue of greater mobility enjoyed greater mental stimulation. As

a result, their intelligence evolved more rapidly than their Neanderthal cousins and, after about fifteen thousand years, the latter became extinct. Their most recent remains are found in caves on the Spanish coast. One implication of these discoveries is that, despite their considerable genetic differences, the capabilities and forms of living of these two species of hominids were, for a considerable time, remarkably similar.

If there is a unique human essence, which of these two species possessed it? Would we say that, just because the vagaries of natural selection favored *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals were mere animals while *Homo sapiens* were essentially (or potentially) human? This is one of those unanswerable questions generated by unhelpful theory. I suggest it is best to eschew all talk of human essences or human natures. By virtue of the chance process of evolution our forebears were *Homo sapiens*. But intelligent life on this planet could just as well have evolved from the quite different species of Neanderthal man. Being human is not the key property. Instead it is the ability to use tools, communicate with language, and form social bonds of various kinds that might be said to mark us off from other animals and to give us a special moral standing. But then, other species, including Neanderthals in the past and certain higher primates in the present, display such abilities to varying degrees also.[6]

In insisting that human beings are just one species of animals among others, Darwinism denies that there is a distinct human essence. This forces us to revise those theories that seek to explicate such a human essence in terms of the soul, the mind, free will, the faculty of reason, and so forth. We cannot have metaphysical properties which are not grounded in our existence as living, material entities, and animals. The wide-ranging philosophical implications of this challenge have not yet been fully worked out. Philosophers are still developing theories about the higher functions that human beings evince without appealing to the metaphysical human essences or entities that used to be postulated as the unique possession and dignity of human beings.

There are contemporary ideological and ethical reasons for avoiding essentialism in relation to human beings as well. Holding the view that human beings are essentially different from other animals supports the view that human beings have a unique moral standing that other animals do not have. In this way it used to be argued that, because animals do not have souls or minds, it was morally legitimate to use animals in any way that we pleased. Another version of such an argument was the one that said that God created animals and gave them into human hands to be of use to humans. Add to this the further argument that animals do not feel pain (because they are essentially different from humans in that they do not have minds), and all kinds of cruel practices of animal usage and animal husbandry are legitimated. Peter Singer has amply described these theories and labeled them as instances of "speciesism."[7] This is the view that an animal has a different (and lower) moral status from a human being simply because it belongs to a different species.

The parallel of this way of thinking is racism: the view that a black person, for example, has a different moral status from a white person simply because she belongs to a different race. The basis of this view is also a form of essentialism: in this case, the view that there is a difference in essence between black people and white people. The scientific challenge to racism is data that show that the differences are genetically very slight. The moral challenge is to argue that they are irrelevant. During periods of slavery, colonialism, or imperialism, racism often took the form of factual claims that black or indigenous people were

inherently and necessarily less intelligent, or more prone to violence, or were in need of strong discipline, or were "primitive" and in need of civilization. These theories are all instances of essentialism: the view that there is an essential, unchangeable, and unbridgeable difference between "us" and "them."

Essentialism also lies at the heart of many sexist practices and forms of life, as we saw in the quotation from Aristotle. It is easier to justify preventing women from taking a full part in public and commercial life if it is asserted that it is in the essential nature of women to be housekeepers and mothers. Again, there is no denying obvious biological differences. However, it is when these differences are turned into immutable essences that they can be given moral significance and be used to justify practices that are oppressive and unjust. Essentialism also plays a part in making sexuality oppressive. If it is argued that it is of the essence of the male and female distinction that it be the basis of heterosexual procreative practices, then homosexuality can be proscribed as "unnatural." Again, it is the fixing of empirical differences into the categories of metaphysical essences that does the work of grounding oppressive *a priori* principles.

Nationalism and certain views about class provide further examples of essentialism. Economic and social thinkers (sometimes inspired by Darwin, ironically) used to argue that members of the working classes (sometimes referred to as the "lower orders") were inherently stupid and dissolute and so it was doing them a favor to keep them working in the factories and pits for long hours because only in that way would they ever be productive. Never mind that talent is distributed arbitrarily across all socio-economic classes and needs only the opportunity to develop in individuals no matter what class they belong to. And as for nationalism, leaving aside tasteless jokes about such stereotypes as stupid Irishmen and greedy Scotsmen, the view that some peoples are inherently of less worth than others because of the nation that they were born in is not the least important of the several causes of war. Prejudice of all kinds usually takes essentialist form. Indeed, it will often be found that the standards of human excellence propounded by essentialist theory are the standards that are native to the propounder of the theory. This is why essentialism is usually oppressive to anyone who is "other" in relation to the essentialist. To an essentialist, difference is almost always pejorative.

None of this is to deny that it serves our everyday purposes in everyday life to make distinctions between things according to definite classifications. We could hardly get on in life if we could not distinguish cars from trees or people from houses. But we do not need to posit eternal essences to underwrite such distinctions. They are simply empirical classifications. It is not necessary to engage in metaphysics and to insist that things are essentially distinct from one another because they have essences that are forever different from the essences of other kinds of things.

Of course the use of verbs and adjectives instead of nouns does not necessarily overcome essentialism. We could still insist that something that is living is essentially different from something that is not. However, the use of verbs and adjectives does lessen the temptation to think in essentialist terms. Nouns like "life" and "human nature" tempt us into thinking that there is some kind of metaphysical essence called "life" or "human nature" which certain entities "have" while others do not. In contrast, the use of verbs like "being alive" or adjectives like "living" remind us that it is natural organisms and their constituents we are talking about and that organisms are concrete, natural entities in the world. If we add to this the contemporary insights of science, which

suggest that there are continuities in nature and that organisms are not essentially and eternally different from other entities, then we will be less inclined to think in essentialist terms. I argue for such continuity in the following sections and again in later chapters.

The methodological strategy of using verbs or derivatives from verbs instead of nouns whenever possible serves to highlight the point that living things are engaged in activities. For living things to *be* is to be *doing* something, even if it is only breathing. Activities typically have goals or purposes, so the temptation inherent in my strategy will be to assume that all living things pursue purposes in their activity of living. The problem with this assumption is that it can reintroduce a teleological form of thinking that modern science rejects. Accordingly, we will have to define carefully how the goals inherent in the activity of living should be described.

2. Intentional Systems

Let us consider the typical behavior of animals that are relatively close to us in the "Great Chain of Being"—that medieval hierarchical conception of nature that puts man above the animals and the animals above plant life and inanimate beings.[8] Let us bring to mind a pet dog. If we have a pet dog we will know that the dog will spend its time playing around the house, being taken for walks, eating, and sleeping. In all of these activities except sleeping it will display purposeful activity and relatively intelligent responses to its environment. It looks for an old slipper and plays with it by chewing it, playing keepers-off with its owner, and hiding it behind the sofa. It wags its tail when its owner comes home, looks expectantly around the kitchen and may even beg for food when it is dinner time, looks for a lap to rest its head on after dinner, and so on. If we were describing these behaviors we would be inclined to use words like "looking for," "playing," "hiding," "wagging," "begging," "wanting," and so on. These are words that designate mental states and ascribe purposes to the dog. It is as if the dog is thinking, wanting, and experiencing emotions. Of course, we cannot observe the dog's thinking or be aware of the emotions it might be experiencing. All that we can observe is the behavior. But the behavior is like that of a creature that thinks, has desires, and feels emotions.

There is a methodological limit on our understanding of a dog. We are forever locked out of its inner life because it cannot speak to us. But we can certainly observe the outward expressions of this inner life. Nor can we directly apprehend its thoughts, desires, and emotions. This has led some philosophers to say that there are no such thoughts, desires, and emotions. There is just a complex set of physical processes in the brain which link certain kinds of stimuli with certain kinds of outward behavior, but there need not be any consciousness or mind. This was Descartes' position in relation to animals. Other philosophers have argued that, whatever is the case about the inner life of dogs and other animals, we do not need to speculate about what their thoughts, desires, and emotions are like since we can understand them fully and adequately when we can make causal correlations between sensory or instinctual inputs and behavioral outputs. Behaviorist psychologists adopt this position even in relation to human beings. Other philosophers, such as Thomas Nagel,[9] have argued that animals may indeed have thoughts, desires, and emotions, and that these would be important in the qualitative understanding of what it would be like to be an

animal but, since animals do not have languages of the kind that can be translated into human languages, we can never know what it is like to experience the world in the way that an animal does. Indeed, this problem is not peculiar to animals. Insofar as our own subjective experiences cannot be fully described from an objective point of view, I cannot experience the world in the way that you do either.

A further position, articulated by Daniel Dennett,[10] is that, whatever is true about the inner life of animals, there is a qualitative difference between a causal system such as a typical machine and a causal system which displays purposive behavior. While machines such as car engines simply do what they are designed to do so long as they are provided with fuel and maintenance, they do not display purposes of their own. They simply follow the instructions implicit in their designs and inputs. Animals, on the other hand, even while they are no more than complex causal systems, do display purpose in their behavior. They even display creativity and find new ways of achieving what they want. My pet dog has learned to use her mouth to rearrange her blanket so as to make herself more comfortable. This is a new behavior, which she has created for herself in pursuit of her purpose of being more comfortable. So the dog is not just following the instinctual program that has been "wired in" to its brain. It is acting strategically and adaptively. In this way it is evincing kinds of behavior qualitatively different from the mere causal responses of the car engine. Dennett calls things that can do this, "intentional systems." As Dennett puts it:

> An Intentional system is a system whose behavior can be (at least sometimes) explained and predicted by relying on ascriptions to the system of *beliefs* and *desires* (and other Intentionally characterized features—what I will call *Intentions* here, meaning to include hopes, fears, intentions, perceptions, expectations, etc.).[11]

They are systems that act in a way that is apparently intentional in the double sense of purposive and responsive to its environment. It may transpire that complex computers will one day evince such behaviors and it may also be the case that plants already do. The issue of what sorts of things can be described as intentional systems can be left open. The crucial point is to understand what an intentional system is. It is an object that behaves purposively and more or less intelligently in response to its environment, and which can therefore be described as if it were "aware" of its environment in some way, and to which we are therefore justified in ascribing some inner states. Dennett is very non-committal on just what these inner states are, but he would certainly deny that they bespeak an inner entity such as a "mind" or "soul."

The notion of an intentional system is an important one for understanding living things. It avoids the issue of whether there is consciousness in an intentional system or whether an intentional system needs to have or experience states of mind such as thoughts, desires, and emotions. It simply suggests that, on the basis of observation alone, a distinction can be made between a system whose output can be understood as a more or less simple causal consequence of its inputs and its design, and a system that has the flexibility to behave purposively and appropriately. The latter system can be described, without metaphor, using such terms as "looking for," "playing," "hiding," "(purposively) wagging," "begging," "wanting," and so on. A dog is an intentional system. A human being is an intentional system. And a mosquito is an intentional system. We might think of a

flower that opens its petals to the sun and follows the sun as it moves across its trajectory in the sky as a borderline case. Is it a "blind" system whose behavior is simply caused by the sun and by its own constitution to move in that way, or does it "seek" the sun's light and warmth? Perhaps not much hangs on deciding this issue in the case of flowers. But a lot hangs on whether we would describe higher animals and even human beings in one way instead of the other. It seems clear that a great many animals and certainly human beings should be described as intentional systems in Dennett's sense. Given my analysis of what it is to be alive, which I elaborate in chapter four, I would be inclined to assert that all living things are intentional systems, and this would include the flowers. The reason that this is not an anomaly in the case of plants is that calling something an intentional system does not imply any claims about its having an inner life of thoughts, desires, or emotions of which the system can be conscious. It merely suggests that we can usefully describe what it does by saying that it acts *as if* it had such inner states. Plants probably do not have an inner life at all, but they do appear to evince purposive behavior instead of merely caused physical reactions.

The notion of an "intentional system" is a purely descriptive notion. It is a way of classifying objects in the world. Some objects are simple entities like rocks, some are causal systems like the weather, and some are intentional systems like living things.

But, despite Dennett's disclaimers, calling something an intentional system does suggest that it has an inner life of some kind. An ashtray just sits there and is what it is. A machine does work, but in accordance with the causal pattern that has been designed into it. The mode of being of these objects is simply that of "things" or "tools." An animal, on the other hand, seeks food and stimulation. Does this description, which marks the animal off as an intentional system, also point to an inner realm of experience that a purely observational and classificatory term like "intentional system" does not capture? Is there some way of capturing the inner or experiential character of being an intentional system? What mode of being does an intentional system enjoy? What mode of being does the word "seek" point to? A mere thing or tool cannot seek. Despite the methodological abstention from ascribing inner or conscious states to intentional systems which science insists upon, can we suggest that what it is like for something to be an intentional system is qualitatively different from what it is like to be a causal system or a thing? Indeed, there is nothing that it is "like" to be a causal system or a thing. There is no phenomenological quality that attaches to the mode of being of a thing. It is blind and inert. But perhaps there is something that it is like to be an intentional system. There seems to be an inner quality to it. Even if not all intentional systems are conscious so that they could know of this quality, an intentional system enjoys a mode of being which is qualitatively different from the mode of being of a thing.

Support for the notion of an inner life in animals is indirectly given by Peter Singer.[12] Singer argues that most higher animals are sentient and can feel pain and that pain in any sentient creature is something that a moral person should want to prevent or reduce. Moral persons seek to reduce the amount of unhappiness and suffering in the world and to increase the amount of happiness and pleasure. Because they can undergo such states, animals should be included in the range of concerns of moral persons. It would be an inappropriate restriction of moral concern to confine it to human beings only. If there is a moral imperative to reduce pain, then anything that can suffer pain falls within the scope of that moral imperative. And this includes those many animals that have

the kinds of nervous systems and brains that make them sensitive to pain. While I do not want to comment further on this ethical position here, I do want to highlight the way in which the notion of sentience presupposes that relevant animals have an inner life of experience. Although we cannot know of this phenomenon directly, Singer thinks we are justified in attributing sentience to any animal whose nervous system is sufficiently complex to sustain the relevant kind of functioning. This kind of sentient experience does not need to involve self-awareness in order to elicit our moral response, so Singer is not suggesting that animals are conscious in the way that we are. An animal can suffer without being aware that it is suffering.

At some indefinite point as we move up the great chain of being, the nervous systems of animals become sufficiently complex to sustain sentience. Sentience is an emergent property of intentional systems. What is it like to be an intentional system? We will never know what the qualitative mode of being of an intentional system is by simply observing or classifying living organisms in the world or by ascribing qualities of sentience or self-consciousness to some and not others. In order to understand the mode of being of intentional systems we must first explore whatever inner experience of an intentional system we can have access to. And the most immediately accessible inner life of an intentional system is our own. We must reflect on our own inner lives in order to understand the mode of being of intentional systems. We must do phenomenology.

3. Subjectivity

As self-conscious beings, we can reflect on our own experience and describe it in language. So far as we know, no other living creatures can do this (although some apes appear to be able to use signs and gestures to refer to themselves in basic forms of communication). Hence, it is from the point of view of our own awareness of ourselves and of the striving, struggling, and seeking which characterize our own form of intentional existence that we gain an understanding of what the inner and experienced quality of being an intentional system might be. From our own reflective point of view these are the characteristics of our "subjectivity." The word "subjectivity," along with the cognate terms "subject" and "subjective," are used in a variety of ways in modern English. What is central to most of these usages is that reference is being made to the inner life of a person. To take a "subjective" view on an issue is to see it in the light of one's own concerns and interests. In the discourse of epistemology or theory of knowledge, a "subject" is the owner of experience while the "object" is that which the experience is directed upon or what it is an experience of. There is a considerable philosophical literature on "subjectivity" defined as the life of a conscious being understood on the basis of the reflection of that conscious being on its own experiences and modes of living.[13]

Central to all these discussions is the idea that subjectivity involves self-awareness. We are conscious, not just of the world, but also of our being conscious of the world. We are aware of being aware. Another way of putting this is to say that any experience or thought has an owner. My experience is *mine* and I cannot have your experience. But it is not just my present experience that is mine in this strong sense. My past experiences and my future hopes are mine also and they structure my experience of the present. My awareness of my experiences does not just have an epistemological significance in that it gives me

access to my own inner life. It also has an existential importance in that it gives my experiences a significance for my life. For beings that are self-aware in the way that we are, awareness discloses their living as a project instead of just as a series of events of which they are subjectively aware. This thought provides an important link between the concept of subjectivity and the concept of an intentional system. In order to understand subjectivity fully we need to build the purposive and intentional conception of living things that I have described thus far into the very notion of subjectivity itself. Accordingly (and following Heidegger), I define subjectivity as that quality of a living thing whereby it can be said that its own existence as an individual entity is a project for it. In my usage of this term, it refers both to the "concern" that living things have for their own identity and survival in life and also to the "concern" that they have for those aspects of their environments which are important for their systemic functioning. It can be clear from our own reflection that our most fundamental concern is to strive to maintain ourselves in existence.

Of course, I am not suggesting that survival is the actual and self-conscious object of our daily lives. Unless we are in extremely indigent circumstances, we tend to take our survival for granted. We get on with our everyday concerns, most of which are mundane and involve short-term goals. But we also have broader aspirations. Indeed, Aristotle has suggested that, when all is said and done, the goal that we all have as human beings is that of achieving what he calls *eudaimonia*, and which is often and clumsily translated as "happiness."[14] This is not the time to spell out what this means in detail, but it will help to explicate the complexity involved in human subjectivity to sketch Aristotle's position briefly. Aristotle describes human existence in terms of four characteristic sets of goals that human beings pursue, whether or not they are conscious of them. First, a living human being is an entity that functions as a biological entity in that it is alive. Second, it also has desires and wants. Human beings have goals, feel desire and disappointment, flee from danger and pain, feel fear when confronted with them, and so forth. These functions are not unique to human beings, since many other animals evince them also. Third, human beings also think in characteristic ways. While it may be possible that some animals think, it is obvious that human beings can plan and calculate the means for attaining their ends to a highly sophisticated degree. The achievements of modern technology bear eloquent witness to that. Fourth, human persons think about what makes their lives meaningful. They speculate about the causes of things, thereby creating theoretical science and mathematics. They contemplate what they take to be eternal realities such as the nature of God and other metaphysical entities. Human beings characteristically create cultural monuments to these speculations, such as cathedrals and art galleries. In short, human beings have a contemplative form of reason, which it seems appropriate to assume is not shared by any other form of life on this planet. For Aristotle, the happiness that all human beings tend to seek is the fulfillment of these four distinguishable functions inherent in human forms of living.

Aristotle talks of tendencies inherent in human forms of living. This is a teleological conception, in that it identifies a goal of all human striving. It is a theoretical construction centered on the notion of *eudaimonia*, which tries to capture in one word the rich range of goals that human beings entertain. What we are each individually aware of as we reflect on our own lives, however, seldom takes this theoretical form. If we tell our friends that we are seeking happiness it will sound like an empty or platitudinous formula. What we are aware of in

reflection are the specific culturally constructed goals, ambitions, and aspirations that give some purpose to our lives. And this will confirm Aristotle's fundamental insight: namely, that striving and seeking fulfillment of some kind or another is the basic quality of our inner lives and thus of our subjectivity.

Subjectivity is not something that can be observed by science. Only the behaviors or reactions that result from it can be described objectively. Subjectivity is manifest only in reflection. Subjectivity is uniquely mine. It is the perspective of the one who says "I." It is my first-person point of view upon my existence. Hence subjectivity can be disclosed only in and to those creatures who can reflect and articulate the content of their reflection. Subjectivity is the presence to itself of a conscious being, insofar as it is conscious in that mode that permits self-consciousness.

I can discern my subjectivity in reflection, but the subjectivity of any other person or creature is largely hidden from me. Only their own reflection can disclose their subjectivity and then only to themselves. Accordingly, it is difficult to attribute subjectivity to living things other than myself. And this is not just because most living things are not capable of forms of consciousness such as those that human beings enjoy: forms that include self-consciousness and so sustain subjectivity. It is also because subjectivity is not something that can be directly observed in another being at all. Subjectivity is always and only *my* mode of being. It cannot be observed as an object in the world.

But I can be aware of features of other living things that bespeak subjectivity. Jean-Paul Sartre, in a famous example, speaks of observing another human being in a park.[15] That other's behavior and demeanor suggest to Sartre that just as he, Sartre, is the center of his world and gathers the features of the park into *his* perception as *his* park from the point of view of *his* subjectivity, so the other gathers the park around him as his also. His movements suggest that he is at home in the park and is using it as his immediate environment and place of enjoyment. While Sartre has no access to the subjectivity of the other, which constitutes the park as his environment in this way, he does sense that he is not now in total possession of that environment and that he has to share it with another center of consciousness that gathers that park into itself. As a result there is a primordial struggle between the two persons in the park. Sartre's subjectivity feels itself challenged and even threatened by the presence of the other in his, Sartre's, world. It is the presence of another who would claim that world for himself. So while Sartre cannot observe the subjectivity of the other because it is the inner life of that other, he can sense the difference that that inner life is making to him. And he does not like it. The intersubjective relationship that is set up, in Sartre's conception, is one of implicit mutual struggle. On such a conception, intersubjectivity cannot fail to be a mutual attempt to overcome and possess the subjectivity of the other.

I will return later to the question of whether the quality of our intersubjective relationships need always be characterized in this non-ethical way. For the moment, I want to stay with the question of how the subjectivity of the other can be apprehended. I can gain no direct perceptual entry into the mysterious interiority of another living creature. Whatever their experience is like for them, it cannot be my experience. Does this mean that my only knowledge of other living creatures is the descriptive and classificatory knowledge that the sciences of life and of humanity have developed? I would suggest that Dennett's concept of intentionality as evinced by intentional systems, allows us to give third-person descriptions of that which, in an organism capable of self-

consciousness, would be experienced as subjectivity. Intentionality, in the sense of apparently self-generated purposive behavior, is an outward manifestation of subjectivity. All creatures that have subjective states such as being aware of their own desires and beliefs will manifest intentionality. But it does not follow that all intentional systems have subjective states. There will be many living creatures that do not have a life of subjectivity. Creatures that have no *self*-awareness may still be intentional systems. For Dennett, it is enough that they behave *as if* they have desires and beliefs, and it is to this appearance of inner states that we respond when seeing them as intentional systems. Whether or not an organism has the brain wiring or the mode of consciousness necessary for having a reflective awareness of itself, its struggle for existence and its "concern" for the fulfillment of its own being is manifest to observers as intentional activity.

Intentionality is an emergent quality. Rocks and mountains do not have it. Human beings typically do. Somewhere along the great chain of being intentionality emerged as a novelty within nature. I do not propose to venture any suggestions as to what life form first displayed it or what the simplest life form might be that can display it now. Suffice to say that it is most clearly displayed by those organisms, like ourselves, who can articulate their purposes and show how their actions conduce to them. But, according to Dennett, it is also displayed by any entity that displays purposiveness in its behavior and acts as if it had beliefs and desires. In this way, the term "intentionality" becomes attributable to living things more generally.

To scientific thinkers of a reductionist or mechanistic persuasion this usage may appear to involve an unwarranted anthropomorphism. In ordinary usage, the term "intentionality" points to the inner life of the creature to which it is being attributed. But how can we understand this inner life if we have no observational access to it? I argue (and here I depart from Dennett's usage) that intentionality is a term the understanding of which depends upon reflection on our own experience. Its paradigmatic meaning arises from our own awareness of what it is for us to be alive and conscious in the way that we are. Our experience of our own intentionality is the experience of having purposive and self-constituting relationships with our environing world. It is our self-project, our maintaining ourselves and our purposes in existence, and our seeking of *eudaimonia*, that leads us to relate to the world and to other persons in the way that we do. For us, to be alive is felt internally as a striving that is most often accompanied by a feeling of vigor and intensity.[16] While the love of life may be lost due to external catastrophes or internal depressions, it generally motivates us as an unarticulated affective horizon to our conscious lives. It is to this inner life of subjectivity that the concept of "intentionality" points. It is subjectivity that turns our environment into a meaningful world. Things mean what they do for us because of what we want from them. It is subjectivity that turns our being into a project. It is subjectivity that turns others into objects of care, fear, disinterest, and even love. The world is a field of meaningful entities, and others are objects imbued with affective qualities because of the way in which we reach out to them in the light of our own self-project. Through this experience of subjectivity we can understand what intentionality is. Although Dennett himself tends to understand intentionality in purely behaviorist terms as a word that designates purposive behavior, I would contend that we cannot understand the purposiveness displayed by others without understanding it in our own case as subjectivity. In the paradigm case of mature and fully functioning human beings, intentionality is the

outer appearance of the subjectivity that lies within. And this subjectivity cannot but be mysterious in every case but our own.

According to Dennett, intentionality is manifested by all living things. While for most of them this will not be a matter of self-conscious awareness, and hence of subjectivity, this usage does suggest that the systemic relationships between organisms—from living cells to plants and animals—and their environments are based upon a striving arising from within that organism. The organism transcends itself toward its environment so as to establish and maintain its own survival. It divides the world into the useful and the useless. It divides time into the lived and the not-yet-lived (that is, into the past and the future). It maintains its own physical integrity and seeks what it needs. Although we can attribute these qualities to organisms, in doing so we are projecting a notion that we cannot fully define operationally or purely descriptively. We are attributing a quality that we can only understand on the basis of our own experience. We are attributing an "interiority" to things that implies a going beyond the descriptive and explanatory categories of science, including that of intentionality itself. But the best Dennett can say of this interiority is that it is *as if* the organism had beliefs and desires. In this he is reminding us that we are certainly not justified in attributing full subjectivity to organisms unless there is reason to attribute a form of self-consciousness to them.

Without such a concept as that of intentionality life simply cannot be understood even scientifically. The criterion for attributing such a quality will be pragmatic. It is of use in aiding our understanding to attribute intentionality to living things. I do not believe that it aids our understanding to attribute it to inert things. I argue in chapter four that it is not necessary to attribute it to matter because it is not true that, unless we did so, we would not be able to make sense of the emergence of life. Therefore there is no need to posit a continuity between the organic and inorganic spheres based on the putative presence of intentionality in both. Moreover, in the light of quantum physics, we know that the basic structures of matter involve essentially random processes in which electrons flip by quantum leaps from one cloud-like orbit around the nucleus to another. This being a chance process, no purposefulness can be attributed to it and hence not even a primordial kind of intentionality can be discovered in it. Accordingly, it is not only pragmatically unnecessary to attribute intentionality to the basic structures of matter, but it would also be erroneous to do so. Further, the kinds of chemical bonding that create the fundamental molecules of life participate in these chance processes. As Linus Pauling discovered in 1931, the unique bonding powers of the carbon atom that are basic to life depend upon randomly resonating distributions of electrons around such atoms.[17] There is no purposefulness in the processes that lead to the emergence of life, even if life, once it has emerged, does then display such purposefulness. Only living matter displays even the most rudimentary forms of intentionality. And it is only to the degree that living creatures have consciousness like ours that this intentionality signals the presence of subjectivity. A reductionist scientific world-view that confines itself to mechanism is appropriate when describing machines. But when describing living things, we have to adopt what Dennett calls the "intentional stance." We have to see such things as intentional systems. And when such systems are conscious in the way that allows for self-consciousness and reflection, it becomes appropriate to speak of subjectivity and to use our own reflexive understanding of such subjectivity in order to understand the richness and depth of the way in which such beings exist.

To sum up the preceding pages, we should replace the traditional essentialist division of nature into inert and living matter, and the latter into conscious and non-conscious life, with a more nuanced and gradualist picture in which the division between living things and non-living things is not sharp. Life emerges from non-life, and there are many intermediate forms in which there is no clear criterion for attributing intentionality. Similarly, consciousness emerges amongst living things supported by increasing complexity in organisms without there being a clear line where we would distinguish those creatures that are conscious from those that are not. Moreover, there is no clear observational criterion for beginning to attribute subjectivity to cases as we move up the great chain of being to creatures of greater complexity that evince more sophisticated modes of behavior. This is an anti-essentialist conception of nature that, as we will see in later chapters, has considerable implications for an ethical approach to health care.

4. Intersubjectivity

There is another concept that we will need to develop in order to lay the groundwork for the chapters that follow. We noted earlier that Sartre's theory of subjectivity implied that the relations between subjectivities would always be a conflictual one. Intersubjectivity, or the relationships between living beings who experience subjectivity, would always be marked by struggle, since it is one of the functions of subjectivity to apprehend the world as its own field of activity. It would follow from this that other subjectivities, in apprehending the world as *their* fields of activity, are in conflict with one of the fundamental goals of any given subjectivity.

But there are more positive conceptions of intersubjectivity available. The famous distinction that Martin Buber draws between an I–it relationship and an I–Thou relationship articulates the difference between the way in which we take possession of things on the one hand, and encounter other subjectivities on the other. The paradigmatic case of a thing with which I have an I–it relationship is the tool that I own and use for my own purposes. The "it" is a thing; an object that I possess and can discard if I no longer need it. While I may look after it and even respect or admire it, my relationship to it is seldom ethical in nature. The paradigmatic case of an object with which I have an I–Thou relationship, for Buber, is God. Here the object of my relating is a person of the highest dignity. Leaving aside the theological paradigm that Buber is using here, we can see the import of his point by stressing the idea that the I–Thou relation is an encounter with another person. It is an encounter because the quality of the relationship is not one of possession or use of a thing, and because the object of the encounter is a subjectivity with a dignity and value inherent in itself. As Buber puts it, "Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation."[18] Whereas Sartre had suggested that an encounter with another person must always lead to intersubjective rivalry in that it is an attempt at possession of the other, Buber is urging a form of encounter in which the self acknowledges and celebrates the being of the other. The encounter between I and Thou has an inherently ethical character.

We will need to explore the nature of subjectivity and of intersubjectivity in order to see what basis can exist for such an encounter. Is it the dignity of persons, based on their autonomy, as Kant had argued? Or is it the sheer fact of

the life that is present in the other? And if the latter, then should the form of I–Thou relationships extend to all living things? It seems clear that, by using God as a paradigm, Buber is stressing the ethical importance of personhood (although he does admit the possibility of entering in an I–Thou relationship with a tree).

The ethical implications of this analysis of intersubjectivity will be fairly obvious. Those others whom we meet in the context of family, friendships, and work, along with our clients and patients, are all people whom we can encounter so as to establish genuine rapport with them. Of course, we do not always do so. Many of our contacts with others are routinized and operationalized. The other is objectivized and depersonalized in such relationships. They partake of the quality of I–it relationships. But the ideal personal and professional relationships are those marked by genuine intersubjective encounter. They are marked by a mutual recognition of subjectivity.

In order to understand in more theoretical terms the basis for the possibility of such rapport and mutual recognition, we need to change the question we have been asking. We have been asking how it is possible to apprehend subjectivity or to attribute it to living things. In this we are adopting an observational point of view. But whatever we apprehend we turn into an object. To perceive something is to insert it into our own world in some way. In another of Sartre's examples, a person is observed looking through a keyhole.[19] The person who observes the person at the keyhole immediately classifies him as a voyeur. This is an objectification, and the voyeur feels embarrassment and shame because of it. In the context of observation, the subjectivity of the other cannot but become an object. But notice what Buber says in the quotation above. He says, "whoever says You." What this points to is a different stance from the observational one. It is the stance of addressing another person. When I address another person by speaking to him or her, I cannot but be acknowledging their subjectivity since I expect them to understand and respond to what I say. So in addressing another, I am not turning them into an object. This will be especially obvious in cases where I am addressing the other in an intimate and sensitive way. When I say, "I love you" to my beloved I am certainly not turning her into an object. But it is also true in everyday functional relationships. When I say, "thank you" to the bus conductor, I am acknowledging her subjectivity and forming an I–Thou relationship. It may not be as rich as the relationship that my addressing my lover establishes, but it is a real instance of intersubjectivity nonetheless. Instead of highlighting the third-person descriptive point of view that characterizes science and Dennett's philosophy, and expanding on the first-person point of view characteristic of phenomenological reflection, Buber has highlighted the second-person stance of mutual address and acknowledgment.

It will be obvious that an ethics of health care needs a theory of intersubjectivity in order to explicate the possibility and form of interpersonal rapport that should characterize clinical encounters. I will return to this matter in future chapters also.

5. Existence

The preceding paragraphs appear to have departed from the methodological suggestion to use verbs instead of nouns that I made at the beginning of this chapter. I spoke of "subjectivity" using a noun. But there are verbs that capture what that noun designates. I have used such verbs as "being self-aware,"

"striving," "seeking," and "reflecting." But the verb that captures the full significance of subjectivity is the verb "to exist." In its nominative form, "existence," it is the term around which a whole tradition of thought has been built up. For human beings, to exist is not just to remain in being or to be biologically alive; it is to strive for that full range of fulfillments that Aristotle had pointed to. It is to assert oneself and also to form relationships with others by addressing them in their existence. And it is, according to Heidegger, to look steadfastly toward our impending deaths.[20] "Existentialism" is a philosophy that systematically explores human existence by reflecting upon human subjectivity.

The reason that I want to call subjectivity as it occurs in self-aware human beings "existence" is that I want to invoke Sartre's famous nostrum, "existence precedes essence."[21] In mature persons subjectivity is constituted by self-awareness. This self-awareness establishes a gap between any environmental stimulus and the response that it would evoke from us. We are not like those animals who respond directly to an environmental stimulus as to a behavioral trigger. We are not only aware of the stimulus so that we can respond to it, but we are also aware of ourselves as being aware of it. This means that the stimulus becomes for us a phenomenon or object of awareness. We can feel ourselves to be in possession of that object and to understand it. As a result we can pause and reflect upon it and upon our own response to it. We do not always pause to do this and, indeed, most of our everyday lives comprise direct and immediate responses to what we encounter. But the presence of self-awareness is constant, and so the possibility of reflection and consideration is always present. We can consider whether what we want to do (that is, that which the stimulus would lead us to do if instinct and causality were all that were operative) is what we really want. And if we had reason to, we could do something different. It is in this that our freedom consists. While Sartre bases his theory of human freedom on more complex ontological claims about the nature of human existence, the basic idea is the same. It is the idea that the self-conscious form of subjectivity that is the mode of being of sufficiently mature persons is the basis of what the philosophical tradition has called our "free will." It is not that we have an essence or faculty that other animals do not have. It is that our mode of being creates an ontological gap between us and the reality that our subjectivity constitutes as our meaningful world. Because of this gap the world is in some degree objective. There is a distance between ourselves as subjectivity and the objects of our world: a distance that breaks the nexus between stimulus and response that would be unbroken in a mechanical and causal system.

Sartre's phrase "existence precedes essence" means that our subjectivity, our self-conscious mode of being, is not determined by any essential human nature. It is in this way that the "existentialism" that he founded is the opposite of the essentialism that I have described above. Instead of claiming that our human nature, our socialization, our genetic inheritance, or any other metaphysical, material, or historical force determines who we are and what we will do, existentialists like Sartre claim that it is our subjectivity, our concernful project of self-making, that projects itself into the world and uses any of those factual and formative elements to forge an identity for itself of its own choosing. I have no wish to defend this thesis against all possible objections at this time. Suffice it to say that the notion of subjectivity upon which it depends is crucial for our understanding of persons. Self-aware subjectivity is a movement from our own existence into the world. It is a projection of our concerns into the world so as to establish relationships of use and ownership with things, and of intersubjectivity

with other subjectivities. Subjectivity or existence is the active, creative, and cognitive grasping of reality so as to constitute for the subject an environing world and a field of intersubjectivity. It constitutes the past as the origin of our desires and self-understanding, the future as the envisaged achievement of our purposes, and the present as the basis from which we act.

Unlike essentialism, which seeks to fix human life into the definitions that its metaphysical categories bring with them, existentialism reminds us that our own initiative and creativity are vital in the living of our lives. Instead of saying, for example, that certain races are, in their natures, less intelligent than others, it allows for the potential that anyone has to develop their abilities and powers irrespective of race, gender, or class. Of course, social conditions may be such as to frustrate such efforts, but that only shows why such social conditions should be deemed unjust. Again, sociobiologists may argue, for example, that it is in the nature of men to want to inseminate as many women as possible, but an existentialist would argue that, even if such instincts were real (which is itself a highly contentious claim), it would still be up to any individual male to structure his life in the light of norms of his own choosing or that are conveyed to him by his cultural traditions.

Existentialism is anti-essentialist in relation to human existence. It claims that the self is not a fixed metaphysical entity and that human beings create their own modes of being, their values, and their destinies, instead of living only in fulfillment of a pre-defined human nature. Much of what follows in this book is informed by this outlook.

Another point that existentialists have stressed is that existence or subjectivity is finite. We all exist in a worldly situation. What we are and what we make of ourselves are constrained by this situation. We cannot know anything except from the perspective that we hold. We cannot know ultimate truths about God, moral values, or the nature of reality from a completely objective point of view. We must interpret things from within the horizons set by our own existence. Moreover, we cannot control our destinies and we are vulnerable to whatever luck serves up to us. We are mortal. As such, we must help each other. Contrary to Sartre's own atomistic view of human existence, we depend upon each other, and our caring for each other is a direct and necessary expression of our awareness of finitude. Complete self-sufficiency is not available in the human condition. We are responsible for one another as well as ourselves. Subjectivity seeks intersubjectivity.

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Two

THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSONS

> Personhood can be seen for what I claim it is—a matter of decision rather than knowledge, an acceptance of another being into fellowship rather than a recognition of a common essence.
>
> Richard Rorty[1]

What difference does it make that a health care worker in a clinical situation, unlike a mechanic in a car repair shop or a vet in a veterinary clinic, is typically dealing with a patient who is a human being or a person? This question invites us to consider the "moral ontology" that is inherent in our practice as health care workers. It will be recalled that Charles Taylor had spoken of "moral ontology" as the set of rationally defensible, but implicitly held, views about human life and dignity that lay at the basis of our "strong evaluations": that is, our discriminations of right, wrong, and virtue in concrete situations. Taylor's conception of moral ontology is both complex and dynamic. Not only does it refer to our substantive convictions about the moral importance of human beings, but it also refers to the very basis upon which we can debate with one another about such issues. If our ethical stances were merely instinctual or socially constructed reactions, then there would be no basis upon which we could discuss them with each other. Saying why we thought that it were better to do one thing instead of another would be just as impossible as saying why I preferred chocolate ice cream to strawberry ice cream. There is no arguing over taste. But if there is arguing over ethical issues, then there must be a deeply shared understanding that is the basis of such argument. And if the argument delves more deeply, this understanding can itself become a theme of the argument. Speaking of our moral ontology, Taylor says:

> What is articulated here is the background we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness, part of which we are forced to spell out when we have to defend our responses as the right ones.[2]

This chapter seeks to spell out and critique the background assumptions that many ethicists make in relation to the nature of persons when they articulate ethical principles for health care, and to articulate more satisfactory assumptions that I consider are actually often being made by caring and virtuous health care practitioners.

Taylor's term "moral ontology" does rather suggest that the methodology with which we approach these issues is one of observation, description, and classification. However, insofar as we are exploring what he calls the "moral sources" of our ethical outlooks there is room for a methodology that explores persons within a framework of relationships with persons. What is it to address another person and to be addressed by that person? What is it to reflect upon our

own existence as persons? What is it to acknowledge ourselves as persons? Answering such questions will articulate not only how we understand the concept of personhood, but also how we are motivated by our own existence as a person and by the existence of other persons whom we encounter in structures of intersubjectivity. In this book, the central notion of the moral ontology relevant to health care will be that of subjectivity.

Before we explore how we might answer our opening question, I need to offer a critique of some approaches to moral issues that I consider less than helpful in the health care context. For example, the term "human being" is often used in a morally loaded manner, and I suggest that our moral discourse will become clearer if we can dispense with that term. I will then introduce the concept of "person" and discuss how this concept has figured in our moral discourses. This will involve using and developing my critique of essentialism as it appears in many moral theories. I will then suggest that the concept of "subjectivity" is most helpful in clarifying bioethical issues and develop my exploration of the ethical nature of our encounter with other subjectivities. Let us begin our study by exploring the concept of being a human being.

1. The Moral Status of Human Beings

It is often said that "human life is sacred" or that the life of a human being is more precious just because it is the life of a human being. In the abortion debate, for example, many ground the claim that a fetus must not be killed simply on the fact that it is a human being. Again, in debates about euthanasia, many will say that it is because they are human beings that terminally ill patients in unrelievable pain must not be killed or assisted in committing suicide. Another premise in such arguments is that it is always wrong to deliberately kill a human being (or that whatever justifications might be offered in general terms for killing another human being—killing combatants in just wars, for example—such justifications do not apply to abortion or euthanasia). I do not want to enter these debates here. I want simply to point out that such arguments turn on a particular understanding of the nature and moral significance of being a human being. What this implies is a general theory about human beings that would explain why all human beings and only human beings have the kind of moral standing that gives them such a "right" to life or that forbids anyone from terminating such a life.

In the distant past, such theories about the special moral standing of human beings included the view that human beings were made in the image of God, or were given an immortal soul by God, or were in possession of a unique faculty called rationality, or had free will. Each of these views has a rich and honorable history and captures important insights about what it is to be a human being. However, they can be criticized on several grounds. First, they are essentialist in form. What is being suggested here is that there is an essential difference between human beings and other beings. Human beings are different in kind from other beings in that they definitively, changelessly, and completely have an essence or essential property that other living beings do not have. This property might be the soul, or the mind, or the faculty of reason, or free will, or a moral sense, or intrinsic, metaphysically based dignity. The theories about what these essential and differentiating properties are are legion. But notice that they are *theories*. They are abstract, speculative generalizations that purport to define the essence of human beings. They belong to that same discourse that includes essentialism,

metaphysical speculation, and the theoretically based formulation of moral principles. I have already indicated some reasons for wanting to reject essentialist ways of thinking in chapter one.

The view that human beings are metaphysically distinct from the rest of nature and have a special and unique moral status and dignity based on that metaphysical distinctness is an instance of essentialism. I could call this doctrine "humanism," but that word is used in so many different senses, most of them benign, that its use here would be misleading. If it were our task to formulate moral principles that apply to human beings it would be difficult to avoid this kind of essentialism. The kinds of general theories and *a priori* doctrines that undergird moral principles that purport to have objective and universal application could hardly avoid positing general theories about human beings as such. Accordingly, if the task of explicating the ethical response that a virtuous agent makes to living creatures does not require *a priori* principles, then it does not require any essentialist doctrines of human nature either. The response of a virtuous agent to a human being need not be essentially different from the response of that virtuous agent to any other kind of being. That the being is human is not, in and of itself, of any ethical relevance. Calling something a human being is saying nothing more than that it belongs to the species *Homo sapiens*. If Peter Singer is right, then species membership by itself is not a moral reason for acting in one way or another.

And yet this conclusion fails to satisfy us completely. We do intuitively feel that our responses to human living beings might legitimately be qualitatively different from our responses to non-human living beings. That we are working in the many fields of human health care does appear to make our cases ethically different from those that would be confronted by a veterinarian. Peter Singer certainly challenges us to think about this and to question any easy explanation of it in terms of human essential differences, but should we be content to conclude that our response to any living thing should be the same as our response to any other living thing whether either of them is human or not? Should I be as upset about the death of a cat as I would be about the death of a human child?

Perhaps we should take the conclusion we have drawn thus far as being of merely terminological import. Perhaps we should simply conclude that the term "human" does not help much. If there are differences in moral status between human beings and other animals, they do not arise from the mere fact of species membership. Perhaps the terms "human" or "human being" simply do not help us to understand these moral differences or the moral status of human beings as such. Moreover, if I were right in suggesting that these terms do not help us see morally relevant differences between species, then they would hardly help us see such differences within the species. After all, a new zygote in a human mother is a human being, a five-month-old fetus is a human being, a young child is a human being, teenagers, adults, and old people are human beings, a decrepit old man with advanced Alzheimer's disease is a human being, and we even refer to the corpses of deceased people as human. And yet it can be argued that the moral status of these various entities is different. It appears clear, therefore, that we cannot say that the life of a particular living entity must be respected simply because it is a "human being." And it also appears that calling something a human being will offer us very little help in discriminating amongst the many kinds of cases that may occur in human clinical settings. So I propose that we cease using the terms "human" or "human being" as any but classificatory terms.

Such terms do not designate metaphysical essences that ground moral status, and they contribute nothing to the solution of ethical problems in health care settings.

Perhaps a more useful alternative to the term "human being" for understanding our ethical responses and moral responsibilities might be the term "person." Bioethical debates make frequent use of the term "person." For example, it is argued that, *prima facie*, an early fetus should not be aborted because it is already or potentially a person, while others say that it has no "right to life" because it is not. It is argued that a terminally ill and comatose patient should be kept alive by all means possible because he or she is still a person, while others speak of the possibility of a person being dead in such cases even while the body is still alive. It appears then that "being a person" is an extremely important category in moral principles and one that attracts the attribution of high moral status. Indeed, the concept of "person" is central to the three main moral theories that undergird bioethics. Natural law theory posits persons as pursuing a set of essential human goods that are the basis of absolute moral duties. Kantian moral theory, or deontology, would see a person as a locus of autonomous agency and a bearer of rights, while utilitarianism would see a person as a seeker of happiness and a bearer of preferences. Let us briefly explore these in turn.

2. "Person" in the Natural Law Tradition

Taking their inspiration from Aristotle's claim that all human beings seek their fulfillment in *eudaimonia*, natural law theorists go on to define an essential set of goods that would constitute the happiness of all human beings. This establishes an essential, universal, and absolute set of goals, grounded in human nature, that define the actions that enhance those goals as right, and those that frustrate them as wrong. In this conception, persons are embodiments of universal goals. The human project is a pursuit of what nature (and its creator, God) has determined will be good for us. Given this secure and theological basis, the imperatives to which it gives rise are absolute.

Norman Ford gives us a typical recent example of such a form of thinking in a book that discusses ethical issues surrounding early human life. A Catholic priest, Ford relies on natural law theory to propound the view that the embryo should be taken to have a human nature from conception onwards. More specifically, a human individual and person begins when "cells of the rudimentary embryonic organism form a distinct ongoing living body at the primitive streak stage, animated by a divinely created immaterial life principle."[3] The crucial factor that gives an embryo the moral standing that is to be attributed to a fully mature human person, it appears, is that it is, or has the ability to become, such a person. Throughout the book, this is variously expressed by saying that it "has a human nature," "has a soul," "is a rational being," "is a human being," "is a human individual," or "is a person."

But this is an essentialist position in which Ford is reifying human nature and positing metaphysical entities where none is needed. In his formulations, human nature is some "thing" that an organism can "have." The impression of metaphysical essentialism is reinforced when Ford speaks of a divinely created "soul." The metaphysics of personhood here appears to depend on saying that a person is a biological entity plus some metaphysical entity or power that grounds its ability to be a rational agent. This is a classical dualistic view, in that it posits that a person or human being consists of a soul as well as a body. This is a view

that most contemporary philosophers would reject. But Ford also offers a different argument. He also appears to argue that moral standing is given on the basis of species membership. Because human beings are to be respected (given that they are made in the image of God, for example), persons, and other human beings that are not yet or no longer persons, are to be respected. Or the argument can go the other way. In this version, given that most persons are human beings (God and the angels are not even though they are persons), if persons are to be respected, all human beings are to be respected. Even if these arguments do not depend on the positing of such metaphysical entities as souls, they do depend upon an essentialism about human nature and personhood. Human beings or persons are said to have an essence that grounds their moral status and this essence is present even without any appearance of the qualities that give manifest dignity to human beings, such as rationality or autonomy.

The reason that essentialist concepts of "human being" and of "person" are needed in the natural law theory used in Catholic thinking is to provide the foundation for its entire edifice of moral doctrine. If there is a definite and substantive human nature, then there can be a definite and substantive human good that is the fulfillment of that nature. And if there is a substantive human good, then there can be objectively good and objectively bad acts. A bad act will be one whose "object" (inherent goal) goes against human nature. Such acts are always and objectively bad irrespective of the intention with which they are performed. Rape is a good example. In this way, moral theory can generate absolute moral rules. Tie this in with the idea that God has created both our human nature and the moral law, and the system is complete and binding.

Notice that to speak of action *types* is also an essentialist way of speaking. Does the moral status of a particular action derive from the type of action it is, or from the circumstances and intentions of the agent? Are all cases of killing an innocent human being essentially cases of murder, or do we judge whether a particular case is a case of murder in the light of the relevant circumstances? Even to suggest that such a killing is *prima facie* a case of murder unless there are extenuating circumstances is to subscribe to an essentialist doctrine that has been recently criticized by some moral theorists.[4] The moral quality of an action, it is argued by these theorists, does not derive from the type of action it is, whether it be the killing of an innocent human being, the giving of money to the poor, or the telling of a lie, but from the context in which it is performed. Such a lie can be a common courtesy. Such a gift can be an act of self-aggrandizement. And such a killing can be an act of mercy. Focusing upon the particular circumstances and intentions of an action can be a better guide to its moral quality than classifying it in essentialist and moralistic terms.

It will be clear that the natural law theory of morality is a case of essentialism *par excellence*. It directly denies the notion of existential freedom that I espouse, and relies upon theoretical reason to establish the goals of human life on an *a priori* basis. On this view, morality is to be read off from reality. But this reality, despite its being called "human nature," is itself the product of theoretical reason. For natural law theorists like Thomas Aquinas, persons are little more than a contingent embodiment of an abstraction called "human nature."

To further illustrate the way in which essentialism in relation to persons operates in natural law theory, we might note the way in which personhood is appealed to even when the manifest features of personhood are absent. If it is forbidden to kill a person and you want to apply this prohibition to an embryo or

fetus, then you might assert that the embryo or fetus is a person. But it clearly does not manifest such properties of personhood as autonomy or even intelligent behavior. In this way, the debate on abortion has yielded a distinction between a "developmental view" and a "potentiality view" of persons. Robert E. Joyce exemplifies the latter when he says, "a person can be identified as a whole individual being which has the natural potential to know, love, desire, and relate to self and other in a self-reflective way."[5] While there are several features of personhood mentioned in this definition, such as knowing, loving, and desiring, that are clearly important, one key point that it makes is that a being is a person when it has the *potential* to evince those features. This leads to the conclusion that a fetus or an embryo is a person (and should therefore not be killed).

The contrary view is that a being that has those potentials but does not yet have the actual capacity to evince those features is not yet a person. On this view a being develops into a person over a period of time. When it is a fetus it is not yet a person, and when it is a child it is a relatively undeveloped person. When a mature adult it is normally a fully developed person and if, perchance, it suffers severe mental debilitation in old age, it becomes less of a person. On this view, while an embryo may be a valuable human life (though given my argument in the previous section, its merely being *human* is not what makes it valuable), it is not yet a person and so any argument as to whether it ought to be kept alive will have to be grounded on some other consideration. Joyce's definition implies that there is an essential quality inherent in being a person: namely the ability to "know, love, desire, and relate to self and other in a self-reflective way." I leave aside the question of whether that list of abilities is complete or adequate. Some such list appears intuitively sound. Many agree that we need a list of qualities and abilities that will serve as criteria for being seen as a person. But the present debate is about whether this essential quality is the actual possession of those abilities or merely the potential to have them.

I do not want to labor over the question of whether the abilities have to be real or merely potential but I do make this point. The notion of a "potentiality" is a paradigm case of a metaphysical notion. The debate over what has it and when it begins (does a sperm have a potential to be a person?) will inevitably be a technical philosophical debate making use of highly abstract notions. Such questions cannot be settled empirically. Such debates may be important for the formulation of principles that should govern end-of-life and beginning-of-life decisions, and our bioethics textbooks are full of such discussions. But the best that such debates can yield are *a priori* principles that it will be our abstract duty to obey. Such principles may be necessary for the formulation of public policy, but at what point will the real motivations and commitments of real people be allowed to respond to the actual and particular contingencies of a situation in which would-be mothers and their clinical helpers are required to make real decisions? What is the nature of that to which these real people have to respond? Does saying that it is a "potential person" help? Does saying that it is a yet-to-develop person help? These are essentialist abstractions that, I suggest, often fail to engage with the actual motivations and real concerns of the people involved.

3. "Person" in Secular Moral Theory

It was Kant who, together with many other Enlightenment thinkers, freed our moral thinking from the dogmatic systems of the natural law tradition. His

fundamental insight was that, insofar as we are rational beings, we act in the light of the best reasons we can give ourselves to act. If we are aware of a good reason for doing something, then we will feel a kind of "practical necessity" for doing it. Just as good reasons for believing something will lead us to believe it, so good reasons for doing something will lead us to do it. Moreover, a good reason will lead any rational being to believe or act in the light of it. Accordingly, two key criteria of a good reason will be internal consistency and "universalizability." Any idea that contradicts itself in any way will not be a good reason, and good reasons are applicable to, and binding upon, all rational beings. In this way Kant devised a test for any plan or intention that we might want to put into effect. Would it be consistent or non-contradictory for us to want everyone to enact such a plan? If it were not, then it would not be a good reason to act and we should not put that plan into action. So, for example, suppose I were considering whether I should kill someone in order to steal his or her money. Could I wish that everyone should act in that way? Perhaps if everyone were to adopt such a plan, someone would kill me and steal my money. This would frustrate my earlier intention (since I would lose my money as well as my life) and so would not be something that I could rationally will to have happen. There would be a contradiction between my plan and my wishing that everyone would act on such a plan. Accordingly, I could not rationally will that everyone should act that way and hence, to be consistent, I must will that nobody should act that way, including myself. In this way Kant formulates his "categorical imperative," namely, "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[6] To act on a plan or intention (what Kant calls a "maxim") that cannot be universalized in this way would be immoral.

Kant's central idea has been intensely discussed in the Western philosophical tradition since he first formulated it, and I have no wish to review that vast literature here. The central idea is that there is a class of actions, such as murder, telling lies, failing to keep promises, that it would always be immoral to perform because there could never be a coherent universalizable reason for doing them. You would always be offending against reason if you were to perform such actions. Such actions are wrong *a priori*: that is, whatever might be their consequences or the particular intentions of their agents. Enlightenment thinkers embraced this idea because moral imperatives were thus no longer grounded in the commands of God. Instead, imperatives were based upon our own reason as human beings. By virtue of being rational, rational beings gave themselves the moral law. Unfortunately, human beings were subject to all kinds of inclinations and temptations such as greed, sloth, anger, and lust, but so long as reason was able to rule our lives, we would act well. An ideal moral agent (one not distracted by "inclinations") would always act rationally and thus morally. Whenever we are in doubt as to what we should do, we need only perform the mental experiment of universalizing our maxim to see whether that maxim was rationally coherent.

It was in recognition of the unique importance of reason in our lives that Kant went on to say that persons, being rational beings, had "dignity." What this meant was that, insofar as people acted upon the dictates of practical reason instead of inclination, they were "autonomous." That is, they gave themselves the law (*auto* means "self," and *nomos* means "law"). Accordingly, it was immoral for one person to use another simply as a tool for his or her purposes, in the way, for example, that slave owners use slaves. Again, this moral norm was based on reason and on the test of universalizability. As Kant put it: "Act in such a way

that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[7] You could not rationally want everyone to use one another as slaves because if they did you might yourself be used as a slave and that would prevent you from using others as slaves. So it is irrational to intend the universalizing of such a maxim.

Again, Enlightenment thinkers seized upon this idea because it gave them a theoretical basis for ascribing dignity to human beings without having to appeal to theological ideas such as that human beings are made in the image of God. And as well, at a time when royal prerogatives were under attack all over Europe, it gave them a theoretical basis for talking about universal human rights that could be claimed even when they were not recognized legally.

However, for all its secular appeal, it will be seen that Kant's view is still marked by elements of essentialism. It is based upon a highly idealized conception of rationality. It requires that persons be able to remove themselves from their inclinations and emotions in order to act as pure rational moral agents. Such rationality is seen as the essence of persons. Kant himself freely admitted that his moral theory and the moral life that it enjoined would make no sense without metaphysical beliefs in an essential human freedom—and even in God—that existed in a transcendental *a priori* realm of pure reason instead of in the lived world.[8]

Kant had shown that a moral theory can be built on an abstract conception of persons as autonomous agents, but subsequent debates have also shown that such a shallow foundation does not make for a very stable structure. Our inclinations, if they include compassion, caring, or generosity, for example, should not be ignored by moral theory. If we are to understand ethics as a matter of personal conviction and commitment, if we are to understand virtue as the quest for integrity between principles and effective motivations, if we are to understand the responsibility that we feel to others (whether persons, animals, or other things of value), then we need a richer conception of the human person as both the central object and the crucial subject of moral responsibility.

That said, I do think that Kant's notion of autonomy and the unique personal dignity that attaches to all rational creatures and that forbids us from using them as means for our own purposes is an important insight. But I would prefer to explicate it in terms of the existential self-project of creating a narrative shape in the finite life that I live and in terms of the responsibility for myself and others that this gives me. As I will argue below, the other-directed moral dimension of this autonomy arises from my intersubjective encounter with others and the acknowledgment of the autonomy of the other that this brings with it.

One of the theoretical advances of utilitarianism is that it eschews all dependence on abstract and essentialist ideas such as human dignity, human rights, or *a priori* moral obligations. Its focus is upon the consequences of an action and it asserts that we are obliged to perform those actions that lead to the greatest happiness for the greatest number. However, it soon became clear in the history of that tradition that the notion of happiness was too vague and theoretical to offer much guidance. Moreover, it left it open for some people to declare themselves competent to say what would make others happy. (John Stuart Mill himself said that the happiness of a cultured person was superior to that of an uncultured person.)[9] It would be more democratic to say that a morally right action is one that meets the preferences or interests that the maximum number of people affected by the action actually have. It follows that "preference utilitarians" think that the most morally important feature of persons is that they

have preferences. Instead of speculating about what universal human goods are inherent in our natures or what happiness is and what would make people happy, the simple fact of actual and presumed preferences is what is deemed morally salient. Our moral duty is to maximize the amount of preference satisfaction of persons and of any creatures that can have preferences.

The problem with this version of utilitarianism is that the term "preference" is ambiguous. It could be used to describe persons from the outside, descriptively, and it could also be used to describe a person's inner states. In the first sense, to have a preference is like having an interest. I can have an interest in, or preference for, the price of my shares going up even when my accountant has not told me that I even own such shares. In this case I have an interest in the price of shares in an objective sense even though I know nothing about the shares and so experience no desire for the rising of their price. I cannot experience the inner state of wanting the price to go up if I do not know about the shares. When Peter Singer says that animals have an interest in not suffering pain he probably means something like this. He is not suggesting that an animal thinks to itself that it would prefer not to suffer pain. It just, objectively, has an interest in, or preference for, not suffering pain because pain is an unpleasant experience.

The second meaning of "having a preference" contrasts with this "external" description of a person or animal as having an interest or a preference, by suggesting a phenomenological description of a person as "wanting" something. The notion of "wanting" refers to inner states. The description "I want food" suggests that I am aware that I want food. "Want" is an intentional term that requires an intentional object. There is something that I want and insofar as I want it I am aware of what that is. I may not know just what food I want and my want is not initially directed explicitly on the food that I end up eating, but my self-conscious state has an object of which I am aware. Notice that wanting something is a self-conscious inner state expressible in sentences like "I want food" or "I want the price of my shares to rise." In contrast, in cases where I am not aware of the relevant matters, I may have an interest but not be able to say anything about what is in my interest or what my preference would be. The term "preference" can refer either to objective interests that I have or subjective wants and desires that I am aware of.

Just how objective interests should figure in moral thinking is a difficult question. Are we obliged to make the world better for others even if they do not want us to? But it is clear that subjective desires and wants that I can be aware of and articulate are of crucial importance in ethical discourse. In typical cases, a person who wants something can do something about it. She can ask for what she wants or she can engage in strategic activities to obtain it. Wanting is therefore a prerequisite for thinking strategically and acting purposefully. Further, a person who wants something can be disappointed in the outcome of what he does in order to secure what he wants. Things can go wrong, his actions may fail, others may intervene to frustrate his strategies, and so forth. Again, a typical human being will suffer disappointment or distress because he or she knows that what he or she wants is not available. A self-conscious element is in operation here. The person is aware that there is a gap between the way the world is and the way he or she wants it to be. The person's (self-conscious) want is (self-consciously) frustrated.

Mill argued that it is this frustration that gives rise to the rhetoric of rights. Where a frustration is very profound and appears to strike against wants and preferences that are felt to be basic to the human condition, a person may come to

think that their frustration is indicative of an injustice. They may come to think that what they want is not only a preference that they have, but also something to which they are entitled. Just how the move from a preference to an entitlement can be rationally justified is a profound question in moral theory. But the key point here is that the pressure toward such a move depends upon the profundity of feeling, whether it be of frustration when a want is denied or of intense desire when the want is entertained. Again, therefore, there is a self-conscious element involved. A person is typically aware of the want or desire that leads him or her to claim a right and the claim of a *right* is an expression of the intensity of his or her wanting.

But let us return to our main theme. The ambiguity of the notion of "preferences" that I have identified above implies that the utilitarian goal of maximizing preference satisfaction can suggest either of two policies. The first would be a policy of social engineering in which experts who claim to know what is in the best interests of people organize society so that those presumed interests are met. Such a policy can be benign in its intention and execution, but, as cases such as that of aboriginal children taken from their families in Australia for many years shows, it is one that is fraught with the dangers of insensitive bureaucracy. The second would be a policy of making use of a rich phenomenological account of persons in terms of the mode of being of subjectivity in order to respond to the wants and desires that people actually have and that they may articulate. At the level of social engineering and public policy formation the latter approach would hardly be practicable, but at the level of individual and particular ethical action, it does indeed appear to be what is morally required for virtuous action.

That said, it does appear that the discourse of utilitarianism is predominantly concerned with public policy, public ethics, and the formation of law. This being so, its primary understanding of what preferences are will be in terms of the attribution in a public discourse of presumed interests that should be taken seriously in moral debate and that can be validated objectively as preferences that people actually have. Accordingly, preference utilitarianism ascribes preferences and interests to persons (and to animals) without any essential reference to the inner states of those persons. How much and why a person wants something is of no interest to it. A thoroughly behavioral account of human preferences will be adequate to ground this form of utilitarianism. We need only see what persons have an interest in doing or having to know what it is our duty to help them achieve. Morality would thus have a thoroughly non-metaphysical and empirical grounding. Anthropological studies may disclose that there are preferences that are present in all epochs and cultures, but this would provide a form of universalism far removed from the synthetic *a priori* truths upon which Kantianism depends. Such universals will almost certainly include the avoidance of pain and the seeking of pleasure, along with the pursuit of vital needs, and more "spiritual" values such as freedom, sexual love, and power over others. (This last serves to remind us that a naturalistic valorizing of preferences may still need to be subject to moral appraisal—but then, what basis for such appraisal would be available? I will not explore that thought here.)

Without the internal phenomenological dimension given by exploring our wants and desires through reflection, this reference to preferences and interests remains remarkably "thin." Not only would such an account be purely descriptive and behaviorist, but, most crucially, it would also lack an account of why it should engage us morally. Talk of preferences understood as interests that I have and that are prone to frustration is still only talk of natural facts: teleological

facts, certainly, but still mere facts. Why not adopt a tragic view of worldly existence and accept that it is in the scheme of things that some interests and preferences just will be frustrated? This is unfortunate but inevitable. It is just what happens. Some seeds fall in dry or shady places and fail to come to fruition. Some animals and humans suffer injury, pain, and frustration. So it goes. And some inflict frustration on others, whether it be animals hunting each other in nature or human beings in pursuit of their desires or of power. This is just what happens. What call does this place upon us morally? Is it my responsibility to overcome all situations of preference frustration? Utilitarianism's essentialist conception of persons as preference seekers appears to give us too little to base a morality on.

The moral theories that I have been discussing seek to derive our moral duties from considerations that imply essentialist theoretical conceptions of persons. Natural law theory depends on a relatively rich conception but one that lacks empirical foundation. Kantianism valorizes the rational aspects of human existence, while utilitarianism focuses on our desires and preferences. In each case, the implicit or explicit conception of persons is partial and theoretical. But moral theories that depend upon relatively shallow conceptions of personhood do not do well in explicating the nature of our moral duties. The focus in the preceding paragraphs has been upon the question of what notion of personhood is implicit in Kantian moral theory and in utilitarianism. In the view of these secular theories, what is it to be a moral agent or to have moral standing as a person? This is a different question from that which arises from the natural law tradition. There the question is, given that we have moral duties to persons, what entities are persons so as to be the object of those moral duties?

Either way, it has recently been argued by a major voice in bioethics, Tom Beauchamp, that the dependence of bioethical debates on the concept of "person" is misplaced. Beauchamp distinguishes between a metaphysical concept of personhood and a moral concept. The second refers to the person as a moral agent with the ability to make moral judgements about the rightness or wrongness of actions and the ability of being judged morally by others. The first concept is approached by defining criteria by virtue of which persons can be distinguished from other kinds of being. The literature that Beauchamp reports upon suggests that some subset of the following five conditions is both necessary and sufficient for being a person in this metaphysical sense: "(1) self-consciousness (of oneself as existing over time); (2) capacity to act upon reasons; (3) capacity to communicate with others by command of a language; (4) capacity to act freely: and (5) rationality."[10] With this distinction in place, Beauchamp goes on to argue that metaphysical personhood does not entail moral personhood or moral standing. "Moral standing" is not the same concept as that of moral personhood. To have moral standing is to be the object of moral obligations on the part of others. For something to have moral standing does not require that it be a moral person or that it be a metaphysical person. Many philosophers these days agree that animals have moral standing in the sense that we have obligations toward them to not cause them gratuitous harm or suffering. And yet animals are neither moral persons nor metaphysical persons. But leaving animals to one side, the main difficulty that Beauchamp identifies with any theory that would base the moral standing or even moral personhood of human beings on their metaphysical status as persons is that metaphysical theories of personhood often demand more than is exemplified in normal human life. For example, condition four above has been interpreted in terms of our ability to reflect on our desires. But it is not clear

that we have this ability or always exercise it to the degree that the theory requires. Autonomy admits of degrees, and it is not a metaphysical truth that all and only human beings display it to a high degree. Even human beings who fail to meet these criteria may have moral standing. Beauchamp concludes that debates in bioethics that depend on saying whether, for example, fetuses or patients with advanced dementia are persons actually show nothing more than that the concept of "person" is so vague as to be unhelpful. Without using the term, Beauchamp is rejecting the essentialist strategy of defining persons on the basis of *a priori* criteria in bioethical debate so as to establish moral standing. He shows that what is needed in such debates is a different approach.

4. A New Question

The claim that being a person is fundamentally and essentially tied to having moral standing raises an interesting question that echoes that of Socrates in the *Euthyphro*: "Is an action pious because it is loved by the gods, or is it loved by the gods because it is pious?" Is it because something is a person that we accord it moral standing, or is it because we accord it moral standing that we recognize it as a person? For example, in the case of the fetus, is it because we think it a (potential) person that we insist that it should have the right to life, or do we think (on other grounds) that it should have the right to life and then, as a way of articulating that position, call it a person? I do not want to decide that issue here. But it is interesting to note that if we deduce from something's being a person that it has certain rights, then we are almost always committed to at least two kinds of argument. The first will be the argument that seeks to establish that that entity is a person. The difficulty that this raises is that of developing agreed criteria for personhood or for being a person. The second will be the even more difficult essentialist argument about what persons are in the abstract. Before we can even attach that classification to the organism in question we need to know what it is to be a person and why this matters morally. This means that we need more than criteria for ascribing personhood. We need a metaphysical theory of personhood. Only such a theory can answer the question what it is about being a person that leads to such moral implications as that persons have certain rights or are the objects of certain duties. In approaching the matter from this direction we cannot avoid having to understand persons in *a priori* and essentialist terms; terms that would lead us toward metaphysical theory and dogmatism or a schematic and impoverished conception of human reality. What we would then need is an analysis of the notion of person (leaving aside the question of whether only human beings are persons) that will enable us to explain why it is wrong to kill a person. My claim has been that we cannot develop such an account without an essentialist metaphysics. Beauchamp agrees that this approach has largely failed in bioethics.

To approach the matter from the other direction appears more promising. There might be all sorts of good reasons why the life of a fetus should be valued and protected that do not derive from an essentialist premise that the fetus is a person. For example, that life might be loved and anticipated by the would-be parents.[11] And we might summarize our thinking along those lines by saying that, because that life is made valuable by that love and acceptance, we accept moral responsibilities toward it. And that, in order to express the moral responsibilities toward it that we accept, we had best think of the fetus as a person. In this way of

thinking, calling something a person is a way of expressing our logically prior decision to accord it the rights that typically attach to personhood. And that "decision" may actually be the expression of the expectation and love that we feel for the fetus. The key issue is then no longer whether some living system is *a priori* a person but whether that living system is or should be given the rights and privileges that we standardly extend toward those creatures that paradigmatically are persons: creatures such as ourselves. In this way we would not need to develop any metaphysical theory of what persons are in order to ground moral obligations toward persons. Instead, we would need an account of why it is virtuous to respond to the creature in question as we would to a person. On this account we would call something a person because we had reason or inclination to extend to it the moral regard we typically give to persons. As John Macmurray puts it:

> We are persons not by individual right, but in virtue of our relation to one another. The personal is constituted by personal relatedness. The unit of the personal is not the "I," but the "You and I."[12]

We can apply this thought to the case of the fetus that we have been considering. It follows from the broadly Aristotelian analysis of persons in terms of characteristic functions and from the existential notion of being a person as being engaged upon a project of self-making that I explicated in chapter one that I would endorse the developmental view of persons. A fetus and a newly born baby cannot perform all of the functions characteristic of persons and are to that extent less developed as persons. A person who is educated and mature can perform all of these functions to a high degree and is, to that extent, fully a person. And a person whose powers and talents have faded with age or disease is, to that extent, less of a person. But, although these descriptions are inevitably valuational, they need not have direct ethical implications for how we should treat persons who are differently abled from others. Indeed, each of these creatures operates as an intentional system and can have moral standing. Moreover, some evince the qualities of subjectivity. It follows from this, as I will show below, that they call for an ethical response. But such a response is not premised upon any metaphysical claims as to their possessing an essence or a potentiality that gives them an *a priori* moral standing or us an *a priori* moral duty. Nor need it be based on the preferences that other persons might have for it or on the universalizability of agents' maxims in regard to it. However, it is a response that we may express by calling the object of that response a person. While this may be metaphysically misleading, it might be a useful shorthand for saying that we accord it the rights and privileges of a person, or that we acknowledge in ourselves a duty to act with care and respect toward it, or that we simply feel a concern or love for it. Because of the metaphysical baggage that the term "person" brings with it, I would not myself recommend this way of speaking, but I do think that what others say in the context of many bioethical debates can often be interpreted in this way.

If this is right, then caring, understood as involving some form of love and acceptance, is more important for deeming something a person than the application of criteria based on abstract, theoretical, and essentialist conceptions of personhood. Instead of deriving the moral standing of an organism from its fulfilling the criteria of personhood, we accord the moral status of persons to that organism on some other basis. This basis is not primarily an argument involving

criteria, but the fact that, in some sense, we care about the organism. To care in the full sense that can sometimes be described as love is a fundamental ability characteristic of well-formed persons. However, to understand what such caring is requires that we understand it from the inside: that is, as a mode of subjectivity. It is a form of *inter*subjectivity. That is to say, it is not just a stance that one person takes toward another based on rational considerations. It is a rapport that two persons establish between themselves. It is a way for one person to address the other. And this implies that one person seeing the other *as* a person through caring is not just a matter of that person correctly classifying the other in accordance with certain objective criteria articulated by philosophers. Instead, it is an encounter between the subjectivity, the existence, or the existential self-project of the one and of the other. It is an acknowledgment of the mystery of the other. As I gaze into the eyes of the other, I touch all the mystery, depth, and concern that is the subjectivity of the other. And I respond out of my own subjectivity. Insofar as the other is mysterious, the caring response is an acceptance of what cannot be objectively known. In that sense it goes beyond what any rational moral theory would indicate. It is always a risk and a gift. Love and caring are forms of acknowledgment of the personhood of the other that are not derived from rational judgements based on criteria, but are gifts of the status of personhood. While there is more to love in the way of affection and feeling than there is to caring, their ethical significance is that the one who is loved or cared for is made an object of concern and thereby accepted into the community of those who behave ethically toward one another. The key to understanding these ideas is to move from the third person point of view of ascriptions of moral status or classifying persons, or even from a purely first person point of view of reflection on our own experience, to a second person point of view of understanding what it is for persons to address one another.

5. The "Call" of Persons—Emmanuel Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas has developed a profound view that will help us understand these ideas.[13] He envisages a situation where two persons are in communication. One looks into the face of the other. What is apprehended there is more than can be encompassed in knowledge. Of course there is some cognition involved. I have recognized what and whom I am perceiving. But there is also mystery there. This mystery is the subjectivity of the other. Just as my subjectivity is a project of being and therefore is not knowable as an object even by me, so your subjectivity is a project of being not knowable as an object by me (any more than it is knowable by you). I cannot turn your subjectivity into an object for me because it is not a thing. It is, in Levinas's phrase, "beyond being." In Sartre's terminology, it is a nothingness. It is a project, a not-yet-being. As such it is beyond comprehension. As I gaze into your eyes I see infinite depth and mystery. In Levinas's terminology, you are "otherness." In its strictest sense this simply means that the conceptual structures of knowledge cannot embrace the reality of you. I can articulate many forms of understanding of you, and if I am sufficiently trained in depth psychology, I may be able to develop a quite comprehensive profile of you. But I will never sum you up. I will never capture you in a cognitive web. You are a mystery. You are "other." So far as my intentional world is concerned, you cannot be in it as a phenomenon or an object. The world that I constitute as mine contains only those objects that I can cognitively possess

and I cannot cognitively possess you. There are forms of communicative intuition whereby we can establish intersubjective rapport between us, but this is not knowledge. It does not make you into an object for my intellectual grasp. To me, your subjectivity is infinity, mystery, and otherness.

For this reason, a full, essentialist, and comprehensive analysis of what it is for you to be a person will always be impossible. We may understand how the category operates in ordinary language and we may be able to successfully distinguish persons from other kinds of being, but a full understanding of what it is to be a person is as impossible as complete self-knowledge and as complete knowledge of the other.

Levinas draws important ethical implications from this position. He argues that we are called to moral responsibility and virtuous response when we are in a situation of intersubjective encounter with another person. That the subjectivity of the other is a mystery and has a depth that is beyond my comprehension does not pose a merely epistemological puzzle. It evokes my virtuous response. Let me head off misunderstanding by quickly saying that this virtuous response is not based on some form of empathetic awareness that I have of the other's inner states of want, desire, or suffering. My moral responsibility is not confined just to those others who do or can evoke moral empathy in me. Certainly, moral empathy is important and the range of beings who can evoke moral empathy in us is not confined to immediate loved ones, or even human beings. The expanding circle of sympathy can be very wide and, in a virtuous person, will be. But such empathy is based on a knowledge of the other that is produced by our projecting our own understanding of their situation onto them. It consists of our placing ourselves in their shoes, and this process always includes some degree of appropriation of the other. We do not so much listen and observe, as assume what the other is feeling. As Nietzsche observed, there can also be a feeling of superiority to the other accompanying feelings of sympathy and pity. The notion of moral empathy bears some similarity to Hume's notion of moral sympathy, in that this moral sentiment is not based on reason and is a *contingent* moral feeling that may or may not be felt depending on the predisposition of the agent. Of course it would be a mark of virtue for agents to develop this predisposition and to do whatever they could to deepen and broaden their sensitivity. The ethics of caring encourages us to develop our powers of empathy and compassion in this way. But Levinas would base the moral responsibility that I have toward the other upon their mystery instead of upon my empathetic grasp of their need. He does not only argue that ethics consists in particular responses to the needs of particular others; needs with which I may contingently be empathetic. He also argues that ethics consists in a universal, ontological structure of intersubjectivity.

I will explain this very schematically. Let us begin in the inner circle of moral concern: the persons whom I love. As I enjoy interpersonal encounter with such persons, as I gaze into their eyes, I am in the presence of a depth that I cannot encompass in a knowing and possessive grasp. Unlike my car which, as I gaze upon it (even in a "loving" way), I encompass as completely mine and as completely (in principle at least, since it is a human construct) understandable by me, when I gaze upon my beloved I am aware of a mystery that I cannot grasp and of a depth that is, to me, infinite. I may be aware too that this infinite depth includes needs that I can meet even if I cannot be entirely sure just what they are and how I can meet them. In this way I am called to help the other in an undefined but real way. But it is not the need that establishes the responsibility.

The moral nature of this encounter is prior to any discovery of needs. It is essential to Levinas's account of the encounter with the other that there be unpossessible mystery, depth, and an inchoate sense of calling to responsibility in the encounter with the other. It is this that grounds the inescapably ethical nature of such an encounter.

That the other cannot be grasped or taken possession of is what differentiates Levinas's view of human encounter from that of Sartre. For Sartre, my struggle for existence, my project of self-making, always encounters the other as a threat or an obstruction. There is never enough room in the park for the two of us. One person must always dominate the other even if only in the objectifying knowledge that he has of the other. For Levinas, on the other hand, no such knowledge is possible. The other is and remains a mystery. I cannot possess the other as an object. I cannot but let the other be. The most basic level of meaning that attaches to the encounter is that of giving the other the space to be who he or she is. I cannot possess the other or objectify that person because the other is an infinity beyond my grasp. Of course, this does not mean that I cannot deliberately adopt a stance of domination and possession. I can be evil if I want to. But to do so is to obstruct the more primordial, ethical, intersubjective response that our respective ontological natures elicit. My first and deepest reaction to mystery is to let it be.

There are several reasons for this in Levinas's texts. One is that the other is an appearance out of that dark and inchoate *there is* that is the ground of my being and that is "beyond being." As I will argue in chapter five, adapting Levinas's views to the notion of life, I have an indebtedness to that which makes my being possible. Materiality and life make my being possible. But as Levinas himself argues, the other makes my being possible also. For most of us, before we ever became conscious we were in receipt of material support and of acknowledgment and encouragement from others. Most of our needs were readily met and our every action and gesture was met with congratulation and encouragement. These responses to me have shaped me. Even in those cases where early childhood was vitiated by cruelty and neglect, the shape of the being who is becoming is being formed. This formation is not readily present to me when I reflect on and remember my past. It is seldom available to my recollection and I have only very inadequate explanations for who I am. But this past is a horizon to my being that shapes my being. So far as my subjectivity is concerned, this past is a part of the dark and unknown horizon that is part of my *there is*. I owe this past a debt even if I am largely unaware of it. I have, to a large extent, been given my identity. Undifferentiated otherness is the matrix of my uniqueness. And I find this otherness in the face of the other. Without recognizing her, I acknowledge the other who has shaped me in every other whom I encounter. And so I respond.

Sartrean being-for-itself as self-concern, and Nietzschean will-to-power as the project of being who I am, is unmindful of its debt to the amorphous other and its foundation in the *there is*. That is its fault. When I become an ego with a self-project, I see others as threats. My own survival can only be secured with the other's defeat. As Freud argued in his essay on mourning, the grief we feel at the death of an other is tinged with pleasure that we and not they have survived. In contrast, it is only in the acknowledgment of our situatedness and dependence on others (or our "thrownness" into the world, as Heidegger would say) that we can find the ethical stance that Levinas calls primordial and that would lead us to preserve the other and seek their flourishing. This is not a response to the other's

need, though it may be expressed in that way. It is a primordial stance toward the other, and one that allows us to be sensitive to their need. It is the basic stance of wanting to let the other be. As Levinas puts it, "Responsibility for my neighbor dates from before my freedom in an immemorial past, an unrepresentable past that was never present and is more ancient than consciousness of . . . ."[14]

Another argument that Levinas offers for this position is that, insofar as I assert my existence in the mode of will-to-power, I usurp the place of another. "In affirming this *me* being, one has to respond to one's right to be." And a little later he concludes:

> It is in the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its "hateful" modality), that we find ethics and also probably the very spirituality of the soul, but most certainly the question of the meaning of being, that is, its appeal for justification.[15]

So long as the ego does not project its subjectivity aggressively into the world so as to usurp the place of the other, it can find a meaningfulness in its life through responding to the call of the other. And it can do this when it implicitly acknowledges the mystery of the other and its dependence upon the other in its own formation before it even became an ego. It is upon this fundamental and primordial stance of letting the other be that we can build a more reflexively available level of feelings such as empathy, caring, and love. Our ability to display moral empathy for the needs of an other is premised upon our prior acknowledgment of the other as having a place in my world. My responsibility for the other is nothing less than my willingness to share my world with her: to accord her the status of a subjectivity. Only if I take that stance can I see the need and the vulnerability of the other as a call upon my responsibility. My acknowledgment of the other is my acceptance of a responsibility for her.

Whether or not this account remains methodologically in the discipline of philosophy or enters the field of speculative depth psychology, it encourages a virtue ethics approach to moral theory in that it makes a particular agent's *response* to the call of the other the crucial and generative element in the moral life of that agent. Ethical principles and the concepts of personhood that are implicated in them may then be understood as useful, secondary, and culturally constructed products of the historical traces of such responses.

Virtue ethics needs a richer description of the object of moral responsibility than essentialist principle-based ethics does because it needs to explain what generates the moral response to the other. *A priori* moral principles focus just and only on the abstract and essential moral standing of the other (whether it be their inherent human nature, their being autonomous, their having rights, or their objectively having interests and preferences), whereas virtue ethics has to describe the other in such a way as to justify the feeling of responsibility that the virtuous agent comes to feel for that other. Be all that as it may (several books would be required to argue for all these claims), the key point is that, for such ethical thinking to get going at all, it is necessary that we develop a very "thick" description of the object of our moral concern if we are to account for that moral concern. I would question whether the utilitarians' talk of "preferences" is thick enough to achieve this. Certainly, preferences understood as objective interests would not be. They are mere facts. We would at least have to show what stake a being had in the fulfillment of its own interests or the meeting of its own preferences in order to explain what responsibility a moral agent had in helping it

fulfil those tendencies or meet those preferences. A mere behavioral description will not give us this. Indeed, if we put the question in this way, we might be pressed back to saying that only preferences of which the bearer of those preferences was self-consciously aware could be preferences that it had a stake in pursuing. Having a stake in the meeting of our preferences is having a preference that our preferences be met. And this is a second order preference of the kind that is indicative of the kind of self-consciousness said (for example, by Frankfurt[16]) to be definitive of persons.

The trouble with most mainstream approaches to ethical theory is that they try to give a definitive specification of the putative object of our moral concern or responsibility in terms that will ground that concern or responsibility. The somewhat reductionist attempt of the early utilitarians to specify what matters morally in terms of pleasure (and avoidance of pain), and later attempts to do so in terms of happiness or preferences, all lead to a theorizing of the other as an object that need only be known in terms of a limited set of morally salient features. The attempt by Kantians to say what dignity, moral standing, or rights a person has is a further attempt at specifying the features of persons that demand a moral acknowledgment in terms of our schemas of theoretical knowledge. But an object that can be known is a fact, and facts, famously, do not entail imperatives. Better to leave the object of our moral concern as a mystery that cannot be known but to which, for that very reason, the most adequate human, cognitive, and emotional response is an ethical one. This is what Levinas's view gives us. For him the focus is upon the moral response. (Or, as I would say, the virtuous response.) Such a response requires sensitivity to the depth of what is before the agent (whether it be another human being, an animal, a plant, or an object of aesthetic or heritage value). It also requires acknowledgment of the ethically salient features of the agent herself, including emotions, emotional bonds, professional responsibilities, authentic commitments to faiths and principles, and the need for integrity.

A priori moral principles explain our moral responses to persons by alluding to what those principles define as morally essential features of personhood. But this gives us not only a reductionist account of persons, but also a reductionist account of morality itself. Morality (as opposed to public policy) is a very rich phenomenon that engages virtuous agents in the very core of their being, and if this is right then it will turn out not to be adequate to the richness of morality that the central objects of moral concern be conceived of in a reductionist manner. It might turn out that it is just not good enough for natural law theorists to premise their norms on metaphysical speculations about human nature. It may not be good enough for utilitarianism to calculate and predict the consequences of actions using ciphers in the calculation instead of full and rich persons. And it may just not be good enough for deontologists to reduce moral discourse to the negotiation of competing rights or duties.

The caring approach that I espouse asserts that it is virtuous to respond to another in accordance with the quality of the intersubjective rapport that is established between sensitive and respectful agents and that with which they are in contact. Caring consists first in being sensitive to the subjective qualities of the other and of acknowledging and respecting those qualities. Second, it consists in responding appropriately with generous and concernful motivations. Third, there must be due consideration of the relevant circumstances, the possible consequences of the projected action, and the social and ethical norms that apply to it. Fourth, there must be effective action that is expressive of care for the other as

well as the pursuit of integrity within ourselves. Accordingly, to be caring is to give full expression to the richness of our own being and to recognize and respond to the richness of the other's being. There is nothing abstract or theoretical about the life of caring. To be caring requires that we have a full and sensitive understanding of what it is we are dealing with and of the ethical importance that we give it.

6. Conclusion

So what difference does it make that a health care worker in a clinical situation, unlike a mechanic in a car repair shop or a vet in a veterinary clinic, is typically dealing with a patient who is a human being or a person? I have argued, first, that the notion of "human being" is unhelpful in providing a satisfactory answer to this question because it invites speciesism without illuminating what is important about being a human being. Second, I have argued that the traditional conceptions of personhood, whether based on traditional, theological, or metaphysical theories, fail to express the deep ethical intuitions that health care workers bring to their practice. Such views are beset by essentialism and, while they play a role in theories of moral responsibility and principles of bioethics, they do little to help us understand the nature of the ethical response to clients or patients who are suffering malady or facing death. To understand that response, we need to be sensitive to our own subjectivity and that of the other, and to respond to the intersubjective relationship that establishes the other as an object of our ethical caring. We give persons moral standing by the caring that we extend toward them.

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Three

RECONCILING CARING AND JUSTICE

> On the level of the ethical aim, however, solicitude, as the mutual exchange of self-esteems, is affirmative through and through. This affirmation, which can well be termed original, is the hidden soul of the prohibition. It is what, ultimately, arms our indignation, that is, our rejection of *indignities* inflicted on others.
>
> Paul Ricoeur[1]

There are many philosophers who argue that basing our moral obligations on the caring and virtuous responses that might be evoked in us by others does not provide a firm foundation for the moral duties that we are said to have. Along with caring about others and being sensitive to them, they say, we must know what justice demands of us, and this will require us to articulate objective moral principles upon which our actions should be based. Bioethics is a field that is deeply riven in its theoretical bases. While the predominant approach has been based on principles,[2] there has been an increasing advocacy of a virtue approach or an approach that stresses caring.[3] It is this latter approach that I espouse in this book. However, there would appear to be a need for reconciliation between the two approaches, and this chapter seeks to meet that need.

Ever since the groundbreaking work of Carol Gilligan,[4] caring and justice have been seen to be in a kind of opposition. In her work on the moral development of children, Gilligan identified two ethical "perspectives" that were characteristically evinced by boys and girls respectively. Whereas boys would seek to resolve conflict by reference to rules, rights, and moral principles, girls were more inclined to preserve interpersonal relationships and seek compromises and accommodations with one another out of a concern for one another's well-being. While subsequent discussion of these claims called the sharpness of the distinction and its attribution along gender lines into question,[5] the fundamental point has now become a commonplace in the literature of ethics. The caring and justice perspectives are in opposition. This has encouraged, for example, those who call themselves "particularists" to prefer ethically motivated decision making with reference only to what is perceived to be ethically salient in a situation to a form of decision making that would derive the rightness of an action from the universal norms that are thought to apply to it.[6] It has encouraged virtue ethicists to propound a character-based form of ethical decision making in contrast to the rational deduction of such decisions from overarching moral principles.[7] In more applied fields, it has encouraged nursing scholars to espouse "caring" as the fundamental purpose and meaning of the profession of nursing, both because that profession is dominated by women and because ethical decision making within that profession is claimed to be more appropriately based upon a contextualized caring motivation than upon the application of abstract norms.[8]

However, Gilligan's claims have not been welcomed unequivocally within the recent feminist and ethical literature. As opposed to Nel Noddings's

enthusiastic endorsement of the concept of caring as a basis for ethical living,[9] there have been others who have argued that caring exposes carers to exploitation. Whether it be in the caring professions or in the domestic sphere, the willingness of women to base their actions on caring for others makes it less likely, it is argued, that they will pursue justice for themselves and for those who are the object of their care.[10] Others have suggested that, while caring may be an appropriate prompt for ethical behavior, moral reason must still be applied to decide whether the action so prompted is right or wrong.[11]

The philosophical issues in this debate have a far longer history than the recent literature generated by Gilligan's work would indicate. The distinction between caring and justice evokes a number of key figures in our tradition of moral theory. The central proponent of the justice perspective will clearly be Kant with his rigorous establishment of a transcendental foundation for moral duty in the very rationality that is distinctive of our being human. Those many moral theorists, whether they are in the Natural Law, Utilitarian, or Kantian traditions, who insist that principles must be the basis of moral action are suspicious of caring because of its being a feeling or "inclination" that is only contingently present in the moral agent and therefore not an apt basis for a universal form of moral rightness. In contrast, the caring perspective frequently leads its proponents back to Aristotle, with his insistence that acting well involves not just thinking rightly but also feeling rightly, with his focus upon acting from virtue as distinct from acting out of duty, and with his stress on *phronésis* or "practical wisdom" understood as contextualized particular ethical judgment. Moreover, the importance or otherwise of "moral sentiments" has been debated in moral theory at least since Hume, if not for longer. Nothing less than the place of reason in our moral lives versus our feelings or inclinations is at issue here, and while the Platonic and Kantian traditions appear to have largely secured the triumph of reason in this debate, the claims of moral sentiments or motivations continue to be pressed, along with those of virtue and of the particularity of contextualized ethical judgements.

In short, there is a lot at stake in the distinction between caring and justice as fundamental perspectives in ethics. Moral theory appears to be deeply bifurcated. I could illustrate this bifurcation in the following table in which concepts form "families" along the vertical axes.

Caring	Justice
Contextualism	Universalism
Particularism	Principlism
Virtue ethics	"Morality"
Moral sentiments	Pure practical reason
Aristotle	Kant
Internalism	Externalism
Private	Public

I will not explicate each term of this table here. The preceding paragraphs explicate most of it, and the significance of the last two rows will become clear in the course of the discussion below. What I propose to do in this chapter is to discuss two recent attempts at reconciling the two perspectives: those of Onora O'Neill and Paul Ricoeur. I will show that O'Neill's project is vitiated from the very beginning by her Kantian methodological decision to disregard moral motivations. In contrast, by virtue of his background in the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions, Ricoeur is able to do full justice to caring while offering an overarching theory that embraces the justice perspective and re-establishes the unity of ethics. It is such a unified conception that, I will argue, should provide the foundation for bioethics.

1. Onora O'Neill

O'Neill begins her book *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning*[12] by wondering why the universalist approach to ethics and a particularist and virtue approach ever came to be so opposed. She suggests it was because in the course of Western history both lost any convincing foundation that would tie them together. In the natural law tradition there was an agreed conception of the human good based either on metaphysics or on a theory of human nature. Such a conception grounded both the principles we should live by and the virtues that would help us to live by them. With the loss of this faith-based conception, modern moral theory must seek to substantiate its positions without appeal to such classical foundations. O'Neill undertakes to show in her book that, if moral theory uses the minimal rational foundations that the Kantian tradition has left us, and which she endorses, the polarized positions of universalists and particularists can still be largely reconciled.

The core of her argument is that ethical thinking is above all practical thinking. It is thinking about what should be done or what justifications there might be for what was done. But for a consideration to count as a reason for an action, it must be able to be followed by anyone who stands in the relevant relations to the action. If the fact that it is raining is a reason for me to take an umbrella, then it must be a reason for anyone else who wants to step outside in such conditions to take an umbrella. For a practical reason to count as a reason at all it must be followable by others who are in a similar situation and have similar goals. They must find the reason intelligible and they must be able to act in a similar way if they are to find the reason followable. Further, if it is to be a *practical* reason, it must be action guiding for those to whom the reason applies. Conceptions of practical reasoning that appeal to metaphysical goods, such as are posited by religious faith, or to agents' preferences, or to their actual commitments, will not be followable by those who do not share those goods, preferences, or commitments. Hence, contrary to Charles Taylor's view described in earlier chapters, practical reason must be *a priori* and free of any substantive beliefs about the human good.

But O'Neill does not follow Kant in assuming that practical reason must be universally applicable. While the scope of any given practical reason may not be universal, it must extend to all those agents for whom the relevant action is a real option. It follows that it is possible for some practical reasoning to have a restricted scope. But just as justifications for action can occur in ever wider spheres of consideration (Why do you want to take your umbrella? To stay dry.

Why do you want to stay dry? To avoid catching cold. Why do you want to avoid catching cold? To be healthy. And so on.) so the reasons offered are expandable to ever wider groups. More people want to avoid colds than want to stay dry when it is raining. As the scope of practical reasons widens, broad principles of action underlie the reasons for our more specific actions. Because agents seek to live coherent and unified lives, principles of wider scope must embrace and substantiate more limited and specific principles. What these observations yield is the basic building blocks of a "constructivist" conception of moral reasoning. It acknowledges the particularist's stress on the specificity and even uniqueness of concrete situations, but it extends the scope of practical reason to all and only relevant others. Notice that in this case "relevant others" does not mean others who might be affected by my actions, but others who might have occasion to act in similar situations. Notice also that to this point the argument does not have any specifically moral implications. It is simply saying, for example, that it is a rational principle for anyone who wants to stay dry to take an umbrella when it is raining.

Given that the scope of moral principles is traditionally said to be universal, O'Neill needs to address the issue of just how far the scope of practical principles can extend. She argues that many principles can be constructed that are "more-or-less cosmopolitan," which is as close to universalism as she will go. In order to be reasoned, she says, an action must be based on reasons that are intelligible to those others who fall within its scope and that "the proposer thinks *could* be adopted by others for whom the reasoning is to count."[13] So the proposer of the reason or principles must assume that relevant others have the same capacities and capabilities as the agent and must be vulnerable to the world's exigencies in much the same way. At the level of the broadest and most inclusive reasons for action, this would lead the proposer to make a number of assumptions that have moral import. These assumptions are those of "plurality," "connectedness," and "finitude." Plurality means that you acknowledge the presence of others and their not being merely a part of yourself (in contrast to the way that certain powerful men in the past might have thought of their servants, wives, children, or even communities as merely extensions of themselves). Connectedness assumes that your actions have effects on others: that you are not radically solitary. And finitude assumes that others are vulnerable to your actions. In the language of moral theory, these assumptions imply that we accord moral status to others whenever we act in relation to them. It is implicit in our actions that we always and already regard those others who are affected by our actions as morally considerable or as having moral standing. In this way the question of who is able to follow the reasons that I offer for my actions and thus see those reasons as applying to themselves turns into the question of how I should conceive of the objects of my actions and what my moral attitude to them should be.

While it may be thought that O'Neill is shifting her focus in the question as to what is the scope of my practical principles from those who might act as I do to those who are affected by my action, the link is that if my practical reason is to be followable by others then it must implicitly assume that those others are relevantly like me as agents. If this is true, then I should accord them the appropriate respect. Or perhaps the conclusion is that my assuming that they are agents like me with all my capabilities and vulnerabilities just *is* my according them the appropriate respect. While based on "minimal assumptions," this conclusion would echo the metaphysically based classical arguments in moral theory that I must accord moral standing to others on the basis of seeing them as

autonomous agents or as persons. If I am right in interpreting O'Neill in this way, it would appear that in offering reasons for our actions we assume others to be both active and passive: active in that my principle is followable by them, and passive in that they may be the object of my action. The respect that flows from seeing them as active modifies, or should modify, the way we see them as passive.

Insofar as O'Neill speaks of assumptions that are implicit in our actions, it would appear that she is offering a kind of transcendental argument in the manner of Kant. She might be arguing that I cannot but assume that other agents are themselves autonomous, that they are affected by my actions, and that they are vulnerable to what I might do. In short, they are like me. Such an argument might suggest that the scope of practical reason is at its broadest when we act in relation to others because those others are agents like us. They are subjects like us, they have wishes and aspirations just as we do, and they are vulnerable to injury, including injury arising from our actions. We necessarily make such assumptions because, in offering reasons for our actions, we assume that what count for us as practical reasons will count for those others as practical reasons. And insofar as we can all influence one another in some way or other, practical reason must apply to us all. The question of scope is not just a question of whom our moral reasoning is to apply to. It is a question of who is to count as a moral agent, couched in the form of asking by whom my reasons must be followable. In assuming that they are followable by others I am implicitly according those others moral status when I propose reasons for my actions: that is, I regard them as having the same capabilities and vulnerabilities as myself. In this way the moral standing of others would be established as a necessary presupposition for our offering reasons for action at all.

Instead of asking whether this transcendental argument is cogent, I want to ask whether it really is the argument that O'Neill wants to offer. O'Neill goes on to say that denying these assumptions leads to morally bad actions. Denying plurality (as in the case of the man who thinks of his servants, wife, children, or community as extensions of himself) means not acknowledging the independence of others. This would lead to despotic behavior. Denying connectedness involves denying the effects of our actions on others. This would lead to callous behavior. And denying finiteness assumes that others have powers that they may not have (as when the rich assume that the poor can fend for themselves). This would lead to irresponsible behavior. While these observations are insightful, it appears to follow from them that O'Neill's argument cannot be transcendental in form. She is advocating being mindful of these assumptions and urging us to not distort or deny them. The fact that these assumptions can be distorted or denied shows that they cannot be a neutral and necessarily assumed base from which to construct norms by extending the scope of practical reason. O'Neill does argue that anyone who fails to acknowledge the capabilities and vulnerabilities of others will come to grief in some way and therefore has reason to acknowledge others in this way. But this would appear to rely on the somewhat sanguine empirical expectation that an unjust person cannot prosper. Be that as it may, it will be clear from O'Neill's admission that the assumptions we make in our practical reason can be false and may need revision in order to secure the effectiveness of our actions or their coherence with our more inclusive principles,[14] that they are not established by a transcendental argument. These assumptions are not necessary presuppositions for any practical reasoning.

Nevertheless, O'Neill suggests that these assumptions do provide a basis for principles of justice. If others have broad capabilities and vulnerabilities similar to my own, then I cannot expect others to follow any practical reason that would support an action that does injury to another. And this for a good Kantian reason. It would be incoherent for everyone to endorse a principle that licences injury to others since those who are then injured could not go on to injure others. Such a principle would be incoherent when universalized. This argument establishes a practical principle of a sufficiently broad scope and of an appropriate content to warrant calling it a moral principle: namely, do not injure others. Moreover these arguments can be extended into the sphere of political philosophy. They allow us to define what would be just institutions: namely, those that avoid systemic, gratuitous, direct, or indirect injury to others or groups of others. This is, therefore, a minimal and yet complete moral position.

The next important step in O'Neill's argument is to show that virtue has a place in this minimal and constructed deontological framework of thinking. The way she approaches this is to explore the structure of practical principles. She suggests that while most obligations have corresponding rights that particular individuals or groups of individuals can claim and that therefore impose specific duties upon particular agents or groups of agents, there are other obligations that do not have such specific rights arising from them. Examples that she offers include our obligation not to be indifferent to a range of matters such as harm to the environment and the fate of future generations. In more positive terms, we might call this an obligation to care, albeit that the objects of such caring remain underdetermined. O'Neill's point is that such indeterminate obligations are the virtues that are required of us as moral agents. They are required because they can be derived from the principle that we must do no injury to others. If we can construct a morality on the basis of expanding the scope of our practical reason, then such a morality will include a range of requirements the objects of which are so indeterminate that we can best describe our honoring of those requirements as states of character or dispositions to act with regard to that range of values. On this account, a virtue is a moral requirement the object of which is relatively indeterminate.

For O'Neill there are a number of kinds of virtue. These include the virtues of justice, executive virtues such as courage and constancy, and social virtues such as care, concern, and solidarity. Some of these are obligatory and some are supererogatory, but a justification for all of them can be constructed on the basis of the moral fundamentals that O'Neill has identified. Moreover, in the case of the virtue of caring, the Kantian test of universalizability can be applied. As she puts it:

> Inclusive principles of indifference to and neglect of others also cannot be universalised. The underlying principles of a range of more specific required social virtues that are relevant to particular situations and at particular times can then be derived from the fact that agents have reason to reject principles of indifference or neglect.[15]

Not only does this argument show that caring is a virtue, but it also shows that virtues can be required by practical reason. While some virtues are "optional excellences," many are obligatory and follow from the principle of justice. Caring is such a virtue.

It follows from this that principles of action and what O'Neill calls "principles of virtue" are not two sides of a bifurcated conception of morality. Justice and caring do not stand within opposing conceptions of what morality is. Both of them are equally derivable from the nature of practical reason in a social context. If we accept her many other arguments, which I have not been able to detail here, that show that the divide between particularists and universalists cannot be as complete as is commonly supposed, then it would appear that O'Neill has made her case.

But do O'Neill's arguments succeed in completely overcoming the distinction that I have described above? If one of the issues underlying this distinction is the relative importance given to reason on the one hand and motivations and feelings on the other, then it is striking that her argument makes caring a virtue on the basis of a minimal set of presuppositions of practical reason. In this way it is reason that mandates care and concern. But the position of many proponents of caring is that it should be care and concern that motivate reason. In the light of this difficulty it should be noted that in the introduction to her book O'Neill explicitly rules out any consideration of moral motivation. She insists that there has not been a successful philosophical account of such motivation and that, therefore, the basis for moral thinking must be sought in practical reason alone. The main problem that this leads to is the one that I have already identified above. When she comes to describe the attitudes to others that morality requires, or the moral standing that others should be given, she shifts from describing the assumptions about others that rationality must bring with it on pain of being irrational, to advocating those attitudes as morally required. But she cannot have it both ways. Either moral agents always already acknowledge the moral standing of others or they are morally beholden to do so. If they are morally beholden to do so, then we are owed an argument for the existence of this obligation. Such an argument begs the question if it asserts that we already assume that others have moral standing. O'Neill does offer such an argument when she espouses the social virtues. But if virtues are defined as obligations to others without corresponding rights held by those others, then moral standing would appear to be a fatally weakened moral notion. It would appear that respect for persons is something that we are mandated to show to relevant others but that they cannot demand as a right. This would appear to turn the virtue of justice into a form of charity, a view that many libertarians will find attractive but one that hardly secures the unity of morality.

The difficulty here is that if motivation, or what Kant had called "inclination," is removed from our consideration, then practical reason becomes removed from the motivations and concerns that give it direction. Without caring, practical reason can have no goal. While it is true that practical reason extends beyond just the agent of action and applies to all similarly placed agents, this formal extension of scope does nothing to determine what practical reason is to be about. The shift from considering others as agents like me to considering the effect that my actions have on them cannot be made so surreptitiously. That we should avoid injuring others is an intuitively sound principle of justice, but it is not clear how it can be constructed on the basis of the assumptions that O'Neill says are inherent in minimal practical reason. At some point we need to acknowledge the need for beneficent as well as non-maleficent motivations. Is it really only its incoherence when put into effect that suggests to us that a principle of gratuitously injuring others is morally evil? Surely moral theory should acknowledge that it would be good if we did not *want* to injure others.

At a more theoretical level, the problem here is one of "externalism" versus "internalism." Externalism suggests that reasons apply to and motivate agents simply by virtue of their cogency or warrantability. Internalism denies this and argues that a reason can be compelling for an agent only if that agent is aware of the reason and already has a corresponding motivation.[16] I can only find the fact that it is raining a compelling reason to take an umbrella if I know it is raining and actually want to stay dry. In the case of O'Neill's principle of justice, internalists would argue that an agent can only find the rational principle that an agent should avoid doing systemic or gratuitous injury to others compelling if that agent cares about those others in some way. The favorite phrase of externalists is that agents "have a reason" to act in a certain way. Agents even "have a reason" to act in this way when it is objectively in their interest to do so but without their knowing that it is. For an internalist an agent does not "have a reason" but acts "from" a reason. For internalists, good reasons are motivational. Notice that in the quotation above, O'Neill says, "Agents have reason to reject principles of indifference or neglect." It appears that pure, unmotivated, practical reason does all the work here. While O'Neill might have successfully closed the gap between universalists and particularists and between principlists and virtue ethicists, she has not closed the gap between internalists and externalists. She has not given us an account of how good reasons motivate us and others similarly placed to act in accordance with them. Accordingly she has not closed the gap between justice and caring either. Indeed, she has completely ignored caring understood as a "moral sentiment" necessary to motivate moral action.

2. Paul Ricoeur

Acknowledging as he does the striving for becoming that drives human existence, and that is central to what I call subjectivity, Ricoeur's focus is squarely on motivation, albeit in a different sense from that used by psychologists. In order to see this we will need to take a step back in order to describe the theoretical bases of Ricoeur's thinking. While I am enlisting Ricoeur as a party to a debate in moral philosophy, that was not his purpose in writing his book *Oneself as Another*.[17] Instead, his aim was to explore how personal identity (in the sense of *who* we are, instead of in the sense of the problem of our continued existence as persons) is secured within the social and historical contexts in which persons find themselves. Ricoeur avoids the extremes of seeing our identities as fully constituted by the interpersonal and social contexts to which we are subject, on the one hand, and of seeing our identity as created entirely by an uncaused existentialist self-making, on the other. For Ricoeur, our identity is formed in our "attestation" of our being in the factual context in which we find ourselves, in the mutual acknowledgment that undergirds our communication with others, and in collective social praxis. The notion of "attestation" acknowledges the fact that our existential project of self-making and our affirmation of ourselves occurs in the context of a social and intersubjective world, instead of in the isolated and self-assertive sphere that Nietzsche and Sartre stress. Indeed, our self-making just *is* our relating ourselves to others in one form or another. For Ricoeur, we become who we are when we address others and they address us. Included in his account is an exploration of the identity that comes to expression when we deliberate and act as ethical agents. As opposed to the third person, descriptive, and explanatory accounts of what it is to be as a person so beloved of

Anglophone philosophy and of the social sciences, Ricoeur explores what it is for me to affirm my identity as shaped through active engagement with the world, through dialogic interchange with others, and through my own celebration of my identity. This involves not only the first person point of view highlighted by the phenomenological and existentialist traditions but also the second person point of view highlighted by those who, like Buber and Levinas, explore interpersonal encounter. How I address particular others and how they address me is importantly constitutive of my identity.

Given the mutuality inherent in this perspective, Ricoeur is able to suggest that my identity is constituted in a form that is not ontologically or epistemologically distinct from the form of the identity of others. The first person point of view does not provide privileged access to the self. How I am addressed by others is also constitutive of my identity, as are the descriptions and imputations that others place upon me. In an interpersonal context, I understand myself as another.

It would be impossible to do justice to the scope of Ricoeur's highly syncretistic book in this chapter. Indeed, it will be difficult enough to explicate the three chapters in it that I will invoke as being relevant to my theme. The importance of seeing the wider context of these chapters, however, is that it helps explain the unique light that Ricoeur can throw on the problems in moral theory that I have identified. And the importance of offering an all too brief survey of the content of these chapters is that it is in their overarching trajectory, instead of in their detailed arguments, that Ricoeur makes his thesis clear.

3. The Ethical Aim

For Ricoeur, our motivation for ethical behavior is understood in the Aristotelian form of an inherent *telos* or goal for human existence or subjectivity instead of in the form of occurrent psychological states. Whereas Aristotle had argued that it is an inherent tendency of all human beings to seek *eudaimonia*, Ricoeur interprets this teleological conception of human existence as suggesting that we all have an "ethical aim": namely, "the desire to live well with and for others in just institutions."[18] This aim occupies the same place in Ricoeur's theory as *eudaimonia* does in Aristotle's. It is an inherent tendency or aim arising from our natures as human beings, much as the tendency to seek light could be seen as an inherent aim in many plants.

I will explicate the content of this aim presently. But first, a methodological remark is called for. While this ethical aim is clearly a positive interpretation of what it is natural for human beings to pursue, it is important to see that it is not just akin to the optimism about human nature of a Rousseau as opposed to the contrasting pessimism of a Hobbes. While Ricoeur does not deny that human beings also evince an inclination toward evil, the key point is that he is not proposing empirical hypotheses about human nature that would be subject to support or refutation by observations of what human beings have done in history and in different cultures. Instead, he is offering us an interpretative framework. Ricoeur's methodology is that of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics seeks to understand and interpret human events in terms of a broader and often implicit view or "pre-understanding" that we might call the "horizon" of the understanding that we come to. Such a "pre-understanding" contains the implicit and often inchoate conceptions of the "whole" of which the event or text being investigated

is a "part." Of course, there is a circularity here. The part is to be understood in the light of the whole, but the whole cannot but be understood as constituted by its parts. To think that it was to be understood as "more" than the sum of its parts would be to embark on metaphysics because it would require us to think beyond the phenomena in order to posit an interpretative framework. This circularity is not deemed vicious because the task of hermeneutics is not that of finding ultimate epistemological or explanatory foundations. It is simply that of understanding human phenomena in the best light that is available.[19] Ricoeur's view that all human beings have the ethical aim that he posits is not a metaphysical claim (as it might have been for Aristotle). It simply articulates a framework that allows us to make sense of personal, social, and historical phenomena in such a way that positive events will be interpreted as expressions of this ethical aim, while evil will be interpreted as arising from distortions of it. There is no attempt at explaining historical events or specific actions in terms of ethical motivations or reasons. Subjectivity is not a causal category. Just as there is no epistemological priority given to subjectivity in his phenomenology, so there is no causal priority given to it in his conception of the human sciences. Ricoeur is articulating an inherent understanding of what it means to be a person instead of an empirical or metaphysical theory about human nature.

Such an interpretation is not only important in that it articulates a pre-understanding that is a possible basis upon which to make sense of history, but also because it uncovers a pre-understanding that makes it possible to enter into discourse with one another about matters of value. As we will see when we explore Ricoeur's conception of pluralist liberal politics, there is a need for real historical people and peoples to talk to one another about the goods of human life. Such a discourse, no matter how extremely polarized the value positions that separate people may be, must still rely on a minimal shared conception of the human good instead of merely on non-coercive procedures for discourse.[20] The ethical aim can be offered as such a shared value.

My thesis in this chapter is that the concept of caring can be filled out with Ricoeur's notion of the ethical aim. Theories of caring are relatively vague on the question of what an agent cares for or about, and most point away from the self. Some see caring as feelings of compassion for, and empathy with, others. Others see it as concern for the well-being of particular others. Others again see it as a form of commitment to the good of others, sometimes in professional contexts. Ricoeur is working within the tradition of thought stemming from Heidegger and his notion of *Sorge* that sees caring as a primordial mode of our being as *Dasein* (that is, our historically situated existence in the world). In this sense, caring is an expression of our striving for being in the world and with others, and of our anxiety in the face of non-existence. In this sense, caring is a fundamental mode of subjectivity (although Heidegger does not use the latter term). If it were permissible for me to correlate this Heideggerian strain of thought with the Aristotelian, then I could postulate that the ethical aim is a form of the primordial caring of *Dasein* and of the fundamental *telos* of human existence. Given the content of the ethical aim, it is a form that articulates in a single holistic formula our concern for our own existence, for that of significant others, and for that of justice in society.

Ricoeur distinguishes ethics from morality.[21] Ethics expresses our pursuit of a good life in the form of the just mentioned ethical aim, whereas morality is a system of rules and obligations to which all rational persons are held to be subject. It will be his argument that in a complex social world the ethical aim of

living well with and for others in just institutions will require the guidance of moral norms, but that these norms gain their motivational power and justification from the ethical aim instead of from any transcendental validity inherent in those norms. This will be especially clear in cases where norms relevant to a situation give rise to moral dilemmas. In such cases, responsible agents will need to have recourse to the ethical aim that is the inherent goal of their being. But before we explicate Ricoeur's arguments on these points I should say more about his conception of the ethical dimension of our lives.

A. Expressed at the Ethical (Teleological) Level as:

Ricoeur offers a phenomenological argument in favor of his positing of the ethical aim: namely, that we all seek "self-esteem." I interpret this to mean that we all have a fundamental existential need to feel good about ourselves. Again, while this is akin to the ideas of humanistic psychologists for whom the idea has an explanatory importance, I consider it more in tune with existentialist theses about human existence being interpretable as a form of self-formation and self-affirmation (although Ricoeur is careful to distance himself from "egological" views of the self). At the level of the individual, self-esteem arises from the fulfillment of our ideals where the latter are understood as our nested set of objectives ranging from the goals of specific projects and the purposes of our profession, for example, to the aims of the projected narrative unity of our entire lives. Once again, the most all-embracing and the least contingent of these ends will be the ethical aim itself.

The true originality of Ricoeur's insights arises from his seeing that the ethical aim has three dimensions or levels. Self-esteem does not arise just from our concern with our own aspirations. It has an interpersonal dimension in which self-esteem is realized by the confirmation of others, and a sociopolitical dimension in which it is completed by our role in just institutions.

Ricoeur's position, when fully elaborated, may be schematically represented in a chart (which I will explicate below) as follows:

The ethical aim:	**Expressed at the ethical (teleological) level as:**	**Expressed at the moral (deontological) level as:**	**Expressed in "tragic action" and political discourse as:**
The desire to live well,	Self-esteem	Autonomy giving rise to self-respect	Conviction
with and for others,	Solicitude and reciprocity	The Golden Rule: Others as ends instead of as means	Critical solicitude
in just institutions.	Equality and a sense of common purpose	Formal principles of justice	Pluralist liberal politics

Ricoeur explicates the interpersonal aspects of the ethical aim with reference to Aristotle's account of friendship. On this account, so-called "character" friendship (as opposed to friendships based on the usefulness or the pleasurableness of the friends to each other) is a development of "self-love" in that the friend is recognized as "another self." That is, friendship is built on a reciprocity between selves so that the other is loved as another self and vice versa. There is a symmetry in friendship, in that friends mutually recognize themselves, with both their virtues and their needs, in each other. In this way my friend is both a mirror of my character and thus a confirmation of my self-esteem and also a reflection of my need and thus an object of my solicitude or caring. I am solicitous for my friend just as I am solicitous for myself. It is possible to characterize the interpersonal relationships between people as able to be ranged on a spectrum where at one extreme the other calls out to me in their need so as to elicit my willing ethical response,[22] and at the other extreme the other is a "master of justice" who commands my obedience. The parameters of *my* response range, on this model, from active to passive, and the parameters of the conception of the *other* range from the passive suffering one who is in need, to the active commanding other who enjoys moral authority. Friendship sits in the middle of such a spectrum, in that it is marked by reciprocity between the friends. Each party in friendship is constituted by the other as both an active and passive self in the relationship. In friendship I am both a help to the other and in need of help from that other. In friendship I experience the other as a self and I experience myself as another. As such, friendship is a uniquely apt form for the shaping of who I am.

One key point that arises from this analysis is that friendship is marked by "solicitude." Caring about the other is an essential aspect of my existence in the context of those interpersonal relationships that partake in one degree or another of the qualities of friendship. And, moreover, this solicitude is an expression, in the context of interpersonal relationships, of the very ethical aim that can give rise to self-esteem in the individual context. It is a modification of such self-esteem elicited by the presence of the other who is my friend. Ricoeur describes this solicitude as "benevolent spontaneity."[23] This captures well what is intended by the notion of "caring" and the contrast between it and adherence to principles. Solicitude is more fundamental in our being, he says, than obedience to duty.

The ethical aim also finds expression at the social level of our existence. If solicitude constitutes the self as open to the individual other, then the ethical aim at the social level constitutes the self as one who is concerned for justice. In this context the other is not any particular other but an "each." Correspondingly, the self is established as an "each." It is the mark of impartial thinking that, all things being equal, the same consideration should be given to each, oneself included. This broadening of solicitude toward others "without particular faces" expresses equality as a goal of our inherent ethical aim: a goal that needs to be articulated through institutions instead of relationships. Ricoeur places less stress on the inescapable power relations and constraints that arise within institutions than upon their enabling and structuring effects: that is, on their being the form of the social life and solidarity of a community. Again, following Aristotle, Ricoeur suggests that the implicit aim of working together socially is prior to any formal arrangements or forms of social organization that may emerge historically from this aim. It is this inherent aim, instead of the postulation of an historical event or of a mere thought experiment, that is the true meaning, suggests Ricoeur, of the social contract tradition. Whereas the I–You relation of face-to-face solicitude is

given at a definite time, institutions, as the working together of a people, have a temporal span into a future and a past in either history or mythology. These shared aspirations and meanings define public space and social solidarity. But instead of swallowing the individual into a social totality, this collective context shapes the individual's ethical aim so that it becomes the pursuit of justice for each. In this context, justice is understood as the virtue of giving each his due and of avoiding injustice.

Ricoeur suggests that distributive justice is a more basic concern within the ethical aim than is reparative justice. The key issue for our ethical aim expressed at the social level as the virtue of justice is what share of social goods each should have. Equality is, however, but one historically contingent form that such justice might take. For Aristotle, for example, distribution should be in accordance with merit instead of equality. Whether equality is literal or modulated through merit, however, this notion establishes each as a node in a set of considerations as to what is due to each and also establishes the self as such a node. The self is thus set up as an "each" equally with each other. Instead of being absorbed as a cog in social machinery or standing aside from society as a claimant upon it, the self is realized as a social being by its inherent pursuit of justice at the third level of its ethical aim.

On the account that Ricoeur has offered thus far, it would appear that the caring and justice perspectives are still distinct. A concern for justice is of a different order from a concern for others as individuals. Whereas the ethical aim is expressed toward particular others with whom we have a more or less reciprocal face-to-face relationship as solicitude or caring, it is expressed at the sociopolitical level as a commitment to justice. Many have argued that there is a continuity between our caring for others and our broader ethical and political commitments.[24] Moreover, there are those theorists of caring who would argue that caring is a fundamental moral motivation that flows out, as it were, from the loved ones and family members for whom we care most immediately, to our friends, colleagues, and clients, and from there to anonymous others whose suffering we might see on the evening news. In this way our generalized concern for others is an extension of our face-to-face caring. This is the view of "moral sentiments" that goes back to Hume. But what kind of self is constituted by such caring? It is a self who cares and who remains at the centre of the expanding circle of moral consideration. This self remains superior, privileged, and in pursuit of reciprocation. It is the one who extends pity and is, for that reason, disdained by Nietzsche. On Ricoeur's account, in contrast, the form that the ethical aim takes at the sociopolitical level constitutes the self as an "each." This self is neutral in its self-concern. It is simply a node in a system of justice. It seeks no privilege or reciprocation, but sees itself simply as a unit in a system of distribution. It deserves no more nor less than anyone else. It follows that there is no continuity between solicitude for others and commitment to justice. If this were all that Ricoeur had said on the matter, the bifurcation of moral theory that I described at the beginning of this chapter would remain intact.

B. Expressed at the Moral (Deontological) Level as:

I now move to the third column of my table. Ricoeur agrees with those proponents of "morality" who argue that the ethical aim inherent in every individual's life must be subjected to moral norms. Whereas Aristotle's account of human goodness is in the "optative mode" in that it speaks of human desire

and teleology, we have need too of Kant's "imperative mode." Whereas the typical form of a moral norm is the negative "though shalt not," we are also motivated by our positive ethical aim, as the quotation at the head of this chapter suggests. Accordingly, we are constituted as moral subjects by the responsibilities, duties, permissions, and obligations that are imputed to us in society and by our willingness to adhere to these. But while the moral mode of existence is marked by constraint and duty, the self who understands itself to be so constrained cannot but understand everyone else to be so constrained for reasons I have explicated in this chapter with reference to O'Neill. The moral subject is a universalized subject. Kant is right to abstract moral decisions from contingent desire to establish what is good without qualification by a process of universalization. Inclination in whatever form is to be set aside because it is specific to individuals. This process of universalization is articulated in the first form of the categorical imperative, *Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*. The genius of Kant's theory, of course, is that it is precisely this process of universalization that constitutes the self as autonomous: that is, as not subject to "heteronomous" inclinations (that is, inclinations that arise from sources other than reason: sources like desire, habit, and social formation). Seeing as it is grounded in the nature of practical reason itself, universalization expresses our human being as free and rational. Kant's idea is that the self obeys the very law that it gives itself through practical reason. If the duties and imperatives that are imposed on subjects from other sources lack inherent motivating power, as externalism suggests, this problem is solved for the categorical imperative by its positing duty as an exercise of freedom. Instead of being characterized by obedience to external constraint, our moral identity is an expression of an abstract and formal self-motivating autonomy.

But Ricoeur hints that Kant's claims for autonomy might be too strong.[25] He reminds us that Kant does not posit a purely abstract, formal, and universalized moral subject marked only by freedom (except in the ideal type of a "divine will," a will that is not subject to any heteronomous influences). Moral subjects are still historical and social agents who are influenced by non-rational motivation and inclination. As opposed to an abstracted Kantian free agent, a real self would be marked by a degree of passivity insofar as it is subject to the continuing presence of inclination. But while there are bad affects that we should overcome, such as the self-love that would lead us to make ourselves an exception to the moral law, there are also good affects that are necessary to us as moral agents, such as the veneration of reason and freedom in ourselves and in others. The second must not be rejected in an attempt to render the first irrelevant to morality. Even if there is a self-love that leads us to do evil, there is also a valid form of affect or inclination in the Kantian system. The law must affect the will through the latter's respect for the law. The respect that is owed to others, in that they are to be treated as ends instead of merely as means, is also an affect. These affects are a transformation of self-esteem in that, in the process of universalization, the other is seen as a self and the self as another. The moral law applies to all without exception. So if all are to be respected, the self is to be respected. The subjectivity of the self becomes somewhat more objective as it adopts the form of a moral agent. In this way, at the level of the individual, morality constitutes a transformation and development of the ethical aim and its forms of solicitude instead of a counter to that aim. At the individual level of my

chart this yields a form of self-esteem that has passed the test of universalizability and that Ricoeur calls "self-respect."

Ricoeur also points out that the phenomenon of evil raised a quandary for Kant. Does evil arise from inclination, so that it is an expression of heteronomy, or is it a free choice, albeit one that is not universalizable, so that it is an expression of autonomy? Kant acknowledges that what he calls "radical evil" is the latter. Thus free choice contains not just the source of human good, but also of human evil. This is the reason that ethics must assume the imperative form of morality and have its maxims tested by universalizability.[26] And it is a further reason why, when the individual lives in accordance with this law, he or she gains a form of self-esteem that Ricoeur distinguishes with the name self-respect. But this also explains why morality does not displace or subsume the ethical aim. If evil is not to be chosen, it needs to fail more than a purely rationalistic test of universalizability. Such a test leaves us free to choose it because reason does not bind our motivations. Evil must also fail the test of accordance with our inherent ethical aim. To see this more clearly, we need to move our analysis to the interpersonal level at which the ethical aim is transformed into moral norms that relate to others.

As we saw in our discussion of the ethical expression of our inherent ethical aim in relation to others, the hallmarks of ethical identity in this context are reciprocity and mutuality. I see myself as another and the other as a self. This suggests to Ricoeur that the Golden Rule is a fully adequate articulation of what becomes obligatory at this level. In the Golden Rule we are asked to do to or for others what we would have them do to or for us. That is, we are asked to assure reciprocity in our actions. This expresses a reciprocal form of solicitude. I am concerned for the other as a self and expect the other to be concerned for myself as another. But the Golden Rule also acknowledges the dissymmetry between the active and passive aspects of action. It acknowledges that action constitutes some selves as agents and others as the ones done to. And it then asks us to see ourselves in either category. Contrast this with Kant. The form of the categorical imperative that is relevant when we focus upon the effect of our actions upon others is: *Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end*. Notice that mention is first made of "humanity." Kant obscures the dissymmetry between agents and recipients of actions by speaking of "humanity," which is an abstract universal term drawing no such distinction. Moreover, as he moves from humanity to persons as ends-in-themselves he still does not acknowledge the dissymmetry of the passive/active distinction within actions. If I am the agent, then the other is the passive recipient of my action. But Kant's moral movement toward others does not recognize the otherness of others, in that it equates the agent's own autonomy with the autonomy of others (as ends-in-themselves) in a purely formal way. In Kant's conception, the agent is still privileged. Accordingly, Ricoeur is of the view that the Golden Rule expresses the normative form of solicitude more adequately than the categorical imperative. Be that as it may, the key point for my argument is still that the norm of respect for others as ends in themselves is a deontological form of the solicitude for others that is a part of our inherent ethical aim. In our interaction with particular others, caring and justice need not be in opposition.

Ricoeur bases his discussion of the social and institutional level of his schema on the claim that the influential liberal conception of justice espoused by John Rawls[27] is inadequate to express the ethical aim when it concerns itself with

social justice. This is because it confines itself to the legalistic, formal, and procedural aspects of justice. The Rawlsian conception of justice abstracts itself from people's conceptions of the good in order to establish a public sphere in which the only values are liberty and fairness in the distribution of social goods. The different conceptions that people might have as to what constitutes a good life are confined to the private sphere. This distinction is another echo of the bifurcation of justice and caring. Many moral theorists see caring as a virtue or a personal good but one that is essentially private. The only thing that matters in the public sphere is that we act in accordance with universally acceptable norms.

Ricoeur begins this argument by suggesting that distributive justice is an ambiguous concept: it could be about the separation of what belongs to me from what belongs to another, or it could be seen as a means for sharing social goods and securing cooperation in a community. Although Ricoeur does not use the terms, this distinction appears to correspond to the distinction between libertarian and socialist conceptions of justice. This ambiguity raises the question of how our *sense* of justice is engaged. Is it in the pursuit of our own rights, or in the pursuit of justice for others and in society as a whole? Ricoeur's point is that justice is a term that, because of this ambiguity, cannot be used in abstraction from the conception of the good that members of society pursue. Accordingly Rawls is wrong to posit a purely formal and procedural conception in which institutional arrangements that would be endorsed under the conditions of the "original position" would secure justice. Social contract theory builds on the notions of autonomy and of not using the other as means by imagining a fictive founding contract between rational self-interested parties deciding on the institutional structures of society without knowledge of how the outcome will affect them. Ricoeur argues, however, that Rawls ultimately depends on intuitions of justice that are not purely procedural. While Rawls's sense of fairness appears to mean no more than "acceptable to self-interested parties under conditions of ignorance," the rejection of any policy that would sacrifice any for the sake of the greater good could be motivated not just by the fear that I might myself be the victim but also by the conviction that no one should be used as a means. This in turn could be just as motivated by solicitude and the Golden Rule as by the rational requirements of self-interested autonomy. Ricoeur concludes that the allocation of shares of social goods cannot be decided upon purely procedurally. There must also be comprehensive debate about the goods involved and their relative weights.[28] According to Ricoeur, it follows that the deontological, moral principles of justice derive from an ethical *sense* of justice. Of course, Rawls admits this with his methodological requirement for "reflective equilibrium." The arrangements we agree to must conform to our sense of fairness. But Ricoeur would expand on this. He would argue that our conception of justice at the institutional level must be expressive of our ethical aim and thus carry with it a comprehensive conception of the human good that we care about.

Ricoeur's problem with Rawls, as also with Kant, is that Rawls's project is governed by the universality of autonomy at the individual level and of the norm that we must not use others as a means at the interpersonal level. When this form of thinking is extended to the social and institutional level, it yields the kind of procedural justice that Rawls espouses. But will the concept and value of autonomy support this much theoretical weight?

Autonomy was seen by Kant as a "fact of reason:" an assumption that we could not but make. Ricoeur interprets this idea so that it does not mean that this "fact" is established on a rational foundation or assumed as a necessary postulate.

Instead, it is attested to by the self-affirmation of individuals. It is not so much discovered as declared as an inevitable expression of self-esteem. This conception relies upon Ricoeur's stress on the second person point of view, in which you address the other so as to attest to your own ethical identity. But this means that, instead of being rationally or metaphysically necessary, the "fact" of autonomy is historically contingent. Social and historical conditions can be such that individuals do not attest to it and, instead, accept domination. This is why autonomy is not just a fact of reason that can be discovered, but an attestation that has to be remade in history. It follows that it is not just a fact. It is an attestation that expresses an ethical value, in Kant's terms that of a good will, in political terms that of liberty. Therefore the deontological system of thought that is grounded in the concept of autonomy itself depends on a teleological system of thought expressed in an attestation of the human good.

It is central to Kant's notion of the "good will" that we should not use others as a means. Ricoeur interprets this norm also as something that is "always known" and is attested to in our ethical stances. This, again, is not unlike O'Neill's point that our according moral standing to others is something like an assumption we make within practical reason or Taylor's point that our "strong evaluations" are central to our very identity. Ethical "intuitionists" would say that it is an intuition. Of course, like autonomy, it can also be forgotten if exploitative social conditions prevail. But Ricoeur doubts whether a fully developed and freestanding deontological conception of justice can be built simply on this intuitive basis. If autonomy and not using persons as means are values whose rational justification can be given motivational force by their being attested to, then they can also fail to have motivational force when they are not attested to. Throughout history many people have become accustomed to domination. For such people the ideals of autonomy and of not using others as means would be inoperative. Even today in the West, the ideals of procedural liberalism are fragile to the extent that they are not based on a conception of justice that accords with people's substantive ethical commitments. The soundness of purely rational argument does not overcome this fragility if justice is not supported by caring. Moreover, Ricoeur suggests that if a purely rational proceduralism were to dominate public discourse the risk would arise that even autonomy and the norm that we should not use others as means will be forgotten once more. To avoid this we should not lose sight of their basis in our inherent "desire to live well with and for others in just institutions."

C. Expressed in "Tragic Action" and Political Discourse as:

It is moral conflict that takes Ricoeur's arguments onto a new level and into a new column on my table. There are at least two conceptions of moral conflict. There is the conception of moral dilemmas that arise when differing principles apply to a situation and urge conflicting courses of action. In such cases, we cannot honor one norm without violating another. In such cases, suggests Ricoeur, we need to have recourse to our ethical aim and act in accordance with those values to which we are most deeply committed. And this is a reason for thinking that our ethical aim is the more fundamental motivational stratum in our ethical lives. But there is another, more theoretical conception of moral conflict. This is exemplified by the debate between the caring perspective and the justice perspective and its many echoes in the literature of moral theory. It is the conflict between what Ricoeur calls the ethical (teleological) levels and the moral

(deontological) levels on the table. Those who would respond to my explication of the earlier form of conflict by saying that even an agent's most fundamental convictions must be tested by norms would be giving priority to the moral, while those who say that if you genuinely expresses caring or the ethical aim then what you do is for that reason right would be giving priority to the ethical.

Ricoeur argues that, if ethics and morality are in conflict, this is not to be resolved by preferring contextualism to universalism, where contextualism means making a decision in accordance with a *phronésis*-like judgment while universalism would involve agents applying the test of universalizability to their maxims. Ricoeur is not a particularist. Instead, Ricoeur discusses the ancient Greek tragedy of *Antigone* in order to illustrate what he calls "tragic action." His exegesis shows that moral dilemmas arise not just from a clash of universals but also from a clash of convictions that are rooted in metaphysical beliefs, traditions, or myths. And it is in concrete situations that the clash must be resolved. Tragic wisdom is the recognition that norms and moral theories do not settle conflicts. What is needed is conviction. Conviction is here understood as a fundamental ethical belief that comes to expression in attestation or action. It is not unlike the notion of "intuition" that is so often appealed to by moral theorists in the Anglophone tradition when argument appears to fall short of warranting an ethical judgment. In his discussion of *Antigone*, Ricoeur shows that, because the ethical convictions of the protagonists have their origin in religion, myth, and tradition, they are held with the kind of commitment that makes compromise impossible and that leads to tragedy. For their part, the convictions of the audience are born from, or reinforced by, the process of catharsis involving fear and pity that Aristotle has described. While these reflections explain but do not resolve moral conflict, they clearly give priority to people's non-rational ethical formation over their moral reasoning. They suggest that conflicts are often irresolvable and that the appropriate response to such conflicts is to combine a tragic outlook with ethical decisiveness, instead of appealing to theory to provide solutions.

But Ricoeur is uneasy with this position. He explores other alternatives, this time in an order of exposition that reverses the pattern of his previous two chapters. He begins this chapter at the social and political level by asking whether there is a possibility that politics might serve to transcend the conflict between ethics and morality. Can the state resolve the tragic dilemmas that arise from individual or group convictions? Does the state embody transcendent values at a higher level? This was the suggestion of Hegel when he posited a third synthesizing term called *Sittlichkeit*.[29] Ricoeur rejects this idea on the well-known grounds of its totalitarian tendencies. The position he prefers has become known in the Anglophone literature as "moral pluralism." The key points here are already familiar from our discussion above. They are that conceptions of the good influence how justice is conceived and therefore the goals of politics. The libertarian/socialist divide between justice as individual rights versus justice as community sharing of goods, for example, cannot be readily resolved in a polity whose history is marked by domination instead of shared power. Although there can be no "higher" morality to resolve the conflict between ethics and norms, there can be comprehensive ethical discourse. Such a discourse must be marked by "critical solicitude" on the part of participants and must embrace their "convictions" (which are terms that Ricoeur will go on to explicate in later sections of his chapter). It must also be uncoerced and pluralist. Public policy debates require particular judgements of the good expressing the convictions of

individuals and communities, tested by norms, and subjected to the discipline of discourse. If there is an overarching set of ethical positions that should influence politics, it should be the liberal respect for contextualized judgment and a tolerance for diversity. What will be needed to motivate this is a sense of justice based upon solicitude.

Ricoeur continues to be fascinated by Kant's importance for this discussion of pluralism. He argues that the version of Kant's categorical imperative that renders our solicitude for others into deontological form, and that I cited above, has a universalist clause that mentions humanity in the abstract and a pluralist clause that mentions persons as ends in themselves. So far as the affects that motivate obedience to the law are concerned, this distinction can give rise to respect for law versus respect for persons. The first of these is universal in form, while the second is particular. Which is the more appropriate reading of the imperative? Like O'Neill, Ricoeur defends Kant against those who argue that Kant's formalism leads to vacuity. If the categorical imperative were to be given a purely universalist reading, there might be some force in this objection. But Kant understands full well that the norms he is propounding are substantive and imply concrete goods to be achieved. When rules are applied to concrete situations, the otherness of persons demands to be recognized in the context of their particular needs and values. So there needs to be a combination of *phronésis* understood as particular judgment together with critical thinking understood as applying the test of universalizability or of applying the Golden Rule. Ricoeur calls this "critical solicitude."

But critical solicitude is not just a fortuitous combination of the ethical and moral stances. Solicitude for the other should take precedence over critical thinking aimed merely at rational consistency. The needs and value of those others who are affected by my action may sometimes demand that the universalizable maxim not be the one that is followed. Kant's argument in favor of only ever following the universalizable value is that the test of universalizability is intended to rule out making an exception of ourselves because of selfishness. But what about making an exception for the sake of others? If I apply a maxim to a situation, may I not consider consequences for others? Solicitude would be expressed if I did, as would the Golden Rule. For whose sake do I keep promises, for example? Is it to ensure that self-love does not interfere with my actions? If this were so, it would be for the sake of my integrity that I keep the promise. Or is it because others should be able to count on me? Kant's somewhat monological conception of morality ignores this dialogic aspect, according to Ricoeur. From an ethical point of view, practical wisdom is required to judge how best to be available to the other instead of just applying the rule of consistency to promising. So critical solicitude is an interpersonal form of *phronésis*. Ethical motivations for our actions should have a greater influence on our decisions than the rational formulas of moral theory.

The clash between universalism and contextualism in decision making that echoes the distinction between the moral perspective of justice and the ethical perspective of caring is to be mediated by the practical wisdom of ethical judgment in situation. And such judgment is motivated by the ethical aim in all three of its aspects instead of by a need for purely abstract rational consistency.

Ricoeur goes on to argue against Kant that universalization is a quite poor idea of what consistency in a moral system consists in. Rational consistency in the moral sphere does not just consist in being able to conceive of the universalization of our maxims without some logical or purposive contradiction.

Instead, it comprises a reflective equilibrium of convictions. The logical structure of such an equilibrium would be quite complex, but might be illustrated by judicial systems that depend on precedents, statute law, and judgment, and that seek to create consistency between them in the context of concrete decisions. Ricoeur also mentions the use of critical reason in order to root out prejudice, ideology, and other distortions of our worldviews as an example of reason seeking a substantive instead of formal mode of consistency with itself. Once again, such a seeking of consistency will be motivated by our ethical aim.

Ricoeur also challenges some of the ideas of such neo-Kantians as Jürgen Habermas. Just as Rawlsian liberals set aside a substantive discussion of the human good in favor of a procedural conception of justice, Habermas and other proponents of discourse ethics set aside the influence of tradition, religion, and metaphysical beliefs on public policy debates in favour of an "ideal speech situation" in which inequalities of power have no influence on the outcome and in which the normative assumptions of speech pragmatics give a formal guarantee of valid consensus. In this way discourse ethics sets up procedural norms that allow the content of tradition and convention to be set aside. But, says Ricoeur, this reinstates formalism and refuses to discuss the historically conditioned substantive convictions of discussants. Yet it is these convictions that motivate citizens to either endorse distributive arrangements in society or not. No distribution of social goods is valid for purely universalist reasons. So far as Ricoeur is concerned, depending on an "ethics of argumentation" to legitimize social arrangements or institutions fails because it requires a form of "purification" of discourse akin to Kant's abstracting from inclination and Habermas's rejection of convention and tradition. Such purification makes discourse unreal. While not endorsing cultural relativism or subjectivism, Ricoeur opposes the universalism of the Kantian tradition by insisting that there must be a place in public discourse for conviction arising from solicitude, albeit that the latter should be in the form of critical solicitude. Argumentation requires conviction arising from tradition, biography, and social formation if it is to have point.[30] It is true that argumentation is the corrective and test to achieve "considered convictions" in "reflective equilibrium," but judgment is required when principles are applied. Such judgment is motivated by solicitude and conviction in order to become critical solicitude.

The upshot of these considerations is now becoming a commonplace in the philosophical literature. It is that rationality does not have the role of guaranteeing the correctness of our ethical decisions. Morality does not trump ethics. We are in the position described by the tragedians. We must put our convictions into effect, having given due consideration to them and to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We must make a judgment drawing on the best that can be thought and the finest of our feelings. And we must then accept responsibility for what we do. Ultimately the identity that attests to itself in ethical decision making in the context of morally complex situations is one that can accept responsibility, one to whom responsibility can be imputed by others, and one whose attestation grounds self-esteem. It will be an identity that cares about others and seeks to express that solicitude in responsible action. And it will be an identity that seeks justice for itself and others in society with the assurance that its critical sense of justice is a sound barometer for what the moral law demands.

4. The Bifurcation Overcome

The unity of ethics, the reconciliation of the caring perspective and the justice perspective, and the theoretical resolutions of the debates between particularism and universalism and between principlism and virtue ethics are all achieved when we focus, as Ricoeur does, on the identity of moral agents. Who are these agents? Are they idealized autonomous thinkers applying the test of universalizability to their reasons for acting, or are they real people with convictions, responsibilities, and a tendency toward, or desire for, achieving self-esteem in the context of their reflection, their relationships, and their societies? Ricoeur has the methodological resources in phenomenology and hermeneutics to explicate such a conception of moral identity. Moreover, Ricoeur's syncretistic approach to the philosophical tradition allows him to produce a holistic conception in which the Aristotelian ethical aim is understood as motivating different manifestations of practical reason without completely rejecting the more formalist conceptions of Kant, Rawls, and Habermas. He disagrees only with the latter's "purification" of moral theory, which would seek to separate the historical, material, and motivational reality of moral agents from their practical reason. By implication, he would also criticize such Kantians as O'Neill who seek to ground their moral theories on "minimal" foundations. His critiques of these thinkers are intended to preserve what can be motivated by the ethical aim while rejecting whatever can only be understood in abstracted terms. If we agree with Ricoeur that the identity of moral agents is best established by way of their implicit pursuit of the ethical aim, then we will see that what such agents care about is as important for what will be accepted as just as are the moral principles that can be constructed from the necessary and minimal presuppositions of their rationality. In this way, their thinking in terms of what justice demands for "each" (where each includes themselves), while different in form from expressing solicitude for particular others, is nevertheless motivated by such solicitude and by concern for their own existential projects of grounding self-esteem. Caring suffuses and enlivens our moral stances and our advocacy of justice.

In contrast to O'Neill's externalism, an internalist conception of practical reason will have to be adopted in order to understand this. Such a conception of practical reason will look more like Aristotle's *phronésis* than Kant's test of universalizability. Only such a conception will re-establish the unity of ethics.

O'Neill might have been right to suggest that it was the absence of metaphysical beliefs about the human person that caused the bifurcation of ethics that she attempted to overcome. It is certainly true that Ricoeur's reunification depends upon some substantive claims about human beings: namely, that they inherently pursue an ethical aim and that this aim is a primordial level of ethical motivation that should be attested to in history. But are these claims metaphysical in nature? While there are echoes of the natural law tradition in these claims, they are offered with the backing of phenomenological evidence and in the form of hermeneutic postulates for understanding real historical persons instead of as metaphysical universal doctrines. Current philosophy is regaining some of its lost confidence in speaking about the human condition in such general terms.[31]

It might be objected that basing a conception of practical reason on the contingent historical realities of actual motivated persons robs such reason of its critical edge. If there can be no *a priori* foundation of moral thinking, then how can the apparently evil motivations that are shared by whole communities be judged to be wrong? The tragedy of the human condition is that there is no

simple answer to this question. The only thing that must be done is for the possibility of liberal discourse to be kept open. Only then may the few dissenting voices be heard that might be raised against collectively shared evil. If no such voices are raised, then neither philosophy nor history can stop the evil. And if such voices are raised, to what will they appeal? Will it be effective to appeal to a formal principle of duty or to a substantive vision of the human good? No philosophical proof is as likely to counter evil as is the promise of the realization of our ethical aim in concrete historical circumstances. Such a promise is held out in pluralist liberal discourse.

It may also be objected that an appeal to discourse ignores the historical fact that some groups and classes have been systemically excluded from such discourse. Aristotle's conception of the state allowed no room for full participation on the part of slaves, women, and children. Children are still excluded today, and, in the West, women are still struggling to complete the emancipation that they have only recently and partially achieved. Socio-economic class continues to be a source of exclusion also. But does history show that abstract philosophical argument has altered these conditions (and it is seldom the oppressed who create such arguments), or has it been the struggle of individuals and groups, making use of philosophical argument certainly, but also motivated by the ethical quest and expressed in militancy and determination? People have had to fight for the right to participate in social discourse. Such a fight is not based on pure reason, but on ethical motivation. It is attestation more than contemplation that fuels political change.

What sort of ethical subject is needed for pluralist liberal politics? Is it one who expresses pure reason under the rule of universalizability? No, it is one who achieves self-esteem by expressing solicitude for, and solidarity with, others. It is one who has deep convictions but is prepared to subject them to moral critique and to the rigors of uncoerced pluralist discourse so as to achieve justice for all. It is the attestation of our ethical aim that grounds our identity as ethical and political agents.

5. Debate in Bioethics

These considerations show that the caring perspective and the justice perspective both have a role in bioethics, with motivational priority given to the first. But this idea has further implications. Bioethics is both a public discourse and the framework for private ethical decision making. It is the name given to a defined sphere of public debates about government policy in relation to life-and-death decisions, genetic research, assisted reproductive technologies, and so forth. In this public domain, it marks off certain "experts" as bioethicists, who are quoted by the press, sit on commissions, write books, and develop a distinct field of scholarship.

Ricoeur's arguments tap into an ongoing debate about the nature of public policy discourses in pluralist liberal societies, discourses of which bioethics is an example. They suggest that there are moral norms that apply to such debates: norms that include those of tolerating diversity, presenting your position in forms that reasonable people can understand, and being prepared to abide by any consensus that emerges from such a discourse. The unfortunate fact is that some adherents of the natural law tradition, especially certain powerful factions within the Catholic Church, do not adhere to these standards. A recent book that

provides a striking example of this[32] argues that contemporary liberalism aids and abets a "culture of death." The contributors to this volume see themselves as an embattled minority engaged in a life-and-death struggle with evil forces within secular society. From the opening address of the late Cardinal Thomas Winning, who alludes to "moral crimes," "the face of evil," and the "ubiquitous tentacles ... of a social and cultural clime dominated by secularism," to the extraordinary rantings of Kateryna Cuddeback, who attributes the alleged conspiracy of Western governments to impose population control on the third world to the devil himself, we have here a quite paranoid collection of essays. There is even an essay by J. L. A. Garcia that argues that there is a justification for the killing of abortionists based on the idea of a preemptive defense of innocent human life. This book is a call to arms on the part of the most dogmatic and least compromising of Catholics and members of the "right to life" movement addressed to others of a like mind. It details how Catholic politicians should use legislative procedures to frustrate liberalizing tendencies on laws relating to abortion and euthanasia. It details how missionary hospitals should proselytize on behalf of the Pope's ban on contraception in countries where population is one of the many sources of extreme poverty. Its prescriptions are simplistic and harmful and are backed simply by faith in the benevolence of divine providence who, it is said, will prevent the horrendous outcomes that the best scientific minds of our times predict will occur if problems of population, environment, and poverty are not addressed. How such irrational and harmful positions can be countered by any person of good will remains an intractable problem in pluralist liberal societies.

But, as noted above, bioethics is not only a public discourse. It is also the framework for more private ethical decision making. Whatever might be happening in the public institutional forms of bioethics, many clinicians are faced with difficult decisions about these same matters in their professional practice. The fact that there are so many unresolved debates in the public sphere is of little help to these clinicians in making their decisions. While they should be informed about these debates and be aware of the policies and laws that apply in their institutions and societies, the official positions, even when they are unusually definite, often leave scope for particular interpretations and judgements. In these contexts, the substantive convictions of clinicians, their patients, and the latter's families that Ricoeur's arguments acknowledge, along with the need for critical thought applied to their solicitude, will be the basis upon which responsible decisions are made. Central to these convictions will be those that relate to life and death. I turn to a discussion of these convictions in the following chapters.

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Four

RESPECT FOR LIFE

> Since they constitute the *only* possible source of modifications in the genetic text, itself the *sole* repository of the organism's hereditary structures, it necessarily follows that chance *alone* is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other possible or even conceivable hypotheses.
>
> Jacques Monod[1]

Life is a phenomenon that is at once quite familiar and quite mysterious. It is familiar because we are alive ourselves and so we know, from the inside as it were, what it is to be alive. Moreover, health care workers are in daily contact with the biological reality of clients and patients. Apart from extreme emergency cases, they can tell readily enough for most purposes when a patient is alive or dead and feel confident about what this difference amounts to. And yet life is mysterious too. The knowledge that I have just mentioned is seldom explicit. When we begin to reflect on what life is we realize that our own being alive is difficult to describe or explain. We come to see that a body's being alive is a highly puzzling phenomenon. More generally, that there is life on this planet at all is a fact that is truly wonderful and awe-inspiring.

It is sometimes suggested that the very presence of life on this earth is a kind of miracle and that life is amongst the highest values that we should live by.[2] It is asserted that life is the most precious gift that a person can have: that almost any suffering is better than not being alive. It is argued that the killing of another human being is wrong for no further reason than that human life is of absolute value in itself. Environmentalists argue that the diversity of life on the planet has an intrinsic value and that human commercial interests must take second place to it. It is argued that animals are of inherent value and have rights simply because of the kind of life that they have: namely, a sentient form of life. In short, there is a virtue of respect for life based on the notion of the value of life. While it is not my intention to discuss all of these ideas in detail, I do want to understand what life is and thus to begin to understand why it might be valued and responded to in these ways.

Life raises metaphysical as well as ethical questions. Examples of such metaphysical questions include "What must be the nature of reality if life can appear in it?" and "What is the nature of life so as to ground its value?" And an example of such an ethical question is "What is the value of life and what does it demand of us in the way of an ethical response?" The metaphysics of life and the ethics of life are so closely related that they are often conflated into a single proposition such as that "Life is sacred." Some authors,[3] however, interpret this proposition in a purely ethical manner and take the so-called "principle of the

sanctity of life" to be equivalent to the moral prohibition against killing another human being. For my part, I think the metaphysical view is fundamental and is needed to provide a reason for the moral view. Our attitude to life and our sense of the obligations to which it might give rise will be a function of the metaphysical views that we hold about it. The mere fact that there is life on this planet is a "moral source" for us, in the sense that it can inspire ethical attitudes toward living things. It is our metaphysical understanding of life that grounds our feeling of the value of life, and both this understanding and this feeling are the bases of our norms in relation to it. From the first formulations of the Hippocratic oath to the different codes of ethics of most health care professions today, doctors, nurses, and other health care workers are urged to respect, protect, and preserve the life of their patients and clients. The most crucial fact about a patient in health care, and one that makes all the difference to what it is ethically appropriate to do for or to that patient, is that he or she is alive. But just what does this mean? And how might an understanding of the metaphysical idea that life is sacred shape the ethical responses of health care workers? What might virtuous health care workers make of the sheer fact of life and what should be their primordial motivational response to it? Why should health care professionals *care* about life?

To answer these questions I will need to make a number of distinctions and to delineate several distinct questions. The first question that I propose to explore is the metaphysical question of what life is. What sort of reality is a living entity? The further crucial question that flows from this is why life is valuable. I assume that the value of life stems from its nature. The thought that life is sacred is not the thought that it is valuable because people value it, but that it is valuable in itself. Accordingly, we will need to explore the nature of life as a possible grounding for such value. This in turn will lead to the question of why it is a virtue to have respect for life and to care about it.

1. Toward a Metaphysics of Life

What is life? This is not just a question posed by modern science. It is a timeless question that goes to the very heart of the meaning of human existence. Given that we are ourselves alive, the question of the nature of life is fundamental to our self-understanding as human beings. Instead of surveying all of the many views that have been developed on this question within the Western tradition or within other traditions, however, I want to approach the question in the light of contemporary science and the history of modern science.

An important theory in the Western scientific tradition, and one that still has some impact on modern thought is "vitalism." This was the view that a living system or an organism differs from a non-living or inert entity in that it is infused with a "vital fluid" or enlivened by a "vital force." It was never made entirely clear just what this vital fluid or force was. Some suggested that it was breath, while others posited mysterious non-bodily or "incorporeal" fluids that were spiritual in nature. That breath was involved may have been suggested by the fact that a dead animal or person no longer breathes. Of course, the range of living things extends well beyond animals with lungs, and so this view would fail to explain the life of those organisms that do not breathe. And so, as it became clear that the vital fluid or force might not have been identical with breath, other

suggestions were made, all of which have failed to stand up to the scrutiny of scientific testing.

This idea continues to fascinate, however, because the notion of a spiritual addition to an otherwise physical body is a theory that many people adhere to in an unreflective way. This view is a form of metaphysical dualism (most often referred to as simply "dualism" without qualification). Metaphysical dualism is the view that the world is made up of basically two kinds of entity: namely, physical or material entities on the one hand, and non-physical or spiritual entities on the other. The most famous example of dualism in the history of philosophy is Descartes' theory that a human being consists of a body and a mind existing in close interaction. The mind is the entity that thinks and is conscious, while the body is the entity that has such physical properties as weight and extension. Millions of words have been written about dualism and we cannot review this vast literature here. Suffice it to say that it is inconsistent with the world-view of contemporary science. Spiritual or mental entities are, by their very nature, not amenable to direct scientific description. They would be a case of the fallacy of explaining the mysterious (consciousness and thought, for example) by positing things that are even more mysterious (such as minds or souls). For this reason, a scientific world-view cannot be metaphysically dualistic. Science is committed by its very methodology to a non-dualistic world-view. For science there can only be one kind of reality, and that must be the kind of reality that its methodologies can investigate.

Whether we can still say all of the sensitive and caring things that we would want to say about human beings while confining ourselves to a scientific world-view is a question that has troubled many. The world-view of contemporary science has often been criticized for having "disenchanted" the world: that is, for having given us a vision devoid of the human dimension or of the poetic depth that we require of the place in which we have our human existence. We want to maintain a rich picture of the world and of human beings, but we think that science reduces this picture to that of mere causal processes. For my part, I do not think that science needs to be seen as reductionist and as disenchanting in this way, but I will not attempt to argue for this here.[4] But this theme will be one of the subtexts of the rest of this book.

The notion of spiritual entities inhabiting bodies also goes hand in hand with many religious world-views in which there are metaphysical entities such as souls and spiritual presences that are said to infuse and enliven material things. In this way, for example, it used to be thought that at the moment of conception a piece of biological material in the mother's body was infused with a soul so as to create a living being. In today's secular society such ways of speaking may be accepted as poetic or edifying ways of saying that something wonderful has occurred when life begins, but I will be assuming that they are inconsistent with (or at least unnecessary for) our scientific knowledge of how these things happen. This is not to suggest, however, as I will show below, that our scientific knowledge has clarified all the issues or removed the element of wonder from the phenomenon of life.

A more subtle variation of vitalism is the view that living things harbor purposes. This is sometimes called the "teleological" view of life. It is the view that events can be caused by the outcomes that they produce. Applied to the emergence of life in the world, it would be the view that nature has an inherent tendency to produce life or has it as its goal to produce life, and that that goal caused life to emerge. Modern science rejects this form of teleological thinking.

Inert matter cannot have goals, and causal explanations must cite causes that exist prior in time to their effects. A goal or an outcome is an effect, not a cause.

Of course there are some spheres of inquiry in which teleological thinking is appropriate. It is not contentious to suppose that rational human beings harbor goals and purposes. We act purposively all the time. We do things because we want to achieve some goal in doing so. But we think that this is possible for us because we think about what we do and about what purposes we might want to pursue. Harboring purposes is thought to be impossible for entities that do not think. This appears to be obviously true of inert things like rocks and it is fairly obvious in the case of plants. But many animals appear to behave in purposeful ways. The anti-teleologist would answer this by saying that, while it may be true that their behavior can be described as that of pursuing goals, this will not be because these creatures harbor those goals within themselves in the way that humans do. Instead, their behavior is patterned in ways that make them appear purposeful. They are intentional systems but their constituent natural processes are said to be blind and causal instead of teleological.

Of course, you do sometimes hear evolutionary processes described as purposeful. You might be watching a nature documentary on television and the voice-over will be saying that this species of bird developed its speckled plumage so that its members could hide from predators more effectively on the speckled forest floor. This way of speaking tends to suggest that the process of evolution was following a plan in ensuring that this species of bird developed its characteristic plumage. Or even worse, it might suggest that individual birds sought to mate with speckled partners because they wanted to ensure that speckledness would be passed on to succeeding generations. Modern evolutionary biology teaches us that no such purposes exist in nature. The process of natural selection fits species to their environments by virtue of processes that are not guided by a goal, but by arbitrary changes that sometimes happen to increase the chance of reproduction for those creatures that have undergone those changes. To think of living creatures or species as guided by purposes or by teleological forces is to revert to a kind of vitalism that modern developments in science have discredited.

But what is the alternative to these different forms of vitalism? If life does not involve some special or miraculous fluid, force, spiritual entity, or purpose, then is it just a matter of material substances and causal reactions? If we think that life is essentially a matter of chemical reactions, for example, we may be accused of being reductionists. A "reductionist" is someone who says that complex processes can be completely explained by explaining the constituent parts of those processes. In this case, it would be a reductionist claim to suggest that a complete explanation of biological phenomena could be given within the scope of the science of chemistry. This would be the claim that, when all is said and done, there is nothing to life except chemical reactions. A complete mapping of the chemical reactions that take place within a living body would give us a complete understanding of how that body comes to be alive and of what life is in that body. And reductionism need not stop at chemistry. After all, chemical reactions can be explained in terms of the physics of fundamental particles and atomic structures, and so a complete reductionism would take us down to the level of physics and the subatomic processes that it can describe for us. This would be like saying that, because all of the entities and events that take place within a car engine are chemical and physical in nature, a complete specification of the chemical-physical states of that engine from one moment to the next would

give us a complete understanding of how that engine works. One of the pioneers of modern science, Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827) famously said that if he could specify the positions and velocities of every entity in the universe, then he could predict every detail of the future, both in relation to the physical universe and to human history. This is not only a statement of reductionism, but also of a related metaphysical doctrine: namely, mechanism.

Reductionism is a methodological doctrine. It argues that the best method for understanding complex phenomena such as life is to analyse those phenomena into their constituent processes and to describe these. The complex phenomenon will then be understood as the sum of the constituent processes and entities that make it up. For example, the sum of all the chemical processes that take place within an organism over a given period of time will be a complete account of the life of that organism. Even in the case of such complex organisms as ourselves, which enjoy conscious experience and thought, the reductionist program will be to understand these by describing the physical processes, including neuronal electro-chemical interactions, that constitute these aspects of life. Put in this bald manner, such a program appears excessively ambitious and appears to leave out of its view most of what is interesting about life, especially human life. However, with the advent of computers and the possibilities presented by them for the creation of artificial intelligence and even artificial life, this program has excited the curiosity of many impressive researchers.

In contrast to reductionism, mechanism is a metaphysical doctrine. That is to say, it is a doctrine about the ultimate nature of reality. It uses the analogy of a machine to suggest that the fundamental entities that make up the universe are like machine parts and that the fundamental processes that constitute changes of all kinds in the world are like machine interactions. It is linked to another metaphysical doctrine: namely, materialism. Materialism states that the entities that make up the world are nothing more than material entities. That is, they are not infused with any non-material beings or powers such as souls or vital fluids. In this way, materialism would be the opposite of both dualism and vitalism. If you imagine the car engine that I have mentioned as consisting of mechanical parts in which the pulling, pushing, and turning of some parts cause the movements of other parts, which in their turn cause the movements of still other parts, then you will get the idea. Here we have essentially inert material entities interacting with one another in essentially mechanical ways. A simpler example might be an old-fashioned wind-up watch. Here all the gears, levers, and wheels interact with each other by pulling, pushing, or turning so as to produce the rotating of the pointers on the watch face. The source of energy for these mechanical movements is the tension in the wound-up spring but, apart from that, the parts of the watch are inert and passive in relation to the processes of which they are a part. And the energy in the spring can be explained mechanically in terms of the tensions arising from the elasticity of the spring material. The car engine is more complex because the core source of energy here is a chemical reaction: namely, the explosive burning of petrol and oxygen. However, the classical conception of chemistry explained this in materialist and mechanical terms also when it said that such processes are the recombination of atomic particles under the influence of other atomic particles that behave in essentially mechanical ways. And, on the classical conception, these atomic particles contained no energy within themselves.

The popular image conveyed by classical science was of a “billiard ball model” of the universe. Just as billiard balls on a billiard table produce all the

aspects of the game by knocking into one another and causing movement and direction by the way in which they hit each other, so the "atoms" that make up the universe produce the phenomena that we are trying to understand by knocking against one another in a variety of ways. Like billiard balls, the "atoms" that make up the universe are inert entities whose only relevant properties are their position and state of motion. Their color, for example, is irrelevant. They contain no power or tendency within themselves to produce any changes, either within themselves or outside of themselves. On this view, the only events that matter are the mechanical interactions of these atoms. Once these entities and their reactions are described, it was thought, we would have the basis of a complete understanding of everything that happens, including life, human experience, and human history. It is this world-view that Laplace was giving expression to.

It will be clear that, with a materialistic and mechanistic metaphysics and with a reductionist methodology in science, it will be difficult to account for the phenomenon of life. The traditional debates had been between "mechanists" and "vitalists." Of these, vitalism has been the easiest for science to reject. This is because, as I have mentioned, it is a case of attempting to explain the mysterious by citing something that is even more mysterious. Alluding to "vital fluids" or to supernatural entities such as souls was never going to be good scientific methodology. But given the richness and complexity of life, especially if we include human life with its high levels of consciousness, a mechanistic explanation is also going to leave many questions unanswered. The machine analogy just appeared too simplistic to capture the complexity of biological entities and events.

Today there are still significant philosophers who argue that materialism is not rich enough to explain life. Quite apart from those many thinkers who remain in those religious traditions that explain life by saying that it arises when inert matter is enlivened by a supernatural principle of life such as a soul, there are those who challenge the impoverished notion of inert matter that is inherent in the materialism of mechanistic thinkers and of others who maintain a reductionist methodology. For example, Charles Birch is a noted biologist whose philosophical thinking is informed by the "process philosophy" of Alfred North Whitehead. Birch, with his co-author, the theologian John Cobb,[5] argues that the mechanistic model cannot explain life as an emergent property of material things. He argues that to say that life is a property that emerges from inert matter is to commit the fallacy of explaining the mysterious with reference to the more mysterious. On Birch and Cobb's view, to say that life emerges from inert matter is to explain nothing. It is simply to say that it happens. The notion of "emergence" does not clarify the issue. The problem is that life appears to be a radically new development in the history of this planet when it emerges. How can the state of things before that emergence make the new development possible? We will never get an answer to this question, say Birch and Cobb, if we continue to think in mechanistic ways with reference just to inert atoms of matter.

Birch and Cobb suggest that we should replace the mechanistic model with an "ecological model," in which the interactions of things can only take place if the entities that interact have a tendency within themselves to do so. An animal can react to the presence of food in its environment by eating it only if it has a tendency (call it hunger) to do so. And the organs within the animal can play their part in the process of digesting the food only if they have a tendency or function to do so as a response to triggers from their environments. Further, the cells in

those organs can only contribute to those processes because they are "programmed" to respond to environmental stimuli in that way by the genes. Accordingly, these authors are opposed to any form of mechanism that assumes that the "atoms" that make up a living machine are inert components the only relevant features of which are their externally imposed roles within a machine-like structure. The pulleys, rods, pistons, and other components in an engine are themselves inert and the only way they contribute to the action (or "life") of the engine is by being subject to mechanical forces imposed upon them from the outside and by transmitting these forces to other components. But the components of a living organism contribute to the action of the organism by virtue of forces or powers that they contain within themselves and that are triggered (instead of caused) by stimuli that they receive from their environments. It follows that the components of a living entity cannot be inert entities in the way that mechanism presupposes. Accordingly, for these authors, material reality is already in some incipient sense "alive" and there is "continuity" in nature between living and non-living things.

But such views appear to deny a distinction that common sense insists upon: namely, that between living and non-living things. Not only do we classify things in the world in accordance with this distinction but it is ethically important that we do so. We have duties to living things that we do not have toward non-living things and, while virtuous persons will treat many things with respect, whether they are alive or not, they will be even more sensitive toward things that are alive. But how can this distinction be clearly drawn if all of matter is deemed to be incipiently alive?

2. The Science of Life

Perhaps the most fruitful way of beginning to answer this question is to quote from an authoritative and exhaustive text on the subject of life. According to the philosophers of biology, Martin Mahner and Mario Bunge, biosystems, living systems, living things, or living beings are:

> concrete systems of a kind *B* such that, for every member *b* of *B*,
>
> i. *b* is composed of chemical and biochemical subsystems, in particular water, proteins, nucleic acids, carbohydrates, and lipids;
>
> ii. the components of *b* are sufficiently contiguous so as to permit continual (bio)chemical interactions amongst them;
>
> iii. the boundary of *b* involves a flexible and semi-permeable lipid membrane (biomembrane);
>
> iv. *b* incorporates some of the biomolecules it synthesizes (instead of releasing them immediately to its habitat);
>
> v. the possible activities of *b* include the assembly, rearrangement, and dismantling of components (which allow for the self-maintenance of *b* over a certain time) as well as the capture and storing of free energy (e.g., in ATP molecules) for future consumption (metabolism);

vi. some of the subsystems of *b* regulate most of the processes occurring in *b* in such a way that a fairly constant *milieu intérieur* is maintained in the system (homeostasis, self-regulation);

vii. one of the subsystems of *b* involved in self-regulation—its genic system—is composed of nucleic acid molecules, and its interaction with other subsystems of *b* (co)regulates the self-maintenance, as well as the development, if any, and the reproduction, if any, of *b*;

viii. all of the control systems of *b* are interconnected by chemical signals (such as the diffusion of ions, atoms, or molecules, and propagating chemical reactions) and thus constitute a (chemical) signal network;

ix. *b* can adjust to *some* environmental changes without jeopardizing its continued existence.[6]

This somewhat technical, non-metaphysical, and exhaustive definition contains several features of philosophical interest. Firstly, it is being stated that life is a function of the chemical reactions of subsystems within systems and between systems and their environments. In short, life is a matter of chemistry within systems. This clearly rules out archaic views such as vitalism. But it may tempt us into supposing that Mahner and Bunge are using a reductionist paradigm. In order to see that this is not so, we should take careful note of their use of the concept of "system."

The notion of a system is the notion of a material entity that has an internal structure combining parts that compose that system and that interact with each other in structured ways and that, as a structured whole, interact with their environment. The three key elements of a system are composition, environment, and structure. The environment of a system can itself be a system so that the larger system is composed of smaller systems that Mahner and Bunge call "subsystems." Composition is important because the system will not operate if it is made up of inappropriate components. A mechanical watch will not work if some of its parts are made of jelly. Environment is important because a system needs inputs of energy to maintain itself and needs to dispose of its wastes into the environment. And structure is important because it is the way in which components are interrelated that is crucial to the working of the system. And in speaking of the "working" of a system I allude to a further important feature: namely, that by virtue of the composition, environment, and structure of the system, it can do work, generate energy, and produce order. Some systems can even maintain their own structure.

Seeing the world in terms of systems has become widespread in the physical, social, and human sciences, and it is easy to take the idea for granted. Let us take a car engine as an example of a system, especially when it is actually working. When the engine is firing, fuel or energy from the environment (in the form of petrol and oxygen) is being spent in the production of an energy output. The structure of the engine makes this possible, and should this structure fail in certain ways the engine will cease to work. In this event, a mechanic is needed in order to restore the structure to its functional form (another input from the environment). In the case of gross mechanical parts, the engine cannot restore itself, but when it is running it adjusts its input of fuels to meet the needs of the engine itself. There are feedback processes that maintain the running of the

engine within parameters set by the structure of the engine and, within those parameters, by the driver of the car.

A car engine is clearly a mechanical system. Accordingly, there is nothing in systems thinking that inherently challenges a mechanistic metaphysical world-view. Moreover, to explain the running of an engine does not require the positing of any non-material entities, and so the notion of a system is consistent with materialism. But the notion of a system does constitute a significant advance on the simple billiard ball model of the universe posited by classical, mechanistic science. The interaction of atoms conceived on the billiard ball model makes it quite difficult to explain any increases of complexity in the universe. All you can do with billiard balls on a billiard table is play billiards. Nothing radically new or novel will ever arise in a world made up just of inert atoms conceived as billiard balls. But if the inert atoms were actually machine parts made of appropriate materials and structured in a system, and if there was an input of energy, then there could be not only change, but also development and increases in order and complexity. New levels of reality could emerge. The car engine illustrates this quite well. All the parts of the engine, taken by themselves, are without inherent motion. Take the engine apart and all the bits and pieces will lie about on your garage floor and, left to themselves, they will stay where they are. Put them all together in a car, however, and provide the car with fuel, and the whole previously immobile structure will be able to move. Motion is then an emergent property of the car's parts. It is a new property that they could not have had when they were not part of the system. There is nothing mysterious here. The motion is a transformation of the energy inherent in the fuel: a transformation effected by the system of the car engine. But neither the fuel nor the engine parts had the property of motion. The point is that we can only understand the emergence of this new property by understanding the system that gives rise to it. The explanation of what is novel here depends on seeing the entity that has this new and emergent property as a system. If I could push the analogy a little further: we would not be satisfied with an explanation of the motion of the engine-car complex that suggested that the previously immobile body of the complex had been infused with a "motile fluid" or a "motion soul" so as to make it move, or that its parts were already incipiently moving. The engine's motion is a new and emergent property. We have no need of dualistic or non-material hypotheses in order to explain this emergence once we have used the concept of a system to do so. It is in this sense that systems are sometimes said to be more than the sum of their parts.

The reason that I have explained this rather arcane matter to such length is that we need to understand how a materialist can explain emergent properties if we are to understand the evolution of life in terms that are not vitalist or teleological in some way. It is well known that Darwin's theory of natural selection, with the addition of Mendel's understanding of genetic inheritance (subsequently confirmed by the discovery of DNA), explains the evolution of species. Mutations occur by chance in the genetic make-up of given organisms and, given the environment in which they live, some of the mutations increase the likelihood that that organism can reproduce and increase the frequency of its mutated gene in the next generation. These offspring are themselves better fitted to their environment and can reproduce more effectively than their less fitted cousins, so the mutated gene increases in the gene pool from one generation to the next. As a result, differing and more adapted species emerge.

More surprisingly, the emergence is not only of differing species but also of more complex ones. As we survey organisms all the way from simple sea anemones to human beings, it is obvious that living creatures range from the quite simple to the marvellously complex. How is this increase in complexity and the emergence of novelty possible? Again, the system concept can help us to understand this. Richard Dawkins, in a book admirably accessible to the general public,[7] argues against the idea that some kind of supernatural intervention was needed to introduce life and complexity to the world by showing that evolutionary processes can proceed by steps. This overcomes the problem of thinking that evolutionary developments must emerge by big jumps that are exceedingly improbable. For example, it would appear exceedingly improbable that an organ as complex as an eye could emerge in one step in animals that previously had no eyes. But if we think of "cumulative selection" the idea becomes plausible. Dawkins demonstrates this with a computer program that simulates the process. The key idea is that structures are built up gradually but then become units within larger structures. It would be quite difficult, for example, to assemble a car engine from a large collection of unstructured parts. The task become more feasible if we assemble the carburettor first, then assemble the gear box, then move on to the engine block itself, then design and assemble the electrical system, and so on. Once all the subsystems are built and their structural integrity maintained, we could assemble the whole engine with some hope of success. So it is in the case of the eye. Dawkins shows that the evolutionary process could create structures that enhance the fitness of the animal but without giving it so grand an ability as full sight in one go. However, these structures can then be assembled under the pressure of selection into a more complex structure that has this almost miraculous, emergent property. It is the stress on structure and the concept of a subsystem, which the systems approach brings with it, that helps us to conceptualize these matters.

If we turn our attention to the very emergence of life in the earliest stages of the history of this earth we are also helped to understand that, contrary to the view of Birch and Cobb, such emergence is possible from matter that does not have any of the properties of living things. It has been argued by Stuart Kauffman[8] that the emergence of life could have occurred by non-random accretions of chemicals to create "autocatalytic" systems that could suddenly form self-replicating structures due to "phase transitions" that are statistically likely given the ways that chemicals bond with each other. In this way, life is not a miracle in the universe but is an emergent property to be expected given the laws of physics. Life requires minimum levels of structure that are not present in inert matter. Accordingly, the emergence of life was a holistic process instead of one that required extremely unlikely chance combinations of discrete entities.

We can see these conceptual elements in Mahner and Bunge's definition of living things. Clause (i) speaks of the composition of a living thing. It cannot be made predominantly of aluminium bars, plastic tubes, or silicon chips (although in modern times certain body parts can be replaced by such entities). Clause (ii) specifies that the mode of interaction of the components of living systems is chemical. It is interesting to reflect on whether contemporary science would still consider this as reducible to mechanical processes. As I have noted, it used to be thought that atoms were simple and inert entities. We now know that this is not so. Elementary particles that have been discovered or hypothesized include protons and neutrons (which are relatively stable), xi-particles, sigma-particles, lambda-particles, and omega-particles (all of which exist for the merest of

nanoseconds), leptons (of which electrons and neutrinos are relatively stable, while muons are not), kaons, pions, and photons. The relations between these are systemic and dynamic. Quantum physics and the theory of the quark have shown that the fundamental structure of matter is not composed of inert substance, but of highly energized relations between a mixture of stable and unstable elements. As John and Mary Gribbin put it:

> There are four kinds of fundamental forces, and also four kinds of [relatively stable] fundamental particles (the up and down quarks, the electron, and the neutrino). This is absolutely everything you need to explain everything that you can see in the Universe.[9]

Moreover, these particles are related to one another, not by constant and discernible causal relations, but by random changes that obey probabilistic laws. According to the wave mechanics account of the structure of the atom, it is thought to be a central nucleus surrounded by cloud-like fields of electrons such that the precise movement by quantum leaps of electrons at a given instant of time is a matter of a distribution of probabilities. The old materialism of inert atoms is here replaced by a materialism of dynamic and energized entities with randomly expressed propensities measured by the mathematics of probability. Given our inability to locate the exact position of some fundamental particles, a mechanistic model will no longer suffice to account for these fundamental physical entities and the chemical process that is constituted by the combination and recombination of these physical elements. This shows that atoms should be thought of as systems. Even at the level of the physics of ultimate particles, the billiard ball mechanism is no longer a helpful model. Accordingly, it will no longer contribute to our understanding of chemical reactions and of the biochemical reactions that take place within living organisms. This conclusion must cast doubt not only upon any simple mechanistic model of life but also upon the reductionist program in biology. It does so, however, without compromising the materialist metaphysics that Mahner and Bunge are committed to. There need be no appeal to any kind of vitalism here and no suggestion that fundamental particles are incipiently alive. Biological processes are material processes. It is just that matter is more complex, dynamic, and probabilistic then earlier scientific metaphysicians had imagined.

This may be an opportune moment to mention Mahner and Bunge's account of randomness as it applies to the changes that constitute genetic mutation. For many people, to say that something happens by chance means no more than that the cause of that event is not known well enough to allow it to be predicted. In a similar way, many people talk of probabilities in contexts where they do not know exactly what causes what and so the best that can be done is to note the frequency with which certain effects occur. Again, people talk of chance when the causal determination of an event is so minute that it cannot be known. This is true of the outcome of a roulette wheel. There may even be cases where it is not knowable in principle. In physics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle suggests that, because the complex experiments that would seek to measure the exact positions of electrons in the atom actually disturb those electrons and displace them from their positions, the exact measurement of these electrons is impossible. This in turn suggests that the need to use probability mathematics to describe these sub-atomic processes is purely epistemological. On this view, the electrons are doing definite things and occupying definite positions, but we

cannot know what they are. However, Heisenberg's principle refers to an actual indefiniteness in the nature of electrons themselves. Electrons need not always be thought of as discrete entities with unknowable properties. They sometimes behave as electromagnetic waves and should be thought of as fields of effects behaving in inherently unpredictable ways in accordance with the complex rules of quantum mechanics.[10] In this way we are led to conceive of chance as real. Many physicists maintain, for example, that the electrons are not actually doing definite things. That we cannot be certain of their positions is not because we cannot find out, but because they do not have definite positions. They vacillate randomly. They move from one orbit around the nucleus to another by chance. They have a propensity to jump from one orbit to another in a random manner. Similarly, when biologists talk of chance genetic mutations, Mahner and Bunge maintain that they are talking about genuinely random processes.

> They are results of collision or scattering processes satisfying the laws of quantum mechanics, which is a radically probabilistic theory. Thus, an individual gamma ray photon has a definite propensity of ionizing an atom or dissociating a molecule, which event, in turn, has a definite propensity of triggering a chemical reaction constituting a genetic change.[11]

What this means is that the fact that we can only know of these events through probability theory is not because our scientific equipment can give us only imperfect descriptions. Instead it is because we are dealing with actual chance events. Probability theory describes the actual propensities of things to behave in a random manner. It does not describe in incomplete terms a deterministic process that our science is not yet in a position to describe in any but probabilistic terms. It describes in complete terms processes that objectively are chance events.

Mahner and Bunge need to maintain that chance is real (albeit only in the realms of quantum physics and genetics) in order to maintain their materialist metaphysics. Novelty and increased complexity are not to be introduced into the world by a supernatural agency. Therefore, it is only if there is change based on chance mutations that there can be novelty in the world. If everything were completely determined, everything and every event would be a working out of the possibilities that were already present in the nature of things, as Birch and Cobb suppose. Genuine novelty can only arise if change is not the working out of potentialities that already exist. Genuine novelty is the product of genuine change and genuine change is the product of genuine chance. If life is a novelty in relation to inorganic matter, if the vast variety of species that exist in the world are novelties in relation to the first primitive forms of life, if consciousness is a novelty in relation to the adaptive reactions of basic forms of life, and if self-consciousness is a novelty in relation to the functional forms of awareness evinced by many animals, then radically new things must be able to occur within the material universe. And radically new things can only occur if there is real randomness in nature. A totally determined universe could not evolve. The eminent biologist Jacques Monod concludes from his account of accidental changes in DNA:

> Since they constitute the *only* possible source of modifications in the genetic text, itself the *sole* repository of the organism's hereditary structures, it necessarily follows that chance *alone* is at the source of every innovation, of

> all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other possible or even conceivable hypotheses.[12]

All this shows that we can account for the emergence of life and of new features in life without having to suggest that basic matter already incipiently contains those qualities. We need only use a systems concept combined with the notion of chance. New levels of complexity do emerge in nature. There is discontinuity as well as continuity.

Arguing against the continuity view of nature does not imply that life is radically different from the rest of nature, however. Although we distinguish organic from inorganic chemistry, for example, this distinction does not bespeak a metaphysical difference. Organic chemistry is the study of those atomic and molecular structures that involve carbon. A unique property of the carbon atom is that its atomic structure allows it to combine in myriads of ways with hydrogen, nitrogen and oxygen atoms so as to create complex molecules. This property of carbon atoms is a direct result of its atomic structure: a structure that in no way departs from the laws of physics. As John and Mary Gribbin put it:

> In the second half of the nineteenth century, it gradually became clear that exactly the same basic rules apply to both inorganic and organic chemical processes, and that the differences between the two categories are entirely due to the complexity of most organic molecules.[13]

The bonds that carbon is able to form are the result of the resonating quantum leaps that electrons engage in within its atomic structure so as to form the rich bonds that organic molecules require. Quantum physics explains life. Nature is of a piece and contains no metaphysical differences. In this sense there is continuity in nature. Nevertheless, when we speak of life, we are speaking of a natural phenomenon that is different in kind from inert phenomena. Again, when we speak of a conscious being, we are speaking of something that is different in kind from a non-conscious being. The reality of emergent properties and of genuine novelty in nature allows us to make such categorical distinctions in kind even while we maintain a non-dualistic and materialistic metaphysics. Such distinctions rule out reductionism but do not imply dualism of any kind.

I should point out that these conclusions were not the main point that Mahner and Bunge were trying to make in the second clause of their definition. They were simply saying that life proceeds by biochemical processes and that a living thing must be a structured unity so as to allow such processes to take place. This point is also the central significance of their third clause. A living entity is a discrete body with a skin of some kind around it. As an aside, it might be of interest to point out that one implication of this view is that to speak of the whole biosphere as an organism, as the "Gaia" doctrine does, is at best an analogy.[14] It may be an important and instructive one from an environmentalist viewpoint, but it cannot be literally true since there is no skin bounding this putative "organism."

Clauses (iv) and (v) refer to processes of interaction with a biosystem's environment that are exemplified by such processes as eating. As we have seen, a system requires an input of energy. As subsequent clauses point out, a system performs work. It maintains its own structure and engages in exchanges with its environment. In order to be able to do this, it needs energy. While some of this

energy may come just from the internal chemical processes that it undergoes, it needs fuel to sustain this over time. It is a basic law of thermodynamics that the structure of things tends to break down into simpler forms. In the fullness of time the universe will suffer "heat death," meaning that all the energy will have run out, heat will have been dissipated, and all structures will have collapsed. All things tend to a state of greater probability, and the most probable state is a simple, disordered, and undifferentiated one. Entropy is the measure of the degree of disorder of a system. If the universe is a closed system (meaning a system that does not receive an input of energy from its environment), its entropy will increase so that, ultimately, all its particles will be in disorder. Living things are often described as tiny local exceptions to this law. Living things are dynamic and complex and are able to maintain and even increase their level of complexity and structure. But they are not really exceptions to the laws of thermodynamics. They are open systems that take fuel from their environments in order to sustain this negentropic tendency. It is when they die that their entropy increases along with that of other non-living things. These clauses of the definition further explain how and why systems are dependent upon their environments.

Clauses (vi) and (vii) refer to another important feature of systems: namely, that they are structured. Biosystems, moreover, are able, up to a point, to maintain their own structures. Contemporary knowledge of how the DNA works have given us exciting new insights into how living entities replicate themselves and maintain their internal structures by way of the "programming" that has been passed from one generation to another through their genes. Mahner and Bunge do not suppose that all living subsystems reproduce themselves, however. Many organisms do, but many living subsystems, such as tissues and organs, do not. It follows from this that the range of entities to which the phrase "is alive" can be ascribed, and the range of entities that can reproduce themselves, is not the same. We speak of "a living heart" but the heart cannot reproduce itself. The smallest unit that we can speak of as being alive is the cell. But not all cells can reproduce themselves. So self-reproduction is not a defining characteristic of living things, though self-maintenance is.

Mahner and Bunge argue that all of the conditions spelt out in their definition need to be present for something to be a biosystem. It is for this reason that the smallest unit of life must be a cell (even though not all cells are complete biosystems). A bacterium does not engage in metabolism, but acts as a parasite within a metabolizing cell. And mitochondria do not regulate their own systemic functions.[15] The smallest entity that can meet all the conditions required for being a living system is a cell. So we can say that a qualitative jump or a physical novelty appears in the world with the appearance of the first cells. Although there might have already been molecules in existence that were capable of many of the functions described in the definition above, something qualitatively new emerges when cells are formed. The gradual molecular evolution that led to self-replicating molecules was grounded in the atomic systems that then existed. This preceded the emergence of life. But when nucleic acid molecules combined with metabolizing systems, something new came into being. As I have argued, instead of speaking of a "continuity of life" within nature, it is better to think of a series of qualitative jumps when we survey the evolutionary history of this planet.

Clause (viii) both alludes to and hides an important point. Mahner and Bunge refer to control systems and signal networks that maintain or increase the order in a system, but they speak of these as constituted wholly by a flow of chemical reactions. Being materialists, they do not want to use the concept of

"information" that is used by other philosophers of biology. The concept of information suggests meaning, thought, and purpose, and Mahner and Bunge are anxious to exclude any such notions from their account of what life is lest they allow some form of vitalism to re-emerge. But information need not be thought of in this way. Information has been informally described by Gregory Bateson as "a difference that makes a difference."[16] This can be illustrated by any input into a system that alters the behavior of that system, or, more importantly, by a "message" that passes along a feedback loop so as to maintain order.

So far I have mentioned that the crucial three features of a system are composition, environment, and structure. In clause (vi) Mahner and Bunge stress the dynamic nature of a system and, in particular, its need to maintain its structure. Central to any analysis of how a system can achieve this is the notion of feedback. To maintain homeostasis a system must be able to react to any departure from its optimal condition by inaugurating a process that corrects the deviation. A thermostat in a refrigerator would be an example. Having been set to an optimum temperature, the thermostat turns the refrigerator on when the temperature rises above that optimum and turns it off when it falls below it. And it is the temperature itself that throws the switch. It bends the filaments in the thermostat and closes the electrical circuit. This in turn maintains the order of the system. This function defines the bending of the filaments as information. So a rise in temperature itself becomes information. In this sense, information is the opposite of entropy. As Ludwig von Bertalanffy says, "negative entropy or information is a measure of order or of organization since the latter, compared to distribution at random, is an improbable state."[17] For a system to receive information or to exchange information amongst its components is for it to maintain its level of organization or even to become more organized. The input to a system from its environment that Mahner and Bunge allude to in clause (v) can include energy that functions as information. Richard Raymond, for example, has described insulin injections thus: "Relations between the control of sugar metabolism and insulin have reached a point where individuals who would otherwise die from a lack of this information may inject the information into themselves as required."[18] This way of speaking sounds like a category mistake because we do not think of diabetics as literally injecting information into themselves. But it does highlight the point that chemical inputs into, and chemical reactions within, systems can function as information. They do so when they maintain or increase order within the system.

There is no threat to materialism in this way of speaking since the maintenance of order does not require the information to be interpreted as meaningful in any way. It requires no "intelligence" or purposeful, teleological "entelechy" (that is, "vital force") to guide the process. It requires only that the physical process, like the thermostat in the refrigerator, does its work.

The emphasis that Mahner and Bunge give to the word "some" in clause (ix) reminds us that even the most sophisticated biological system cannot defend itself against every catastrophe. A bus hitting an animal on the road will surely kill it. But living systems do have a range of adaptive possibilities and a repertoire of self-preserving reactions to environmental threats. Some animals can curl up to protect themselves, others can flee, while others again will fight. The relevance that this point has for my account of life is that living things seek to preserve their own existence and to develop a range of strategies and behaviors that seek to achieve this. Not only does the process of evolution select phenotypic features such as speckled plumage or curved beaks to enhance an animal's

adaptive capabilities, but it also selects for behavior patterns and for the possibility of learning new patterns to further increase the chances of survival. While it is difficult to distinguish adaptive behaviors that are due to genetic structures from those that are learnt, it is clear that most of the more sophisticated animals develop repertoires of purposive behavior throughout their lives through learning. And the most notable animal that has this capability is the human animal. It is in this way that purpose can be part of the mechanism of natural selection even while, at the level of the genotype, only chance and blind selection are the operative mechanisms.

It follows from my argument against Birch and Cobb that life need not be seen to be incipient in all of nature in order to explain the existence of life. Nor do we need to posit supernatural forces to account for it. Life is not the result of the infusion of a "vital fluid" or "vital force" and it is not a miraculous intervention on the part of God. Life is possible within a material universe. Does this mean that life is not sacred after all? If "sacred" means "given through miraculous means by God," then life is indeed not sacred. However, if "sacred" means "wonderful and awe-inspiring," then it is. This is, of course, not a matter that can be decided on rational grounds alone. To call life sacred in this sense is to express an attitude toward it instead of giving it an objective description. It requires a sensitivity and receptiveness to see life in this way. There is some virtue in allowing ourselves to be impressed by the enormity and depth of the phenomenon of life. Not only will it inspire poetic and aesthetic perceptions of natural phenomena, but it will also motivate the ethical concern that leads to moral practice. In this way, the phenomenon of life can become a moral source.

That science has the conceptual means necessary for understanding life (although it is far from having answered all questions about it) need not imply that life ceases to be wonderful. As I have mentioned, science is often accused of "disenchanting" the world and of leaving us with conceptions that are merely functional and reductive. There appears to be no depth or meaningfulness to the world that science describes for us. The world-view of classical science, in particular, with its positing of inert material atoms interacting with each other only mechanically and without purpose, was thought to be especially arid and heartless. For myself, I have never been very impressed by this thought. The idea that a simple model, whether it be that of a billiard table or of a system, can allow us to make sense of complex phenomena appears to me to make nature more impressive instead of less. With all its multiplicity, fecundity, and apparent formlessness, nature follows laws and is amenable to description and explanation on the part of creatures that are themselves a part of nature. What can be more wonderful than this? Life is an emergent property of matter and it can be known by living creatures as a state of their own subjective being. What can be more impressive than this?

3. The Value of Life

Does it follow from my conclusion that life is wonderful that it is also valuable? That life is valuable appears to be both obvious and inexplicable. But is it the direct consequence of its being wonderful? What takes us from being enchanted with life to valuing it? Is this a contingent psychological process or is it one necessitated by reason? Is there a rational argument for saying that life is valuable in itself? Many philosophers would say that we can not move logically

from the proposition that life *is* structured in the way described by science (and, therefore, that it *is* wonderful) to the proposition that life *ought* to be respected. To attempt to derive an "ought" statement from an "is" statement in this way would be an instance of the so-called "naturalistic fallacy." Moreover, there are major logical and conceptual problems involved in saying that life is valuable *in itself*. Those who want their ethical systems to be founded on principles and objective "moral facts" will want the value of life to be established as some kind of metaphysical reality. For them it will not be enough to say that its value is a function of the wonder that living creatures such as ourselves can feel in the face of it. But for me this is not a problem. A virtue ethicist does not need objective or intrinsic values in the world. He or she needs only values that are felt. To feel that life is valuable is enough to motivate actions that respect life. We do not also need an objective argument for the value of life. People who are insensitive to life would be insensitive to such arguments as well. What is needed is the virtuous stance of respect for life. The feeling that life is wonderful and valuable can be the basis of such a stance. And a thorough adherence to the methods and world-views of science need not jeopardize such a feeling.

Epithets such as "wonderful" and "valuable" are not simply descriptive. They are also expressive of the attitudes of the person uttering them. Further, these attitudes guide our actions. It is virtuous to allow our actions to be guided by such feelings. That said, however, there is one further consideration that would be relevant to generating an action-guiding feeling such as respect for life: namely, the thought that life is vulnerable. A living organism is a wonderfully complex system as we have seen. The chemical reactions that take place within it and the flows of electro-magnetic information that control many of its functions are minute and involve amounts of material and forces of different kinds that are minuscule in scale. The tolerances in these amounts are also tiny. The slightest deviation from the required amount of protein or hormone, the slightest increase in the strength of signals in the brain, or the tiniest variation in sugar levels in the blood can lead to catastrophe for the organism. We know also that the very possibility of life on the earth is dependent upon climatic and geological conditions that must remain within quite precise parameters. If the average temperature on the earth were only a few degrees higher than it is, it would have prevented the interglacial conditions that allow our forms of life to flourish as they currently do. Any alterations of the balance between oxygen and other gases in the already thin and slight atmospheric blanket over this planet, and life would have taken radically different forms, if it could have evolved at all. That the basic molecules of life can form the stable bonds required for the complexity of organic molecules is due to essentially random processes of resonance between forms of chemical bonding. In short, the more we learn about the nature of, and conditions for, life, the more impressed we are by how vulnerable and fragile life is. This thought, in combination with the awe that organic processes inspire in us, leads, in a caring and virtuous person, to a determination to protect life and secure the conditions for its continuation. This sequence of thought may not enjoy the rational necessity of a deduction from principles or facts, but it does enjoy the kind of practical necessity that can ground a feeling of moral obligation. Life ought to be respected because it is both wonderful and vulnerable.

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Five

LIFE AS A MORAL SOURCE

> The basic principle of ethics, that principle which is a necessity of thought, which has a definite content, which is engaged in constant living, and practical dispute with reality, is: Devotion to life resulting from reverence for life.
>
> Albert Schweitzer[1]

The previous chapter suggested that the phenomenon of life is a moral source for bioethics in the sense that to say that life is wonderful and vulnerable leads to the thought that it is precious and should be preserved and protected. It also suggested that there is a "practical necessity" that a caring and virtuous person would be led in this direction, in the sense that a person with the right dispositions would be so moved. But this appears to make an ethics of life dependent upon our having the right disposition. Some people have such dispositions and some do not. At worst, we could respond in a way that a vandal does to anything of beauty or fragility: with anger and destructive venom. At best, we could respond with respect for life and a determination not to destroy it. And as a median position, we could remain indifferent and thoughtless while continuing to live with routine responses. In what ideal way, then, does the recognition that life is precious affect the motivational stances of a virtuous person? Ethical theory would like to be able to demonstrate that any person at all should respect life, that there are rationally binding reasons for doing so, and that there are rational bases for giving priority to some forms of life over other forms.

Given that life exists in the world (and given that I am a living being), what ethical significance should I attach to it? From the perspective of a virtue-theoretical approach to ethics, this question becomes: What should the phenomenon of life inspire in us in the way of virtuous responses?

Virtuous responses are expressive of our character or deeper motivational sets. Although they involve judgement as to what the practical situation that we are confronting demands of us, they express, both in that judgement and in the action to which it leads, the deepest attitudes and concerns of the agent. They express what the agent cares about. Accordingly, in order to explore what the phenomenon of life should elicit from me in the way of virtuous response, I need to explore my own deepest motivations and the significance that life already implicitly has for me. The phenomenon of life takes on a double significance in this exploration. It is significant in that it is the object of our ethical concern when we are virtuous. In this aspect we explore what it is about another being's being alive that elicits in us an ethical response. But it is also significant in that it is our being alive that constitutes the most basic and implicit stratum of our own motivational sets and that is therefore the ground of our virtuous response. Life in the form of subjectivity is itself a motivation out of which a response to life emerges. This is what it means to say that life is a moral source. So not only am I asking what our response to life or to living things should be, but I am also

asking what our response is likely to be given that I am myself alive and implicitly aware of what that means. My response to life is not purely intellectual and abstract; it is vital and thus motivational. It expresses my subjectivity.

In order to understand this further, we should move beyond the scientific and explanatory conception of life that we described in the previous chapter. Given that we are ourselves alive, life has a meaning for us that goes beyond our marveling at its systemic complexity as described by science. As we saw in the first chapter, our being alive is not just a matter of our biological functioning. It is also a matter of our adopting a motivational stance toward ourselves, others, and things in the world. For human beings, acting ethically is an important expression of the way in which we exist as beings with characteristic concerns for ourselves and for others. Accordingly, we need to explore the significance of life from the perspective of a being who is alive in order to see what ethical character life might have and what basic attitudes to life and to other living things it might give rise to.

1. The Moral Character of Life—Nietzsche

One author who has written from this perspective is Friedrich Nietzsche. In his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, he says:

> Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation, and, at the least and mildest, exploitation. . . . Even that body within which, as was previously assumed, individuals treat one another as equals . . . must, if it is a living and not a decaying body, itself do all that to other bodies which the individuals within it refrain from doing to one another: it will have to be the will to power incarnate, it will want to grow, expand, draw to itself, gain ascendancy—not out of any morality or immorality, but because it *lives*, and because life *is* will to power. . . . "Exploitation" does not pertain to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it pertains to the *essence* of the living thing as a fundamental organic function, it is a consequence of the intrinsic will to power which is precisely the will to life.[2]

This paragraph contains a bold statement of how life is to be understood, along with unequivocal indications of the ethical implications of such an understanding. There is much in it that is central to Nietzsche's whole philosophy, including that which is most disturbing. It includes the notion of "will-to-power": a notion that is central to Nietzsche's philosophy and central to why many people reject it. However, this notion does have a history and it is worth recalling it briefly before commenting on the passage in detail.

In Western philosophy there is a long tradition of metaphysical speculation that sought to understand what nature is in itself. One notable philosopher in this tradition, and one who inspired Nietzsche, was Arthur Schopenhauer. He argued that the world is "Will." What he meant by this is that there is a dynamic tendency and a drive inherent in everything. Everything strives instead of simply being inert. It is the phenomenon of living things that most clearly illustrates this. Living things pursue purposes, have wants and desires, compete with each other for mates, flee from death and injury, seek food and shelter, and engage in the

myriad activities of purposeful living. In our own case, we are aware of how these behaviors feel from the inside. They appear to be driven by endless and unquenchable desire. We are driven by concern for our own being, for our needs, and for our comfort. Whatever we obtain, we want more or something else. Our desires are insatiable. We are constantly driven. And Schopenhauer suggests that this is inescapable because it is in the very nature of things to evince desire in this way. All things are driven by forces within themselves. In the terms developed in chapter one, we might say that Schopenhauer is attributing subjectivity to everything. He is not just making the quite bold claim that all things are intentional systems, but even that they enjoy subjectivity. True to the tradition of metaphysics, Schopenhauer attributes this dynamism, this desire, this subjectivity, this "will," to all parts of reality and not just to living things as defined by Mahner and Bunge. Moreover, this drive is blind to higher purpose or the demands of morality. It is the sheer expression of dynamism and desire for its own sake. This is a quite striking thesis and I have no wish to render it plausible here. It is a metaphysical theory offered to allow us to make sense of the world as we encounter it on a daily basis. I mention it only in that it prepares the way for understanding what Nietzsche meant by "will-to-power."

Nietzsche posited will-to-power as the essence of reality in order to explain a number of different phenomena. For example, he noted that history comprised not only struggles and battles between peoples, races, and genders, but also the subtle struggle for dominance of differing cultural and ethical outlooks. All of the different groupings of people that history discloses seek to impose their world-view upon others. The very claim that such views are true implies a claim to universality that is an imposition upon those who do not hold that view. Moreover, he argued that the inner life of individuals is marked by conflict and struggle for dominance of one aspect of the personality over another. All people seek to exercise self-discipline and forms of self-command as part of their search for a coherent sense of self and for their personal integrity. Nietzsche was also influenced by the newly emerging ideas of social Darwinism, with their positing of a struggle for existence as the engine of evolution and historical progress. Even when looking at nature in its wild states of beauty and grandeur, Nietzsche saw striving and struggle. Plant growth is a competition for nutrients and light. Animal life is marked by predation, killing, and the competition for mates. What is the most plausible view of reality-in-itself, given that these are the phenomena that we meet in everyday experience? Clearly, reality in its very essence is striving and struggle. Although he did not make any pronouncements about the physics of ultimate particles or the biological structures that enable life to occur, Nietzsche was certain that nature must be dynamic and competitive in its very being. And even if the attribution of such qualities to matter in itself might be too speculative, it was certainly justified in relation to living things. And so we find Nietzsche writing the paragraph from which the above quotation is taken.

Notice that Nietzsche is writing about two levels of reality here. He is talking about the social level of existence and also about the biological level. The point about aristocratic groups (bodies in which individuals treat only each other as equals) is that they compete with each other for dominance and seek to expand their spheres of influence. This is a sociological or historical thesis. As such it could be tested in principle against the facts of history. But this point is made in the very paragraph in which it is claimed that life *itself* is appropriation, suppression, and so forth. It would appear, then, that groups or societies behave in the way that they do because they are social forms through which individuals

express their essential nature. And the essential nature of individuals, insofar as they are living organisms, is will-to-power. It is this that is their "fundamental organic function." All organisms, including human ones, compete with each other and seek to overcome one another. There is a biological struggle for existence that leads inexorably to social and historical struggle. This view is metaphysical instead of empirical in that it postulates an essential quality of reality and proposes a hermeneutical framework through which we can interpret physical, biological, human, social, and historical events.

Many commentators have expressed disquiet about the ethical viewpoint that appears to be inherent in Nietzsche's position. It appears to condone violence and oppression of others as somehow "natural."[3] It appears to endorse aggressiveness and tribalism. While it is not my purpose here to defend Nietzsche against these charges, it is useful to recall a number of ameliorating points. First, it does appear to be a feature of most human beings that they seek to affirm their own identity. Self-esteem and justified pride are thought to be important indicators of psychological health. But self-esteem and justified pride are won through striving to meet and exceed the standards we set ourselves for ourselves or those set by others. In this sense we are constantly in competition, whether with others or with ourselves. Moreover, in order to achieve anything of worth we need to overcome tendencies toward complacency, contentment, and even laziness within ourselves. Self-discipline is a struggle against those parts of our selves and against those social pressures toward conformity and mediocrity that would lead us to be satisfied with less than we can achieve. Nietzsche's image of the "noble spirit" is of persons who are admirable because of the severity with which they suppress the tendencies toward contentment and conformity that would lead them to mediocrity. There is a positive ethical meaning to these ideas even if they are vitiated by their lack of empathy with others. So long as will-to-power is exercised in relation to the unruly parts of ourselves as well as to the less noble aspects of society, there can be a positive ethical dimension to Nietzsche's thought. It consists in the struggle toward self-improvement. Everything in nature seeks to differentiate itself from what surrounds it. Each living thing seeks to advance its own cause and to be more splendid and powerful than its neighbor. Instead of suppressing this tendency through false humility and sociability, it is nobler, says Nietzsche, to acknowledge it honestly and to live by it. Whatever might be true of the rest of nature, in the case of human beings, it does appear that our subjectivity takes the form of will-to-power.

2. The Moral Character of Life—Whitehead

Nietzsche is not alone in holding views of this kind. The concept of life developed by the notable philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, bears some striking resemblances to it. The first notion that Whitehead develops is that of "self-enjoyment." By this he means:

> a certain immediate individuality, which is a complex process of appropriating into a unity of existence the many data presented as relevant by the physical processes of Nature. Life implies the absolute, individual self-enjoyment arising out of this process of appropriation.[4]

Notice first that Whitehead is using the same word as Nietzsche's translator: namely, "appropriation." But here it means, not exploitation, predation, or oppression of others, but the bringing together of the life processes and experiences of one individual into a systemic whole. The first thing that a living thing must do is to distinguish itself from its environment. This is the significance, if not the biological function, of the membrane that surrounds it. This membrane is not only a system boundary, but also the border of a space that defines itself as a subject of being and of experience. From the point of view of physics and chemistry, nature consists of a constant flow of chemicals in interaction without there being any *prima facie* boundaries between entities. Accordingly, the first thing that a biological entity needs to achieve is its own distinctness and individuality as an entity. To this end it gathers together systemic energy and information flows as its own.

Whitehead uses the word "experience" to describe this gathering together of a self, but in the case of plants and primitive forms of animal life, this word can only be used metaphorically. What is significant about it, and what applies to all life forms, is the idea of a distinction between that which owns the experience and that which the experience is an experience of. This is the distinction between organism and environment understood not just in terms of systemic interaction, but also in terms of self-definition in contrast to the other-than-self. Even if a plant or primitive animal is not yet a "self" that experiences its world self-consciously, it appears to establish its own individuality and direct itself purposefully toward its environment with a view to drawing from it its sustenance and ordering influences. In more scientific terms we say that it exchanges energy and information with its environment. In more philosophical terms we say that it defines itself, orients itself toward its environment, and transcends itself in reaching out toward its world so as to establish itself in its world. Hans Jonas speaks of "freedom" in connection with living things.[5] By this he does not mean the full and quasi-political concept that we apply to human beings, but the condition of being apart from and, to an extent, independent of, the purely causal determinations of the material world. A living thing has, as we say, a life of its own.

The second point that Whitehead makes about life is that it is active. It transforms potentialities into actualities. It grasps the materials and the information that it needs from its environment, absorbs them into itself, and passes on to new possibilities. In this it constitutes what Whitehead calls "creative advance" in the universe. It makes for dynamism and change. And it is selective. It does not absorb just any of the potentialities around it, but selects those that will optimize its own sustenance and systemic functioning. In this it displays purpose and aim.

> By this term "aim" is meant the exclusion of the boundless wealth of alternative potentiality, and the inclusion of that definite factor of novelty which constitutes the selected way of entertaining those data in that process of unification.[6]

A living thing is a dynamic node or centre of an environment. It unifies itself as an entity through its own dynamism and purpose. "Thus, the characteristics of life are absolute self-enjoyment, creative activity, aim."[7] Even if enjoyment is not self-conscious in plants and most animals, it is the quality attending those processes of appropriation and self-making that marks all living things. A living

thing is an entity for which life is a struggle. And it is a struggle the quality of which is not only a non-self-conscious concern or anxiety for its own existence, but also enjoyment. Given propitious environments, living things will flourish. Even in danger or hardship, while under sentence of strenuous effort or even death, living things will strive and seek to overcome the threat with vigor and self-assertion. While the term "enjoyment" may suggest a self-conscious state and a happy outcome to such struggles, the point is that, even without such an outcome, the organism will have fulfilled itself and affirmed its own being in its battle against adversity. While Whitehead's purpose is not to endorse Nietzsche's thesis, it does appear that his account of life provides an apt amplification of the latter's concept of will-to-power.

Life involves transcendence. What this means is that a living thing has a concern, not only for its own existence, but also for things beyond itself. Again, this concern will take the form of an experiencable emotion only in the case of human beings and some animals. In the vast majority of living things this concern is not self-conscious. It is a blind force of self-assertion that can be manifest to observers as purposive processes or the activities of intentional systems, but of which the organism itself cannot be conscious. But in all life forms there is some kind of orientation toward relevant features of their environments required for their own existence and enjoyment of life. Maintaining the integrity of their own being is a primary purpose of all living things, and a tendency toward both internal homeostasis and external metabolism is an expression of this. In using such terms as "concern" and "purpose" Whitehead is not suggesting that plants and lower animals enjoy forms of mentality similar to those that are typical of human beings. Instead, he is projecting back onto such life forms the structures and phenomenological features of experience of which we are aware in our own case. He is elucidating what it is to be an intentional system.

But this is a form of anthropomorphism. Whitehead describes the often hidden forms of emotion and excitement that accompany life during peak physical experiences and suggests that these bodily states of enjoyment are our most directly available experiences of life itself. Eating good food, playing sport, experiencing situations of danger, and even experiencing intellectual achievement are all occasions when our attention on what is at issue is accompanied by an implicit feeling of enjoyment and a heightening of the emotions of life. He then projects such experiences back onto higher animals who may be capable of some form of self-consciousness, from there on to lower animals whose consciousness involves no element of self-awareness, and then onto all those living things that we would not be inclined to describe as conscious at all. He even extends such a notion of mentality into material things themselves. This is another instance of what I called in chapter four the continuity view of nature. In that chapter I criticized such a view when it was articulated by Charles Birch and John Cobb by arguing that it is not necessary to project such qualities as life and mentality onto all of material nature in order to explain their emergence in higher forms. Genuine novelty is possible in nature. It is possible that there be animals that have no aspects of interiority and can undergo no experience in the sense that we understand that term as applying to us as human beings, and yet that there evolve from them animals that do enjoy experience. Intentional systems can evolve from matter and beings with subjectivity can evolve from intentional systems. Using system theoretic concepts and the notion of chance, it is possible to explain the emergence of life, and later of intentionality, and later still of self-consciousness and subjectivity, in scientific

terms. The notion of experience would lose the meaning that it derives from its application in the field of self-conscious life if it were applied to all of living reality.

This is not to deny, however, that some notions that we learn to use in the human context might appropriately be used in relation to simpler forms of life. We have seen Jonas using the notion of "freedom," for example. But then there may be something anthropomorphic about this usage as well. We have seen Whitehead use the notion of "transcendence." If this notion means that something reaches beyond itself so as to sustain its own being, then it does indeed apply to all living things as intentional systems. A flower that turns its petals to the sun is transcending itself and responding appropriately and purposefully to its environment. "Enjoyment" too appears an apt word. That living things have a self-project—a need to sustain themselves and to reach out to the world—implies that there is a fulfillment to be achieved in their doing so. So long as the term "enjoyment" does not imply a self-conscious emotion, we can speak of plants and lower animals "enjoying" their being alive. Simple organisms do more than just passively react to stimuli that impact like causes upon them. They *reach out* to those stimuli in order to fulfil their needs. These stimuli act like cues or triggers for a purposeful response. This teleological interpretation of systemic metabolic information flows contains no element of anthropomorphism if understood as an intentional system in Dennett's sense, and so accounts for the phenomena more adequately than a purely passive and causal model would. While I disagree with Whitehead in his wanting to attribute these qualities even to non-living nature, I do agree that he is highlighting features of life that the disenchanted, mechanistic view of the world bequeathed to us by classical science frequently misses.

One aspect of life that Whitehead stresses is more problematic. He suggests that life constantly seeks to improve itself. As he puts it in his 1929 text *The Function of Reason*, all living things have an urge "(i) to live, (ii) to live well, (iii) to live better. In fact the art of life is first to be alive, second, to be alive in a satisfactory way, and third, to acquire an increase in satisfaction."[8] This appears to mean that life is constantly striving to live in a better way and to improve its own mode of engaging in living processes. Considering the human case might lead to this conclusion. It does appear to be a fact about human psychology that human beings seek to improve themselves. While there may be pathological exceptions to this, most people who are considered psychologically and physically healthy seek to acquire skills, improve their performance in their tasks, acquire new knowledge, strive to deepen their understanding, and try to increase their physical fitness and health status, and so forth. Is it a vicious anthropomorphism to attribute this motivation to improvement to other animals and to other living things? The fact of evolution may be thought to require us to do so. Evolution is marked by a gradual improvement in the abilities and powers of species. As a species emerges in the context of its selective environmental pressures, it develops new and more adaptive means of securing its continuation in life. In this way such incredibly subtle and complex organs as eyes, and ears, and the navigation systems of bats have emerged over the aeons of time that evolution requires. This could be seen to be an improvement in the nature and structures of life. We might be inclined to explain this by positing and attributing to living things the purpose of seeking self-improvement, and we might be encouraged in this by the thought that such a seeking marks human living. However, this would be an inappropriate anthropomorphism. This way of accounting for evolution is inappropriately teleological. It suggests that evolution

is driven by an innate desire on the part of species to improve themselves. This is clearly at variance with the standard scientific explanation for evolution, which is that it is based on chance mutations that happen, by chance, to allow their bearers to reproduce more effectively in their changing environments. In this instance, the fact that human living is often marked by a desire for self-improvement should not be read back into all other forms of life. It is an example of the errors to which the continuity view of nature makes its proponents prone. The kind of purposiveness that can be attributed to life in a warranted manner will need to pass the test of consistency with science if it is not to be a misleading and purely poetic or metaphorical attribution.

The term that I would use to gather together the strands of thought captured by such terms as "freedom," "transcendence," "experience," and "enjoyment," is "subjectivity." I would say that the basis for the descriptions that Whitehead, Jonas, and even Nietzsche give us is phenomenological reflection. Such reflection yields the concept of subjectivity that I developed in chapter one. But we should avoid the theoretical temptation to read this concept back into all forms of life. Subjectivity is a form of "freedom," "transcendence," "experience," and "enjoyment" that is marked by self-awareness. It is because of these characteristics that subjectivity as a mode of our living is itself a moral source.

3. The Ethical Character of Life—Schweitzer contra Nietzsche

To attribute the quality of subjectivity to life on the basis of its displaying intentionality and enjoying self-awareness may be an interesting metaphysical or hermeneutic idea, but what does it imply for our attitude to life? Nietzsche's version of the notion of subjectivity is will-to-power. Here the striving for self-individuation and the appropriation of the environment that it involves are given an aggressive and self-aggrandizing interpretation. In Nietzsche, the notion of "appropriation" takes on an ethically worrying tone. Perhaps this is because Nietzsche is too individualistic in his thinking. For him, the struggle for life to affirm and individuate itself is inherently competitive. Not only does the individual organism struggle to gain what it needs from its environment, but it also competes with its fellows in that struggle. In Nietzsche, subjectivity or will-to-power is self-seeking or egoistic. While there might be communities of mutual respect based on the joyful recognition of our own qualities as reflected in the person of another, there is no genuine rapport with others in their vulnerability. Nietzsche's communities are groups of like-minded masterly types whose camaraderie is based on each member's self-sufficiency. Subjectivity as will-to-power admits of no genuine sympathy with others. The suffering of another person is to Nietzsche's masterly type a sign of failure and weakness. It attracts only disdain and even justifies exploitation. Above all else, Nietzsche's masterly type must not allow himself to feel pity. To do so would be to lose that sense of self-affirmation upon which the masterly type depends for his superiority. It would be to identify himself with the oppressed and the downtrodden. Such an identification is precisely what led to the historical overcoming of masterly paganism by the religions of meekness, humility, and victimhood. Will-to-power, in order to be free of the resentment that distorts the mentality of slave types, must not identify itself with weakness and fear. It must remain self-affirming, aggressive, and alone.

In order to see a more positive notion of life we should explore the thought of another notable thinker: namely, Albert Schweitzer. Albert Schweitzer was a highly talented musician and scholar who gave up success in Europe to train as a missionary doctor and set up a hospital in equatorial Africa. Such a man's writings about ethics command credibility. He developed the notion of an ethic based on respect for life. While discussing the foundations of ethical obligation, Schweitzer says that the Western project of seeking to found ethics on the meaning or nature of the universe has failed.[9] It is not possible to gain an objective knowledge of the universe of the kind that would ground ethics. We cannot deduce our moral standards from the way the world is, from what the gods want, or from our own genetic make-up. According to Schweitzer, our will structures knowledge and interprets reality in the light of its desires instead of the other way about. Therefore the will or the intuitions of the individual person thinking with sincerity must be the primary source of ethical obligation. In the terms of contemporary moral philosophy Schweitzer would be an "intuitionist": that is, a person who believes that our knowledge of right and wrong are embedded in our deepest impulses and thoughts. For Schweitzer, what we need to find within our intuitions is an attitude of world-affirmation and life-affirmation. These are the feeling that life is good and worth living, and the sense of responsibility for all living things. But we cannot use reason to secure this. So Schweitzer posits a "will-to-live" that is an instinctive and primordial level of motivation that all living things evince. There are clear affinities here with my concept of subjectivity. There are also affinities with Nietzsche's will-to-power: affinities that Schweitzer acknowledges. But our "will-to-live" is not simply an ethical motivation in itself. It can become routine or be overwhelmed with pessimism so as to lead to life-negation just as easily as it turns to life-affirmation. It is vague and unformed, a mere non-conscious drive. So whatever ethical stance we might form, it cannot be merely a direct expression of our will-to-live. It must be mediated by thought.

What kind of thought is it that will shape the will-to-live in such a way as to make it life-affirming? How does our will-to-live come to express itself as an ethic of reverence for life: as a commitment to enhance the conditions of life? Is it thought about moral principles? Is it a rational grounding of moral norms, whether on natural law, utilitarian, or deontological principles? No, the relevant kind of thought is subjective and arises from sincerity to my own deepest feelings. I must be true to the will-to-live. As Schweitzer puts it, "The essential nature of the will-to-live is determination to live itself to the full. It carries within it the impulse to realize itself in the highest possible perfection."[10] We have here, again, an articulation of my notion of subjectivity involving self-creation and self-affirmation, and of Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia* as fulfillment, along with Whitehead's more contentious notion of self-improvement. It is being suggested that will-to-live is a feeling or an impulse toward self-fulfillment. But I will argue that it is not purely individual and egoistic in the way that Nietzsche's will-to-power is. A person who is motivated by the will-to-live is in the grip of something greater than herself. As Schweitzer says, "Reverence for life means to be in the grasp of the infinite, inexplicable forward-urging will in which all Being is grounded."[11] We hear echoes in this quotation of Whitehead's idea that the entire universe is infused with life and subjectivity in some primordial form. On this view, every individual living thing is caught up in this dynamic Being or reality-in-itself. Accordingly, its activities and behaviors are an expression, not just of its own will, but also of the larger forces of which it is a part. On the

continuity of nature view, it would be easy to maintain that human beings and all living things are part of a huge natural living system whose primordial aims flow through every one of us. Having rejected the continuity view of nature, however, I cannot interpret Schweitzer's idea in this way. Instead, I suggest that even without those parts of nature that we take to be inert, we can still acknowledge that living nature is suffused with intentionality and that, given the systemic connections between organic systems and their environments, we and other living things are all part of a living system marked by a will-to-live that flows through us, as it were, and motivates our actions at the most primordial and hidden level of our being. This thought fully grasps the hint at interiority that Dennett's notion of an intentional system points to, without attributing full subjectivity to all living things. That said, it is not clear that Schweitzer himself uses this distinction between intentionality and subjectivity. He too appears to have succumbed to the anthropomorphic temptation and to have attributed subjectivity to all of life.

But how does this metaphysical vision of a primordial will-to-live that flows through us lead to an ethical stance marked by affirmation of, and reverence for, life? It appears not to do so through an intellectual process of detached, scientific, or objective thought, but through a form of being in the grasp of an idea or a reality. It is an intuition. It is a shaping of character. It is the motivational basis of virtue instead of an intellectual basis of moral principles. It is because it leads to an ethic of self-perfection that will-to-live becomes life- and world-affirming. Schweitzer is saying that all living things are caught up in a great adventure of life. They all evince subjectivity in some form and this subjectivity comprises the self-project of self-affirmation and self-improvement. This is dynamic and motivational because it is a participation in the dynamism and living force of reality-in-itself. In order to be true to this force and thus be sincere and true to itself, every living thing must strive for its own perfection. This is to affirm life. Negation of life, mere contentment, and the seeking of death would be forms of escape from the very forces that subjectivity intuits as being at the heart of itself.

But is this view of Schweitzer's sufficient to ground a human ethics of caring for others? Is it enough to make the poetic suggestion that a life force flows through us in order to theorize the nature of our caring for others? Can this view account for our sacrificing our own comforts or even life itself for another? How is Schweitzer's view different from Nietzsche's self-enclosed will-to-power? How does the individual living thing break out of its motivation toward self-affirmation and self-perfecting in order to become altruistic? How does the individual living thing bring itself to respond to the need of the other without regard for its own self? Schweitzer does say that altruism is a "necessity of thought" for a person's will-to-live on the ground that such altruism is a part of the perfection of living things such as ourselves and that therefore our own drive toward self-perfection must embrace altruism. But this begs the question. Why is altruism taken to be a part of our self-perfection if it is not being already assumed that it is obligatory and good? We are seeking an argument based just on the nature of life for thinking that altruism is obligatory or good. It begs the question to assume that it is good, as Schweitzer does when he says that its development is implied by the notion of self-perfection.

If self-sacrifice is to be possible, will-to-live cannot lead to only self-directed behavior. Both Schweitzer and Whitehead base their understanding of life on human experience. But human experience discloses motivations and impulses of dizzying variety and complexity. In the human case with which alone we are fully familiar, subjectivity is a rich and deep field of drives, inclinations,

motivations, and reasons for action. If we take seriously the methodological injunction to account for ethical behavior not in terms of causes but in terms of imperatives that are deeply felt, then we must acknowledge the primordial nature of the motivations that Schweitzer is pointing to. Just being alive is motivational. As Nietzsche also points out, it urges us to self-affirmation, self-perfection, striving, and achievement. But there is more to subjectivity than just these forms of self-project. As I have argued elsewhere,[12] an equally primordial form of subjectivity is caring-about-others. When we reflect upon our own experience we find more than just self-directed motivations. We find concern for others as well.[13] They may be a fairly finite range of others: the ones we love, our kin, our friends, and those with whom we have direct personal contact, but our concern for them is as real and as immediate as our concern for ourselves. In these cases our caring for others does not need to be generated by thought such as a consideration of moral principles. A full description of our subjectivity would uncover not only a tendency toward self-affirmation and individuation, but also a tendency toward empathy with, and caring for, these concrete others. It is this that Nietzsche either misses or disparages. Yet it is just as basic as will-to-power. Our subjectivity or will-to-live includes the kind of empathy that responds to the needs of specific others. No objective or principled argument needs to establish this as duty. For someone who is not a psychopath it is simply felt as empathy in response to those others who are significant in their life.

Schweitzer contrasts an "ethic of personality" (which I would call "virtue ethics") with "social ethics," by which he means publicly established rational and principle-based ethics such as natural law theory, utilitarianism, and deontology. An "ethic of personality" is an expression of the basic, intrinsic, and primordial motivations that any living thing feels toward itself and its environment. In the case of human beings it will include our self-project and our caring about a definite range of others. We human beings may well develop this ethic into a system of principles and social rules, but the basic ethical motivation is already there as an expression of life's subjectivity itself. In order to see this we need to transcend our objectifying forms of knowing. Schweitzer argues that some kind of mystical rapport with what is living is needed. This is not a mysticism focused on abstractions like "Being" or "God." Instead, it is a rapport with particular beings that elicit my response. It is this that secures the link between an ethics of self-perfection and an ethics of altruism. The rapport is sincerely a part of my life, and thus it is required by my self-perfecting to respond to it. Accordingly:

> The basic principle of ethics, that principle which is a necessity of thought, which has a definite content, which is engaged in constant living, and practical dispute with reality, is: Devotion to life resulting from reverence for life.[14]

Schweitzer tries to distinguish clearly a scientific view of life from the metaphysical and ethical view that he is trying to develop. He says that no ethical conception of life can be derived from a scientific one. To understand life in a way that will convey ethical import, our thinking must be "mystical" in that it must be expressive of a spiritual and intuitive relation to the world. Ethics in this sense does not require abstract thought, but particular engagement. "What life is, no science can tell us."[15] If you were to look at your pet cat or pet dog with the eyes of classical science and with eyes shaped by the thought of Descartes, you would think yourself to be looking at a machine. Descartes, following upon the

discoveries of the then emerging sciences, had taught that animals were complex biological mechanisms with no mind within them. In more sophisticated terms, he was suggesting that an animal is like a robot or an automaton. It was a quite sophisticated machine with no "interiority" or subjectivity present within it. However, as anyone with a pet knows, an animal does indeed evince intentionality in Dennett's sense, and it is an open question for some as to whether this is indicative of subjectivity. An animal acts purposefully, as if it had beliefs and desires, and so it displays intentionality. Moreover, many animals look us in the eye with expectation and affection. Looking into the eyes of a dog is not like looking at the lens of a camera. It involves seeing an intelligent and feelingful creature to which we are drawn to respond in recognition of its needs and wants. We appear to intuit subjectivity when we gaze into the eyes of an animal and respond to it as a living creature. Schweitzer builds on such experiences with his point that the way in which science has taught us to see the world—in terms just of mechanisms, behaviors, and causal relations—is not adequate to our perception of living things. Our perception of living things is structured not just by an objective classification of visual information but also by a rapport with the hidden subjectivity of the other.

Psychologists tend to explain this rapport as a projection of our own knowledge of what subjectivity is, derived from our own self-awareness. On this view, it is my own knowledge of what life or the will-to-live is that is the model for understanding other living things. This is not abstract, theoretical knowledge but concrete and engaged knowledge. It is a knowledge that derives from a relationship with that which I know. In this instance, I have envisaged making eye contact with a companion animal. This eye contact establishes a relationship that is then the basis of our intuiting the subjectivity of that animal. But this relationship or empathy is not enough. We also need to have an understanding of what subjectivity is in our own case so that we can project, as it were, this understanding onto that which we are perceiving. It may be that the way we project this knowledge as we apprehend things in the world is not always apt. We may attribute qualities of subjectivity to a rag doll or to a misbehaving computer, or we may attribute qualities of supernatural subjectivity to trees or other natural phenomena in the way that some traditional societies do. But in the case of higher animals such a mode of knowing appears more warranted because it is consistent with what science tells us about such entities in terms of the complexity of their brains and their intelligent behaviors. They are intentional systems. Empathetic knowing goes beyond the world-view of science, but it is still subject to epistemological testing in that it must not be inconsistent with it. But more to the point, an animal elicits this kind of intuitive seeing from us. It is not just we who project subjectivity onto the animal so that we see it as a subject of experiences and a center of life. It also draws this mode of seeing from us by its human-like appearance and by the way that it looks at us. We are seduced into attributing subjectivity to it by the look that it directs upon us. We see that look as active, as joyful, or as a supplication. We do not just apprehend the animal, we respond to it. It appears to be a genuine encounter between two subjectivities in which there is a form of rapport involving mutual entreaty and response. However, it is not clear that such animals actually enjoy subjectivity. They are intentional systems and there are psychological processes of empathy that lead us to relate to them as if they were subjects, but it is not clear that they have the mode of being that allows us to address them in an I–Thou form of acknowledgment.

The quality of subjectivity is more clearly present in the case of mature and healthy human beings and, in a book about the foundations for an ethics of caring and for virtue in the health care professions, our focus should be upon human beings. I discuss animals only because, as we consider different forms of life from the less complex to the more complex, there is no clear point at which we can say that we have passed from creatures who do not evince subjectivity to those who do.

Schweitzer's notion of a human will-to-live is significant because it posits the possibility of empathetic and caring knowledge of others and thereby shows up the limitations of Nietzsche's view of will-to-power as a struggle that is inevitably competitive. Nietzsche could adopt his egoistic conception along with its disdain for the "herd" of humankind because his lonely reflection could find only self-affirmation amongst his primordial forms of subjectivity. Will-to-power is competitive precisely because the other is not known by it in any empathetic way. There is no genuine intersubjective encounter in Nietzsche's view of the world. Will-to-power only responds reactively to others and sets up a master–slave antithesis. The masterly types define themselves through their own self-affirmation and disdain for lesser forms of life, while slave types define themselves through fear and resentment of the master mentality. This is why Nietzsche has to reject pity. Any pity or sympathy with a being that is suffering and calling for help would be, for the masterly type, an identification with that need and supplication. And this would involve a diminution of that self-affirmation upon which their identity as a masterly person is built. So, to sustain the masterly self-project, the very subjectivity of weaker others has to be rejected. The masterly type of person ends up alone in the world unable to acknowledge or respond to the subjectivity of most others and able, therefore, only to use them and exploit them as instruments.

The self-sacrificing doctor in equatorial Africa, in contrast, could find caring for others as an equally primordial motivation within his subjectivity. If will-to-live is sympathetic in its very structure, then it allows for the ethical regard of the other. Empathy with, acceptance of, and absorption into the other are expressions of this ethical outlook equally as important as Nietzsche's self-affirmation and differentiation. Subjectivity enables mutuality. It allows us to gain an intuition of the subjectivity of the other based upon our projection of our own intuitive grasp of our subjectivity onto that other, in response to the intentionality manifested by that other insofar as it is alive. It is upon this mutuality of recognition of living things that Schweitzer bases his basic ethical principle.

> Ethics consists, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own. There we have given us that basic principle of the moral which is a necessity of thought. It is good to maintain and to encourage life, it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it.[16]

For my own part, instead of expressing this as an intellectualized moral principle, I would express it as a description of the virtue of caring. The virtue of caring involves my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own. It involves my feeling that it is good to maintain and to encourage life and that it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it.

4. Extending the Ethical—Emmanuel Levinas

And yet, I do need to acknowledge that my claim that virtue is an expression of what lies deeply within our subjectivity is too limited. All I have been able to show thus far is that such empathetic subjectivity arises in an encounter with other living things with which I happen to have a rapport. This rapport, as I have intimated, is based either on my having been nurtured in an intersubjective context or on a psychological process of projection in which I attribute subjectivity to the other. While such projection may be justified in the case of other people, it is a form of anthropomorphism in the case of most animals. Genuine encounter can only be between subjects, as Buber has shown. If the living creature before me displays only intentionality, then my rapport with it is of a lesser ethical quality than the I–Thou relationship that Buber describes. The contingent fact that I can feel sympathy for, and be ethically motivated by, particular others, whether these be persons close to me, or domesticated animals with which I can establish rapport, is an insufficient basis for an ethical norm that would claim universal or objective normative significance for my subjectivity. How might we understand our ethical responsibility for all living things as present within my fundamental motivational stances as a virtuous person if that responsibility is to extend beyond the circle of those with whom I enjoy empathetic encounters?

In order to answer this difficult question we need to ask what could be meant by Schweitzer's appeal to a mystical rapport with all living nature. He does not explain this notion himself, but I would like to suggest a reading that is inspired by Emmanuel Levinas.

Levinas situates human self-conscious existence in the context of a blind reality that he calls the *there is* (in French: *il y a*). This reality is the system of causal interactions and material processes that, if there were not conscious beings within it, would be nothing more than things interacting with other things without any self-awareness or apparent purpose. With the emergence of subjectivity, human consciousness creates its own world as a world of light and appearance that emerges out of the darkness of sheer reality. "To be conscious is to be torn away from the *there is*, since the existence of a consciousness constitutes a subjectivity, a subject of existence, that is, to some extent a master of being, already a name in the anonymity of the night."[17] As we perceive the things around us we constitute them as objects in our world and thus emerge from the night of unconscious and blind being. Our awareness gives us a world in which to be. Our understanding, equipped as Kant had explained, with concepts of reason, structures a knowledge through which the world becomes apparent to us as the reality in which we live. Our world contains cars, houses, other people, animals, and so forth because, whatever it is in itself, we apprehend it in those terms. In this way our subjectivity constitutes our world for us as an assemblage of appearances and presentations that make sense to us. Of course we need not believe that there would be no reality if there were no self-conscious subjects to constitute a world of perceived and understood objects. There surely would be. But it would not be a known or knowable reality. It would be just what it is, but it would not be an appearance. In Kant's terminology, it would be an unknowable "thing-in-itself." It would be a blind, deaf, and dumb reality that would be, in Levinas's phrase, "beyond being." It would be a sheer *there is*. It would be beyond being because beings are the objects that we constitute in consciousness through the structuring of our knowledge. Even aside from that which we can

apprehend directly, there will be objects we remember or imagine as well as theories that we create and cultural products that we produce. The reality of these is of a different order from the objects that we can apprehend through our senses, but they are all, nevertheless, objects in our world. It is beyond this world that there lies the *there is*. Our world of light has darkness as its horizon.

Perhaps an image of my own devising would help here. Suppose that the universe were made up of pea soup. Pea soup is full of matter. It contains peas, bits of ham, water, different starches, and so on. It is thick and viscous and totally fills its space. It is closed in upon itself. Who or what can know what it contains if it is all there is? Nothing can. It is blind to itself. For there to be any knowledge of it possible, there must be what Martin Heidegger calls a "clearing." There must be a space from within which the pea soup can be apprehended. (Remember that the whole universe is the pea soup and that, therefore, there is no place outside of it from which it can be observed and knowledge of it gained.) So there must be an opening or a space within the pea soup from where knowledge of the pea soup is possible. This space is the absence of pea soup. It is a no-pea-soup. Seeing as pea soup is all there is and therefore is all things, a no-pea-soup is a nothing (or a no-thing) within the pea soup. But it is within this nothingness and because of it that knowledge of the pea soup is possible. Within this bubble of nothingness in the pea soup, the peas, the water, and the bits of ham can be apprehended. Whatever is in the space, the nothingness, can have knowledge of the soup. The soup is no longer closed in upon itself or blind to itself. The edge of the bubble is a possible appearance of the soup. So if consciousness is what makes knowledge of reality possible in a universe of blind materiality, then consciousness is like a nothingness or space within that materiality. Of course, for the pea soup to be visible from within that clearing there would need to be light. Consciousness can be thought of as that light. There must be light in the clearing for the disclosure of the pea soup to take place.

But what sustains this space, this light, and this openness? If we were to press the analogy as far as it can go, we would have to say that the soup itself generates the bubble and the light within it through which it can be aware of itself. Seeing as the soup is everything there is, there can be no other agency that could exercise this magical power. Perhaps there was a chemical process that produced a bubble of gas and lit it up. We should not push the analogy so far as to demand of it that it explain the origin of the light and of the bubble. The key point is that it can only be the pea soup that sustains its own bubble. Moreover, insofar as the view of the soup that the bubble makes possible is a view just of the edge of the bubble and hence of a surface in the soup, the soup itself lies behind that surface and remains hidden as a reality behind the appearance. The soup is present to awareness only as the surface of a hidden *there is*. And the awareness is present only as an openness, as light, and as nothingness emerging from, and sustained by, the hidden *there is* of the soup.

But if the soup sustains the openness through which it is disclosed into appearance, then the openness, the light, the clearing, or consciousness, owes its being to the sustaining of the soup or of blind material reality itself. Whereas Kant had postulated a transcendental subject to be the conscious source of knowledge and the owner of the concepts through which reality could be disclosed to us, Heidegger and Levinas situate subjectivity, not in a transcendental realm beyond reality, but within reality itself. Subjectivity is a possibility given by the material universe. While this does not require us to say, as Whitehead did, that everything within materiality is marked by a quality of

subjectivity, it does require us to accept that subjectivity emerged in the material universe by virtue of material processes in that universe. My argument is that the primary means whereby it was possible for subjectivity to emerge in the materiality was through the emergence of life. Every conscious living thing is a little bubble in the material universe through which that material world becomes an appearance for that living thing such that that living thing can respond to it and use it for its own goals of living. Purpose, intentionality, and teleology require awareness of things such that subjectivity can respond to them appropriately. Intentionality, as consciousness *of* things, must be separated *from* things and so is the clearing of a space within which reality can become aware of itself. Kant's transcendental subject is not a metaphysical stranger situated outside the material universe, but a clearing within it, at home in it, and constituting it as an environment for life.

What has all this got to do with ethics? I said that the material universe sustains the clearing through which it becomes a teleological environment and world of perceived objects. The sheer *there is* is the sustaining bed of our being as subjectivity (even as it is the horror-inspiring thickness to which we fear to return). Within it, Darwinian science assures us, there occurred blind, random, and natural processes that resulted in the emerging of living beings and then, subsequently, conscious and self-conscious beings. Our existence as physical beings and as subjectivities is based upon the processes of material nature. Those processes and realities are the horizon within which, and the basis upon which, I have my existence. If I am a bubble within the pea soup of the universe, then I owe my existence to the pea soup.

And if I *owe* my existence to anything then I have a responsibility to that thing. The mystical vision that Schweitzer gestured toward is one in which I recognise that I am one with the universe. More particularly, I am one with the living beings in that universe. I am even more one with the conscious beings in it and with the self-conscious beings in it.

I am using the word "beings" here as a verb. I am speaking of other subjectivities, other bubbles in the pea soup, other centres of consciousness and of environing worlds. I owe my being to them too. The *there is* sustains me because I am a product of those natural processes that result in life. It does so beyond my knowledge. Whatever scientific knowledge I may have of modern evolutionary biology, such knowledge is constitutive of objects and theories. My living, real, and subjective reality is not sustained by such knowledge. Such knowledge is made possible and sustained by my subjectivity. My subjectivity is sustained by materiality and by life itself. So I owe a debt to life. I do not have a *right* to life. Against whom or what could I claim such a right when I have not yet come into being? I have been *given* life. All past living things are my forebears and all present living things are my brothers and sisters. We are all sustained by materiality and we all are openings within that materiality such that subjectivity can act in it purposively and with awareness of its world.

Notice that this argument is not a rational deduction from known premises. I am not arguing that I have knowledge of the natural world and of the processes by which it sustains my being: a knowledge that leads me to conclude that I owe that world a debt of gratitude and reverence. My analysis is an attempt to explicate Schweitzer's notion of a mystical feeling of connection with life. The feeling of responsibility that I have toward life does not arise from reasoning. It arises from my being situated in the encompassing horizon of the *there is* and of the grounding that my being has within that horizon. This horizon is a dark and

inarticulate shadow of sheer materiality that both threatens and supports my worldly existence as a subjectivity. The *there is* resonates within me as an unknowable basis of my existence. This is a feeling prior to any knowledge. It is not the theme of a reflection. It is an *a priori* mood of reverence, respect, or indebtedness arising from my embeddedness in the organic realm.

Given these ideas from Levinas, Schweitzer's mystical thought can be interpreted to lead to a universal principle by way of the highly intuitive path of a meditation upon the material basis of human existence. This meditation leads to the recognition of a debt that is owed to the *there is*. It is a debt that is paid by way of respect for the material world and, in particular, by way of reverence for life. The principle that Schweitzer has articulated as a "necessity of thought" is not derived by logical processes from clear and distinct ideas, but is felt intuitively as a debt that we owe to all living reality. The possibility of our own mode of being as subjectivity is based upon its mode of being as intentional, living reality. When Schweitzer said "Reverence for life means to be in the grasp of the infinite, inexplicable forward-urging will in which all Being is grounded," he was articulating the intuition of that debt that we owe to life because of its being the ground of our being as subjectivity.

What kind of argument is the one that has just been developed? I have suggested that it establishes that we ought to respect life in all its forms. But does it do so with the logical rigor that moral theorists demand? Does it establish by way of a logical deduction from self-evident premises an imperative that we had not known before and that we now cannot ignore? Indeed how specific is the imperative to respect life? What does it actually enjoin us to do in specific situations?

Schweitzer's ethic does not make reference to any supernatural entities or concepts. It does not say that life is "sacred" and, despite Schweitzer's own profound Christian beliefs, it does not appeal to any theological notions. His is a purely naturalistic ethics appealing just to our own experience and sensibilities in order to impress itself upon us. But nor does he offer the kind of apodictic principle-based arguments often found in bioethics. In discussing life and death issues such as euthanasia, abortion, or many of the new problems that contemporary medicine and health care are giving rise to, we often hear it said that the embryo, or the foetus, or the irreversibly comatose person must not be killed or even allowed to die because "it is a human life," "it is a human being," "it is a person," or "human life is sacred."[18] I do not believe that Schweitzer's arguments give any support to these kinds of position. Indeed, I doubt that any arguments could give support to them. They express a number of essentialist prejudices: for example, that human life is somehow more valuable than other forms of life, that human life is a gift from God, that no human being has the right to intervene in the life-status of another human being, and so forth. I do not want to debate these positions in detail. I only want to suggest that they all partake of the most serious fault of all principle-based forms of ethical thought. They attempt to apply dogma to particular situations without regard to the specifics of that situation. Would a virtuous person refuse to consider alleviating the suffering of another on the grounds of such an abstract thought as that this is a human life? Schweitzer's principle is not an abstract doctrine in this sense. It is an appeal to us to understand that life supports intentionality and subjectivity and to encounter the one who is alive and suffering in their particularity. It takes virtue instead of dogged adherence to principles to do this. It is in the intersubjective contexts of health care that virtuous decisions are made that

respond to the suffering subjectivity of the other. Objective moral principles lack the warmth and immediacy of intersubjective encounter and often appeal to spurious notions of essentialist objectivity and absoluteness. The virtuous person responds to the concrete situation from a basis of virtuous commitments and attitudes, including that of respect for life. But such a person does not convert such an attitude into a dogmatic principle to be applied without regard to the specific needs of those who are involved. Quite often "life is sacred" or "it is a human life" are slogans that hinder sensitive awareness of suffering subjectivity.

I would suggest that what Schweitzer's argument achieves is an understanding of an intuition that we all have in some way or another. We all feel that in some way life is wonderful and ought to be respected. This is the intuition that is formalized in the principle "Life is sacred": a principle that is then justified by appealing to theological or apodictic arguments. But even as we honor this intuition in some circumstances, our habits of mind and forms of socialization prevent us from seeing many other instances to which this thought is applicable. We swat flies and eat meat and largely ignore the high human mortality rates in the third world. Schweitzer's argument does not establish a new moral principle with certainty. It merely leads us to reflect on our practices to see whether they are consistent with the intuitions we implicitly have. It enlivens those deeper motivations and moral sources that routine might smother.

Moreover, Schweitzer's view as amplified by myself establishes the kind of link between understanding and motivation that a virtue-theoretical approach to ethics requires and that justifies my suggestion that life itself is a moral source. If empathy establishes the object of our moral concerns on the basis of a primordial kinship between living things, it also establishes the motivation to act ethically in relation to those objects. Moral development and growth will consist in a widening of the range of things to which we are sensitive and to which we respond with ethical caring. My argument that as conscious beings we owe a debt to all life for sustaining our subjectivity is an intuitive basis upon which this enlargement of the scope of our moral responsibility can be based. If there are distinctions to be drawn between different kinds of moral regard based on different kinds of life or entity, then such distinctions will arise in the actual responses that are elicited in us as living beings by our encounters with others and with things in the world. Just as there are discontinuities in nature, so there will be distinct kinds of empathetic response to things in nature as well as genuine intersubjective I–Thou encounters with other human beings. We live our lives in the particular, and we respond in specific ways to things in all their variety. If we have a general moral duty, it is to enlarge and deepen the range of our moral responses to the world. To do so is to be true to ourselves and to perfect ourselves as empathetic beings. In short, one moral duty that we have as human beings is to care. The way in which the recognition that life is precious affects the motivational stances of a virtuous person is to elicit and broaden such care.

5. The Scope of Schweitzer's Ethics of Life

Notice that Schweitzer's ethic does not refer specifically to human life. It applies equally to all living things. By not stressing human life as such, Schweitzer is not only urging us to give more moral consideration to animals, but he is also urging us to reconsider what the basis of our respect for *human* life is. Traditionally we

have thought that human life is distinct, special, and superior to animal and plant life. Only in the human case, it was thought, is life given in the form of a rational and immortal soul. Human life was thought to be sacred in a way that animal life was not. And even if we do not subscribe to theological theories about human life, we might argue that human life is special in that it includes the function of rationality that other forms of life do not enjoy. Human beings are often said to enjoy a kind of dignity, based upon their freedom and autonomy, that animals do not have. Whether or not we account for the distinctness of human life with reference to some metaphysical or theological doctrine, the basis of the moral status of human life is thought to be unique to the human context. But in basing his ethic of life just on the special qualities of intentionality, subjectivity, or the "will-to-live," Schweitzer refuses to give any special status to human life. From our anti-essentialist position, it becomes less clear that subjectivity is confined to the human species. The great apes, dolphins, and whales have been frequently cited as possible bearers of subjectivity and most animals and possibly even plants evince intentionality. There is here a modified form of the continuity view of nature. There is a continuity through all kinds and levels of living things in that they all evince intentionality in one form or another, and at some indefinite point, as we move up on the great chain of being, we take this to be indicative of subjectivity. By default, Schweitzer's claim is that there is no moral significance to the differences of kinds or grades of intentionality or subjectivity that living things evince. Insofar as they display will-to-live of any kind, they can be encountered in an empathetic mode and they should elicit in virtuous people the ethical response of respect for life.

But does the continuity view of nature inherent in Schweitzer's position imply that all of our ethical stances toward nature must have the same quality? He does not distinguish between intentionality and subjectivity, and speaks simply of the will-to-live. Does his view prevent us from making ethically important distinctions between those many living things in the world that appeal to our ethical intuitions? It may be true that respect for life extends to all living things insofar as they and we express will-to-life. But does it follow that the same kind of ethical respect should be extended to all forms of life? The only kinds of ethical distinctions that Schweitzer's arguments allow us to make are distinctions between those living things with which I can establish an empathetic rapport and those with which I do not. But this is a contingent matter and often depends upon the culture in which I am brought up. This, by itself, fails to provide a universal and rationally secure set of distinctions. A Buddhist will have a wider range of concerns than the average Westerner. Moreover, it fails to discriminate between intentional systems and bearers of subjectivity. We need a basis for ethical discrimination that would allow us to understand, and perhaps justify, the way in which we respond differently to creatures with which we can feel empathy on the one hand, and creatures whom we can address as subjects, on the other.

As this book focuses on human health care, the health needs of human beings are central to its concerns. Accordingly, we will need to recall the nature of intersubjective encounters as distinct from empathetic ones as described by Levinas and as explicated in chapter two. It is this distinction that justifies the intuition that other persons and the human objects of their care should occupy a special and pre-eminent place in the field of our ethical concerns.

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Six

LIVING SUBJECTIVITY

> Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analyses as *concern*, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as *solicitude.*
>
> Martin Heidegger[1]

When it focuses upon human persons does an ethics of life mark them off as objects of special moral obligation? Why is human life said to be "sacred" to a degree that other forms of life are not? Why is the death of a human person seen to be an evil that we have a moral duty to avoid causing? A typical contemporary bioethicist's answer to this question might be exemplified by that of Michael Tooley:

> What properties must something have in order to be a person, i.e., to have a serious right to life? The claim I wish to defend is this: An organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself a continuing entity.[2]

This quotation hints at an important insight. That a being conceives of itself as a self and as a continuing entity does indeed appear to be of some importance when we consider its "right to life." In his own terms, Tooley is gesturing toward the quality of subjectivity that persons enjoy. But he leaves many questions unanswered. What is it about subjectivity that justifies its high moral status? What ethical claim does seeing myself as a self make upon others? How is my subjectivity a moral source motivating others to adopt an ethical stance toward me? Moreover, there can be questions that point in the opposite direction. Is my ethical stance toward others grounded in my believing myself to be a continuing entity or self? How is my subjectivity a moral source motivating me to an ethical stance toward others? In this chapter I will explore what the relation might be between being a person and having a right to life. And I will add that being a person implies having responsibilities.

But I will not use the terminology typical of the bioethics discourse. I have argued in chapter two that offering criteria for personhood in order to establish a "right to life" or any other form of moral standing is an unhelpful approach. In contrast, I argued that "being a person" is a classification that we bestow on a being even as we already accord it ethical significance. Moreover, I have suggested that the central feature distinguishing persons from those living beings who would elicit a different kind of ethical concern is that these are the beings with whom I can enter into intersubjective rapport. As well, as my thinking moves from intersubjective encounter to a critical solicitude for justice, they are the beings who can become equal to one another and to me in our all being bearers of rights. And we have noted Ricoeur's argument that intersubjective

solicitude is reciprocal. It is for this reason that our questions above have to point in two directions. Moreover, Ricoeur reminds us that being a person is a status that persons themselves can typically attest to. Self-affirming subjectivity is central to being a person. It follows from this that living subjectivity cannot be understood except in an intersubjective context. Lastly, I will sketch out some bioethical implications of my views in relation to beginning-of-life decisions.

1. Toward a Phenomenology of Subjectivity

In considering the special status of persons as bearers of subjectivity, we need to commence with a methodological point. In the preceding two chapters, I have failed to heed my own methodological strictures. I have spoken of "life" using a noun. What I should have done was to speak of "living beings" so as to stress the dynamic, conative, and concernful nature of the mode of being with which clinicians are centrally concerned: the mode of being of persons. As persons, we are not only conscious of our environments, but we are also aware of ourselves as being conscious, and of being actively engaged with that of which we are conscious. This means that we not only respond to stimuli in our environments, but we also understand those stimuli and the way they affect us. When we are hungry and see food we do not just pounce on it and eat it as many animals do. We can place some distance between the food and ourselves because we are aware of ourselves and of our responses to it. We understand the stimulus as food and we understand ourselves as hungry and so we constitute the food as an object of our perception and of our desire. We make the food into an object instead of just blindly responding to it as to a behavioral stimulus. And we can give this object and the act of eating (which is also an object of which I am aware in reflection) different kinds of significance. We can classify the stimulus as breakfast food or lunch food. We can decide that now is not the time to eat and wait till later, thereby, perhaps, constituting the food as temptation. We can surround the act of eating with etiquette and ritual so as to experience it as a social event. None of this would be possible if our consciousness did not include an element of self-consciousness that allowed for the objectification of our sensory stimuli and of our own responses.

Given that we are biological creatures with biological needs, the basic classifications or objectifications that we will use to structure the world will be those of the useful and the not-useful. That the world appears to us always and already with such a pragmatic patina shows that subjectivity does not approach it neutrally. We approach it in the light of our needs. The significance of this, as Heidegger has shown, is that one of the most fundamental qualities of our being is "concern."[3] The phenomenological counterpart of the descriptive fact that we have biological needs is that I will experience concern for the meeting of my needs. Those of us who are comfortably off will not be preoccupied consciously with such concerns because we know where our next meal is coming from. Nevertheless, such a concern will be an implicit or pre-conscious structure of much of our motivational lives. We cannot live without being concerned at some level about our basic needs. Needs are not just objective facts about us as biological and living creatures, they are phenomenologically present to us as a qualitative mode of being of our subjectivity. As reflection would disclose, we are concernful beings never at rest. But such a reflection has to go deeper than the concerns of which we are conscious. Our everyday concerns relating to work and

career, home mortgages, loved ones, and so on, are socially structured and valid concerns. But they are not as basic as those concerns that stem from basic needs, not all of which need be biological. The four levels of human functioning that Aristotle delineated and that I described in chapter one posit needs that relate to our biology, our desires and emotions, our reasoning, and our conception of a greater whole of which we consider ourselves a part. But our cultures both hide and transform these basic concerns. It is arguable that our concern for fame, wealth, security, and friends are transformations of deeper needs of which we are barely conscious. One of the central insights of psychoanalysis is that subjectivity is marked by a range of concerns that are deeper than everyday consciousness would disclose.

A crucial element in the set of pre-conscious concerns that our self-aware mode of consciousness gives us is that we are aware of our deaths. We know that we are going to die. We know that we are vulnerable. My argument does not rest on the claim that it is only human beings who know that they are going to die. There may be other animal species that know this too. But insofar as they do not have language of the kind that we have, they cannot tell us this and we can only speculate about them. In the case of persons, it is arguable that most of human culture is a response to our recognition of our mortality.[4] Archaeologists generally ascribe personhood to the hominid creatures whose remains and settlements they study when they note that the dead are deliberately buried in purpose-built graves with gifts of flowers or implements or the like. For example, recent newspaper reports speak of remains found near Lake Mungo in Australia that are between 60,000 and 40,000 years old. The bodies had been marked with ochre and buried with numerous artefacts. As such, they are thought to be among the oldest human remains ever found although scientific controversy still rages about them.[5] Such practices are taken to be evidence for a kind of awareness of death that gives it meaning for the living, and this is thought to be a kind of threshold that moves intelligent tool-using creatures from the status of non-persons to that of persons. This is what was so striking about the Neanderthals who were not members of the human species but who did display these and other features of self-aware personhood.

What are the implications of our knowledge that we are going to die? I should say first of all that this is not just knowledge of a fact. I know that others will die. I know that my father has died. I know that my wife will. And I have attitudes of grief and concern about these facts. But these are still just facts that I have to deal with by objectifying them. I have to hold them at a distance from myself, adopt an attitude, and consider their implications. While this will have implications for the way I live, my knowledge that I myself will die is of a different order. It touches the way I live much more intimately. It is part of what I am. It is a quality of my existence or of my mode of being as subjectivity. I do not mean that it is something of which I am constantly conscious. Indeed, it is something that, operationally, I deny every day. Every time I embark on a project I am effectively denying that I will die before it is completed. If I did not deny this I would hardly be motivated to embark on the project. And yet I have a constant and implicit intimation that I will die. It is because of this that I must embark on this project *now*. I may not be here to do it tomorrow. And if I do not embark on this project and complete it successfully, then what mark will I have made on the world when I die? How will people remember me? I achieve my own memorial by achieving what I do. If it were not for this, why would it be worth doing? Is it important in itself? Moreover, I must leave progeny to carry on

my name and memory after I have died. My knowledge of my own death is part of the intrinsic structure of most of my motivations. My mortality gives urgency and weight to everything I do. Immortals have little to worry about and nothing to live for.[6] That I am destined to die is what gives me a life in the sense that it gives me the concerns and motivations that forge me into being a person. The projects and ambitions that I take on are driven, at a pre-conscious level, by my need to overcome death. It is not just instinct, it is knowing that I will die that leads me to being concerned for my own existence, and being concerned for my own existence is what constitutes me as an active self with a life to live.

It also constitutes me as a vulnerable self. Being a vulnerable self is being concerned first to survive biologically, second to have my desires fulfilled, third to plan ways in which I can achieve what I desire, and fourth to want to give all of these projects some meaning so that they will appear worth doing. These four "functions" are what Aristotle describes as "parts of the soul."[7] Mortal beings are concerned for their own biological survival. Living intentional systems seek food by hunting, fossicking, or waiting for it to drift by. The key point is that they seek. They adopt a concernful, conative, and purposive stance toward the world. In our own case, enriched by self-awareness and an awareness of death, this stance is constitutive of the qualities of the world of which we are aware and of the quality of the self of which we are aware. We are aware of ourselves as desiring, vulnerable, and mortal beings. As mortal and vulnerable living beings we are needful beings. As needful beings we are desiring beings. As desiring beings, aware of our own mortality and vulnerability, we become concerned beings. As concerned beings and as desiring beings (with the requisite brain capacity), we become strategic beings. We use our intelligence to make tools, plan our hunts, create cooperative societies, and so forth. We seek to stave off death by any means we can devise. What motivates much of our strategic thought at the deepest levels is our concern to ward off death and to meet our biological needs. We are anxious in the face of a return to the darkness of the *there is*.

We can ward off death symbolically too. Even if I myself will die, my works and achievements may live on after me if only they are grand enough. Or I may come to think that there is an immortal and eternal order of reality to which I belong and to which I will return so that my death is not real in the eternal scheme of things. I may create cultural practices and beliefs that give my actions and those of my people an everlasting grandeur or a place in the immortal realm of the gods. In doing so I may think that I am transcending my mere biological being and attaching myself to a reality greater than the merely human, whether it be theological, nationalistic, or moral. But I am still only expressing my deepest concern elicited by my awareness of my impending death.

I will be discussing death in later chapters, so I do not want to explore its impact on our lives further here. My purpose in raising the issue here is to explain that for vulnerable creatures like us, who are aware of our inevitable deaths, living contains an undercurrent of concern. In such cases of self-awareness as ours, our concernful mode of being can be understood as a more or less articulated structure of experience. We are aware of this mode of being as concern for survival and success, or desire for immortality, or as an unfocused and non-specific undercurrent of anxiety in our lives. Michael Tooley's mention of our possessing a concept of self and believing ourselves to be a continuing entity hints at this, but fails to do justice to the concernful and dynamic nature of this being.

I call this concernful mode of being our "self-project." The existential project of living a life is the same as the project of being a self, or being a person. My life, my self, and my being a person are achievements. There is no metaphysical entity or essence that is my "life," or my "self," or my "personhood." These terms designate the objective of our project of being who we are, instead of essences that we "have." Our fundamental mode of being is that of being concerned to fulfil this project of becoming. To be a person is not just to be the kind of entity to which it is logically correct to apply a certain range of predicates or moral entitlements. Instead, it is to live *as* a person. It is to *exist*. It is to be a subjectivity engaged upon the existential project of living a life. Anthony Giddens confirms these points from a sociological point of view when he makes the following two observations: "The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible" and, "The self forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future."[8] We do not so much "possess a concept of self" as project ourselves into the world as a self.

A second way in which Tooley's conception of personhood is inadequate is that it is too atomistic. It suggests that a person can exist as a person in a purely individualistic manner. But our being as self-project and our attestation of selfhood cannot but involve others. I would interpret the quotation from Heidegger that heads this chapter as suggesting that being mortal and vulnerable does not just motivate a self-project of survival and self-centred concern for immortality. It also leads us to reach out to others. We reach out to them because we need them, as an infant does, and in doing so we learn to love them. On this basis I have argued elsewhere that an inchoate motivation in our mode of being that is equally basic to our self-project is our caring-about-others.[9] The love of others, beginning with our parents and later extending to siblings, sexual partners, and friends, is as basic a need in our lives as human subjects as is our struggle to affirm our identity and overcome death.[10] This is the reason for our response to the call of the other that Levinas has described. We are already always disposed to care about others who are close to us. The vulnerability of the other, which we discern in the mystery of their appearance to us, elicits in us a caring for their well-being that flowers, in the context of intimacy, into love. Such love then becomes a further driving force of our existence. While this force can direct itself upon persons or upon things and ideas that are either more or less worthy of it, it remains a positive motivation within human existence. It suffuses all aspects of our being, ranging from casual acquaintanceships to religious and ideological commitments. Without some object to which we give ultimate value, our lives, even as we pursue survival, can only become meaningless. To be alive is not just to seek to overcome death in self-affirmation. It is also to care for something or someone other than ourselves. In this way, a typical, well-formed, and emotionally healthy life is ethical in its most fundamental motivations. This is the significance of Ricoeur's concept of an "ethical aim" inherent in our subjectivity. In shaping our identity, we attest to our loves and commitments as well as to our selves.

Just as being implicitly aware of my death is constitutive of the way I live, so being implicitly aware of what I love or care about is constitutive of the way I live. We have seen that being aware of my death and my vulnerability changes the quality of my being alive. It is even more obvious that caring for others also changes the quality of my being alive and hence of my sense of myself. Whatever Tooley means by a "concept of a self," reflection discloses that it must be intersubjective. What these additions to Tooley's conception of being a person

show is that there is a lot more to being a person than its having a concept of itself as a continuing entity. There is also a lot more to being alive as a person than enjoying effective biological functioning. From the perspective of subjectivity, being a person is to be engaged, with others, in an existential project shaped as a narrative.

2. Narrative Conceptions of Living

The notion of a "right to life" that appears in Tooley's statement would appear to refer to a biological state to be distinguished from being dead. While it would be true that a quite minimal demand that persons can make of each other is that they do not kill each other, the ethical content of the idea that we are alive appears to extend beyond this. What ethical significance attaches to the fact that it is a person's *living* subjectivity that we are considering? It is often said that a person *has* a life.[11] What this means is that persons are concerned for the lives that they are living with all of their cares and hopes for themselves and for others. It is not enough just to be alive in the sense of having their biological functions in a sufficient state of good order. To be a person you must also be aware of and acknowledge significant aspects of your past and envisage a future for yourself with death on the horizon of that future. And you must be or have been in some kinds of relationship with others.

Because you know that your future is finite and that the others you care about have needs, you will structure your life according to purposive plans. I am not suggesting that everyone formulates a plan for their whole lives in a quite explicit or deliberate manner. For most of us, it is only at crucial junctures in our lives—when we decide on a career, or decide to get married, for example—that such planning is at all explicit. For many others around the world, such a life plan is largely structured by the cultures that they are brought up in. The son of a shepherd in a remote mountain village will be told of the past and the traditions of his people and of his family and he will be led to adopt these as the pattern for his own life. He will envisage himself as following in his father's footsteps and want to become a shepherd. He will believe in the gods his fathers believed in and will marry the girl his family or his village will choose for him. He knows that he has a finite span of time in which to live and he knows that these things are given him to do within that span. And his existential project of being a self and caring for others will be structured by this knowledge. The society of ancient Athens that is the background of Aristotle's ethical writings assumed that young men would acquire physical skills of the sort that would allow them to be soldiers and the rhetorical skills that would allow them to exercise leadership in their community. It was assumed that as they grew older they would take up civic duties and engage in politics. In their later years those who had lived well would be able to discourse with their friends about the eternal things of life, such as the gods, mathematics, or the norms of social life, and teach these to the new generation in their turn. These are life plans premised on a life being of a certain length. Immortals would have no need to structure their lives in a pattern of this kind.

For their part, modern people have lives that are not as structured by tradition as these examples are. Our cultures give us options, freedoms, and risks unimaginable to people in traditional societies. And yet we also distinguish between phases of life, such as childhood, youth, the thirty-something years (the

years for getting married and acquiring a mortgage), middle age (the productive years), and retirement, and hold certain activities to be appropriate just to those phases. Our lives take on a structure because our skills and abilities have to be acquired in youth and will be lost as we move into old age. Finitude or mortality imposes this structure upon us. Moreover, these phases of a typical modern life will be structured in relation to the kinds of relationships with others that are deemed appropriate at different stages. Sowing our wild oats belongs to the phase of youth, while marriage and bringing up children belong to a later phase, one followed by a twilight phase in which the structures of intergenerational relationships has become somewhat dysfunctional in modern times. It is within such biologically structured frameworks that the decisions that make up our life "plan" have to be made.

Of course, it should not be thought that the only meaningful life is a life that is rationally chosen in accordance with such a life plan. We do not have that much scope for choice. Things happen to us because of the agency of others or because of sheer chance. We cannot control and therefore plan all the aspects of our lives. For example, if we choose to have a child as part of a life strategy for being happy we will most likely not succeed. Such a child would be so burdened by expectations placed upon it that it would rebel and cause us unhappiness. A child has a life of its own that needs to be accepted. We need to give ourselves over to what engages our caring in order to be happy and have meaning in our lives. The happiness of our lives depends on how we respond to what happens to us or to what is given to us by others as much as it does upon our own plans. However, it remains true that maturity consists in seeing the different aspects of our lives as a balanced whole to which we give coherence by the decisions we make.

Alasdair MacIntyre has spoken of a narrative structure to our lives.[12] To have a life is to be like a character in a story. There is often a dramatic structure to this story, with a build-up of problems, moments of resolution, happy and tragic events, and a denouement. Of course, unlike a novel or a play, there is no omniscient author controlling all the elements so as to produce an aesthetically interesting narrative structure. In real life much is left to chance or the unanticipated interventions of others. A real life can end abruptly and meaninglessly. The radical freedom that Sartre posited needs to be tempered by the "facticity" that worldly realities impose upon us. Nevertheless, any modern individual, in order for it to be true that he or she is "living a life," will be thinking of his or her life as a narrative in some such way as this and will most likely imagine him or herself as the author of this narrative. That we choose our vocations, plan our careers, enter into marriages freely, have children, and buy real estate are all expressions of this intrinsic wish to live a coherent, well-planned life that comes to a satisfactory conclusion. Bad luck and trouble may intervene to frustrate our plans, but we want our lives to flow along a coherent and culturally structured trajectory. Our life is an existential project for us. We do not just react instinctively to stimuli. Our rationality grounds our ability to give a coherent structure to our lives by having reasons for what we do: reasons that at some point reach back to the basic projects and concerns of our lives as a whole.

The point that MacIntyre draws from these observations is that the question "what should I do in this situation?" that can arise at any point in a life when a decision has to be made and that is quite often a question with a moral importance, should be answered with reference to, amongst other considerations, what the trajectory of my life-plan suggests that I should do in this situation. How

do we decide what to do when tradition does not tell us? How would we answer MacIntyre's question as to what we should do in a given situation when all that we have to guide us is what the trajectory of my life narrative suggests? With reference to what standard can one option be seen to be good and another bad? Is the only standard our own well-being or the well-being of those we love or are concerned for? Even if we were to accept that standard we would still find that the point of time in the narrative of our lives at which the decision was taken would make a difference to the goodness of the options before us.

I can explicate this and further illustrate the importance of the narrative conception of a life by noting an argument developed by David Velleman.[13] Velleman argues that the well-being of a life is not a simple function of the momentary states of well-being that make up that life, as most utilitarians would argue. There are two orders of good in a life. The first order is constituted by the momentary or synchronic goods that a person enjoys. The second order is the goodness of the structure or narrative into which those first order goods are inserted. Velleman uses the analogy of a just distribution of goods. A just distribution and an unjust distribution may result in the same amount of net good. But the just distribution includes an additional good: that of justice, which is a second order good over and above the sum of the goods that are distributed. In the same way a narrative life may be good, but that good is not just a sum of all the good experiences that a person has in it. For example, Velleman envisages two lives: one in which success comes early and is followed by decline, and another in which there is struggle and hardship and then success. It would be feasible to suppose that the sum total of good and bad experiences in each life is roughly the same. Yet the second life can be judged to be better. This is not because of a time factor that valorizes later goods as greater, but because of a narrative pattern in a life in which success is deemed better than decline. Another example is the contrast between the person who struggles with a marriage for ten years, gives up and happily marries another, on the one hand, and the person who struggles with his marriage, makes it better, and lives happily with the first wife. This time the pattern of struggle and success is the same. Moreover, the total happiness quotient may be the same. But one man has relinquished his struggle while the other has learnt from his and succeeded. His is the better narrative.

It follows from this argument that the narrative pattern of a life has an ethical value over and above the ethical value of any good moments that might occur in it. While Velleman's purpose in proposing this argument was to impugn forms of utilitarian thinking that do no more than add or subtract units of well-being without reference to the narrative structure in which they occur, my purpose in mentioning it is to suggest that a life pattern that leads to success instead of decline, or a decision in which a person overcomes a problem instead of sidestepping it, is ethically better because life is a project in which self-improvement, caring relations with others, and the attainment of self-esteem are intrinsic aims. Unless that were so, there would be no reason to prefer success to decline or making a success of a marriage to opting for a new one even when the sum total of preference satisfactions over the whole life remain constant in either of the options. It is our existential self-project that grounds these strong evaluations and that is the moral source of the ethical decisions that we make through the temporal trajectory of our lives. It is for this reason that a narrative structure that culminates in success is preferable to one that leads to decline.

Our subjectivity is also marked by caring-about-others. This aspect of our subjectivity is a further moral source for the evaluations and decisions that might

make one life narrative ethically preferable to another. Perhaps this provides us with a further reason than Velleman's for saying that, all other things being equal, the person who struggles and makes a success of his marriage is doing something better than the one who fails in his struggle and marries another. If we assume that, in the latter case, the rejected partner is hurt by the rejection (which might not always be the case), then we can say that the divorcee has not only failed to bring his struggle to success, but also that he failed to fulfil his caring for his spouse. We should not be judgemental about this since there may be many reasons why the divorce could be the best outcome, but, all other things being equal, it is a loss that love has died and that the caring-for-another that was at the heart of the husband's love has not been fulfilled. It is not just the husband's self-project that has failed, but also his caring-about-others. The value of a life is not just a sum of the satisfactions and satisfactory encounters in it, but also of the faithfulness and commitment shown in it over time. The fulfillment of the potentials in a relationship is a value over and above the moments of joy inherent in it as measured in a utilitarian calculus.

My point in reminding us of these matters is that it gives substantial and ethical content to the narrative conception of a "life" as something that I live. Many of the challenges that I face in life have ethical implications because they are moments when I can either succeed or fail to fulfil the tendencies in my subjectivity to enhance its own existence and the existence of those for whom I care.

A second important implication of this narrative conception of the life of subjectivity is that it confirms and deepens my claim that our ethical goals cannot be achieved without our caring about others. A character in a narrative is not a social atom. A person is a node in a web of ethical relationships, responsibilities, and claims. Being a person, or living a life structured as a narrative, gives ethical import to my actions, makes me the object of the ethical concern of others, and gives me responsibilities toward others. If caring-about-others is a primordial concern of my being of equal importance to my self-project, then I will reach out to specific others and seek to embrace them into the narrative of my life. Whatever bonds I am inserted into and whatever bonds present themselves to me, I will enhance my being by responding to them and developing them over time. My living a life as a narrative will be my movement into and out of relationships. Having an atomistic sense of self, as Tooley suggests, is not sufficient for being a person. Love, caring, and responsibility for others are fulfillments of our living subjectivity just as a sense of identity and of self-esteem are. We attest to our being a person not just to the extent that we affirm ourselves but also to the extent that we acknowledge and reach out to others. Indeed, our being as a person consists not just in self-affirmation, but also in addressing others and encountering them in I–Thou relationships. As we saw with reference to Levinas, caring about others is a primordial structure of our being as subjectivity elicited by the mystery and vulnerability of others as I encounter them in intersubjective rapport. Moreover, Ricoeur reminds us that such encounters will be reciprocal in the sense that others will acknowledge my subjectivity in those encounters just as I acknowledge theirs. In this way our very subjectivity is a moral source motivating us to ethical action.

The narrative framework in which subjectivity unfolds itself in the living of a life not only constitutes it as an agent in an intersubjective world with hopes, responsibilities, commitments, and plans the fulfillment of which would ground its self-esteem, but also creates the dialogical and intersubjective framework in

which others shape my subjectivity. Tooley's essentialist conception of personhood stresses the autonomy of the individual and locates it just in that individual's personhood. But autonomy is a gift created and maintained in a web of relationships. As a child is typically brought up in a caring family it enjoys dyadic relationships such as the one in which it is initially dependent on its mother in a process of psychological symbiosis.[14] In such dyads the autonomy of the child is in inverse relation to the responsibility taken for it by the parent. It is its mother and other family members who gradually and subtly give the child more and more opportunity for autonomous behavior and thus for the creation of a sense of its self. The beginning of the narrative of a person's life is a chapter in the life of another. Our subjectivity and selfhood emerge gradually within the web of relationships that ground our being. It is the inchoate acknowledgment of this "birth" of our self in the womb of others that grounds our being as a caring-about-others. This, in turn, is expressed as the lingering sense of the importance of commitment and responsibility that is the moral source of our ethical stances toward others.

The tradition of ethical thought of which Tooley is a part seeks to discern in the putative object of our ethical responsibility some features that will ground that responsibility in an objective imperative. The tradition of thought of which Levinas, Ricoeur, and I are a part seeks to understand the ethical subject in terms of the moral sources of ethical concern that reside in that subjectivity. In this tradition, ethics is not so much a matter of obeying moral commands or honoring objective norms as it is of responding to the call of the other from the caring-about-others that is inherent in our subjectivity. All other things being equal, this caring-about-others always already constitutes the other as an object of solicitude. Whereas Tooley is concerned to show what it is about persons that commands us morally, I am concerned to show what it is about *us* as persons that moves us to embrace others ethically.

3. Bioethical Implications

In order to show how this ethical conception of living subjectivity as the narrative unfolding of my self-as-project and my caring-about-others might alter the way we approach bioethics, I will briefly sketch some of its implications for several perennial moral problems in bioethics that relate to the beginning of human life. I will not, however, offer general guidelines in relation to such problems, as this would be inconsistent with the particularist approach inherent in my conception of acting from the virtue of caring.

Bioethical issues relating to the beginning of human life depend on having an answer to the question of when a person's "life" begins. The short but not yet adequate answer to this question suggested by my analysis above would be: when the narrative of my life as I live it begins. This answer rules out most of the essentialist conceptions that dominate the bioethical literature. Clearly it makes no sense on the view that I have been developing to say that life begins with the infusion of a soul or life principle into an embryo. That much is quite clear. But it is also difficult to argue that it begins with the "quickening" of a fetus, or with the first emergence of sentience, or of consciousness, or of self-awareness, or of autonomous action. Nor is it helpful to ask whether there is a point in the life of the fetus when it begins to have rights or when others begin to have duties toward it. What my arguments may appear to have been suggesting is that we should

replace the essentialist question, "When does life begin?" with the existential question, "When does a human person begin to live his or her own life?" I reject the first question because it invites us to look for essences or criteria of an essential personhood. In contrast, the second question invites us to think about when the degree of self-awareness that would support autonomy and maturity begins. But while this may be an interesting question, does it mark off the point at which a person comes to have moral standing? It would appear to be much too late in a life's trajectory for that. Depending on how we define them, it might be said that autonomy and maturity do not emerge until young adulthood. It would be absurd to suppose that we have no moral obligation to preserve the life of a human organism until it reached such a late stage of development or until it was able to claim for itself the moral consideration of others. Accordingly, we have to recall that the existential self-project that is definitive of living a life as a person does not depend just and only on the full or even partial development of the internal abilities and tendencies of that person. This is because it is not just a solipsistic self-project. It is also a caring-about-others and, given the dyadic relationships of which I spoke above, a being-cared-for-by-others. Accordingly, even this existential question needs to be replaced by a further one: namely, "When does a human organism enter into a supportive web of caring and acceptance?"

As I have argued in chapter two, our being treated as a person may be the result of an implicit decision so to treat us based upon love and care, instead of a decision derived from principles, metaphysical doctrines, or criteria for when an organism must be seen as a person. Ideally and characteristically, persons live in a web of relationships of caring, concern, and love. Whatever may be his or her inner states or abilities, a quite young person (even a not-yet-born person) may be the object of love and caring. I would suggest that the narrative of a life begins to be lived when it becomes some*one* for others in this way. Living as a person begins when that person is accepted in the family and community to which it belongs. Others initially constitute me as a self, or an identity, or as a character in my narrative. This happens through formal processes such as naming a child, but even more importantly, it happens informally as a child is accepted and communicated with. This acceptance is not a discrete event that occurs at a particular time. Typically, it has already been occurring for some time before the birth takes place. It is an acceptance that grows and emerges during the pregnancy. Of course, the young person in question does not become consciously aware of this acceptance until such time as it can be conscious of itself, and this may take some years. When it is able to become aware of itself and who it is, it discovers that it already is an "encumbered self" in the sense of being a person with an incipiently formed identity. A person always already has relationships, and these are constitutive of who it is as well as of the fact *that* it is. Of course, "that it is" does not refer here simply to its material and biological existence. It refers to its being an identity that it can, at some stage in its life, attest to and affirm. It is the love of others, pre-eminently its mother, that begins to give it that acknowledgment and identity.

The answer to the question, "When does a person enter into a supportive web of caring and acceptance (and so become a person)?" is therefore answered in terms of the love and acceptance with which that person is received into the world instead of in terms of any essentialist realities, potentialities, or criteria that theoreticians may want to impose upon the organism in question or upon its own ability to be aware of, and plan, its own life. The beginning of the living of a life

as a person is not just a matter of having crossed a biological threshold. Nor is it a matter of having crossed a threshold into self-awareness or maturity. Instead, it is a matter of having crossed an intersubjective threshold. It is when there occurs an intersubjective encounter that the terms of that encounter are confirmed as subjectivities or persons. While I have spoken so far of intersubjective rapport as being made possible by both parties to the encounter being self-aware subjectivities, the new suggestion is that if one party is a self-aware subjectivity, it can constitute the other as a being of such value as that of subjectivities; in more ordinary language, as a person. Clearly a mother gazing into the face of her newborn infant is typically engaged in such an encounter whatever be the abilities of that infant, and so will the love that a mother feels for her as yet unborn fetus. While the latter may be thought of in more dispassionate terms as, at best, an intentional system and hence not, strictly speaking, an appropriate term in an interpersonal relationship, I would suggest that the love of a mother partakes of the features of genuine encounter in such a context. Love is not only an acceptance but also a bestowal.[15]

In loving her child or fetus a mother bestows a status upon it that is analogous to the status enjoyed by subjectivities in encounter. It is difficult, however, to imagine that such an act of bestowal of value could be engaged in with a quite early conceptus or with an embryo or fetus of which the mother is not aware. We cannot love something and thus accord it ethical acknowledgment if we do not know of it. But then, in that situation, it would be completely otiose to speak of such an entity having a right to life as well. From a non-essentialist point of view, if no one is aware of something, then it cannot have a moral status of any kind. Moral status is not intrinsic.

But how does the acceptance of a newly living creature into a realm of intersubjectivity, and hence of human community, differ from the anthropomorphic projection of human-like qualities onto our pet cat, for example? It would appear likely that, from a psychological point of view, there would be considerable similarities between the two processes. But reflection also discloses a much greater sense of commitment and responsibility that obtains in the typical case of love of neonates or fetuses. Anyone who suggested that this sense was based on a moral duty to look after and preserve such young living creatures would be begging the question. The thesis that we are exploring argues that the moral obligations of adults toward the very young are based upon these processes of acceptance, instead of the other way about. It is clear from recent studies[16] that the qualities of the relationship between mothers and infants are more complex, more ambivalent, and more compelling than relationships with companion animals. Whatever qualities psychological projection may impute to such animals, that process often produces illusions of subjectivity. Intersubjective encounter, on the other hand, is an acknowledgment of something real because the encounter itself makes it real. In the case of young human lives, what intersubjective encounter produces, over a period of time that may begin even before birth, is the being of the infant as a self-project and caring-about-others. The reality of subjectivity is created by the intersubjectivity that nurtures its earliest life. What is "real" in the required sense in the intersubjective encounter is the new life's being a self-project and a caring-about-others, albeit in a non-self-aware form. The first thing a newborn infant does is seek its mother's nipple and what it learns soon thereafter is to respond to its mother's love. This is not the same as saying, as an essentialist would, that it is a "potential" person. It is to say that it already has a mode of being that allows us to enter into a cryptic form

of intersubjective encounter with it and so accept it into the human community. It is the incipient self-project and caring-about-others of the infant or fetus that leads it to seek its mother's warmth and nurture, and it is this that the mother acknowledges with love. This love and acknowledgment elicits into expression the infant's being as self-project and caring-about-others. Moreover, this love bestows the value upon the infant or fetus that grounds our feelings of responsibility toward it.

As with all non-essentialist ideas, the idea that the moral status of a newly living human organism depends upon the acceptance and love shown it by its parents and community is quite vague. The scope of the term "community" is not specified, and it does not allow us to point to a clear point in time when an embryo or fetus "becomes a person" in this new sense. Even saying that the narrative of its life begins when it is loved and accepted is vague since there is no discrete moment when such love begins. But it is in the nature of non-essentialist ethical ideas to be vague. It is the concrete circumstances of any given situation that fill in this vagueness and make it definite. There is but little that can be said in general terms that will settle the matter. My position is "particularist" in the sense that what we should do in a given situation is not to be derived from principles that seek to be clear and unambiguous, but from our careful and caring appraisal of the situation. Such an appraisal will need to discern the qualities of love that exist in that particular context instead of applying predefined objective criteria.

My position also has the disadvantage of implying that when love is absent or when the fetus is positively rejected and hated, it does not begin to live a life of the kind that would elicit our moral responsibility toward it. This will be objectionably contingent. It is precisely such a thought as this that drives moral theorists to try to establish objective and universal criteria for our duties toward the newly conceived or for their rights. But such a response may not be necessary. It may be that there are others who will love the newly conceived or newly born and bring it into the human community in the way that our general caring about such matters would welcome. There will often be someone other than the immediate parents who is willing to take up the ethical task of constituting such a new life as a person with a narrative of its own. They may be charitable workers, other members of the family, or health professionals. It would be rare and undoubtedly tragic if a new life were radically unloved in the sense that there was no one at all who cared about it.

And yet, we might just have to face the uncomfortable idea that if there is utterly no one who will embrace that new life, then nothing is lost if that life ceases. If it does not yet support its own wishing to live in a self-conscious form, and, if there were literally no one who cared for it, then it could only be abstract and disengaged theory that would declare that situation to be a moral loss. There is simply no one to suffer that loss. There has as yet been no self-aware subjectivity. At best there is an intentional system. While there is some ethical loss involved in the death of any intentional system, it is not of the order of loss that is involved in the cessation of subjectivity. The death of an organism that experiences no self-project, no caring-about-others, and no self-awareness is not a loss of the same order as the death of an organism that enjoys full subjectivity and intersubjectivity or that is inserted into a web of love and acceptance constituted by others. It is the latter that establishes the framework within which ethical value can be given to the living. The story of my life begins from the

moment I am loved and acknowledged. It is only from that moment that my life is valuable in the way that grounds ethical obligations.

It is also possible that the acceptance that a new life receives is not based on love or caring, but on a moralistic and essentialist reason such as that "life is sacred." A woman may find herself pregnant and, even though she does not want or love the child or her material circumstances would make bringing up the child extremely difficult, she considers that it is her moral duty to bring the fetus to term. There is great danger in such a thought. The risk is that the newly born child will not be loved, or even that it will be resented. Moralistic reasons are not good reasons for bringing a new life into the world. Thinking of it as an obligation is not a good basis for love. Even if others in the community such as family members may make up for such lack of feelings, it would be better if, once the decision has been made to have the child, bonding between it and its mother could take place and love grow.

An even more ethically dubious situation arises when third parties insist that the pregnancy must come to term or seek to convince the mother of this. Members of right to life movements who either physically or persuasively prevent women from having abortions are imposing moral views that are not shared by everyone in the community and may not be shared by the mother. Having to bring a fetus to term because she is prevented by either physical or moral pressure from aborting it will hardly provide a sound basis for a mother's love and intersubjective acceptance of the newly born child. Satisfactory bonding may yet take place, but the circumstances for it are not propitious.

Some may respond to this point by saying that such campaigns against abortion are actually instances of the larger community accepting a new life into its midst so as to constitute it as a person with moral status. The motivations of such campaigners often include a positive concern for human life. But such concern, if it is to be a genuine case of caring, must also motivate taking responsibility. It is inappropriate to urge or force the mother to have the child and then walk away. If the mother does not want the child then someone else must take responsibility for it. And this includes the responsibility not just to care about it in a general sense, but also to care for it specifically. According to Joan Tronto, one of several aspects of genuine caring is that the caring agent is prepared to take care of the one about whom he or she cares. A caring agent accepts responsibility and puts arrangements in place for something to be done about the matter at hand (thought not necessarily by that same agent). This "involves the recognition that one can act to address these unmet needs."[17] On this account, anyone who does not take responsibility in some form for the things or people they say they care about is not genuinely caring. I would add that in many cases the attitude of those that insist on moral behavior on the part of others in relation to these matters is one that is not caring in this way. It does not include a preparedness to accept responsibility for the consequences of what they insist that others should do. Such campaigns often seek to exercise power over others, but without accepting responsibility for the outcomes.

This is not to deny that there are many good people who do indeed accept such responsibilities. Orders of nuns set up to look after pregnant mothers and ensure that their offspring are cared for are but one example (though there have been abuses in such institutions). Such activities can go beyond the "cold charity" of many dogmatic moralists to become genuine and responsible caring. It has even been suggested that there are great rewards to be had from accepting the difficult responsibilities that caring brings with it. Hans Reinders has described

cases of parents of disabled children whose acceptance of the responsibility of caring for those children has enriched their lives with love.[18] My point is simply that it is unethical for anyone to insist that anyone else is morally obliged to take up such burdens and for them then to walk away. If you care about such matters, you must accept responsibility. You must become part of that community of acceptance, enter into the intersubjective relationships that it entails, and be prepared to offer real support to those who need it in that situation.[19]

It follows from all this that abortion is not an inherently evil act. There is no objective and universal prohibition against abortion. The act of abortion does not have the inherent moral quality of being forbidden. My rejection of essentialism implies a rejection of any such formula. But there is an ethical price to be paid in abortion in most cases. While the death of a radically unwanted and unloved fetus involves only a negligible ethical loss, in most cases the death of a fetus is the loss of an opportunity for loving and for the beginning of a new life narrative. While circumstances may justify paying this price, it is a real price and should occasion regret in those who are sensitive to these matters and care about them. It is virtuous and admirable to bring new human life into the world.

There are a number of problems in bioethics that simply fade away when we take seriously the idea that a human life is valuable to the extent that it is accepted into the community and loved by parents or parent surrogates. One such is the argument over the moral validity of research using embryonic stem cells. Embryos that are "left over" after IVF treatment and are then available for use in medical research are no longer wanted and cared about as offspring. As such they have no value as persons or future persons. Moreover, in their primitive state of development they are barely intentional systems. Cryopreserved embryos are simply pieces of matter. It would be essentialist to say that because it is a "human life" or a "potential person" it is absolutely forbidden to harm it in any way. Further, even if it were thought that such embryos should be preserved because of their alleged special status, what would taking responsibility for them entail? Would it be just a matter of seeing that the refrigeration process did not break down? What would be the long-term value resulting from the continuation of such a process? To whose love and concern would such a cryopreserved embryo appeal? There would appear to be no reason to not discard such embryos when they are no longer needed and, therefore, no reason not to use such embryos for research. Indeed, if the outcomes of that research live up to the therapeutic possibilities that have been promised, then there is every reason so to use them.

Cases of fetuses afflicted with anencephaly can be thought about in a similar way. Anencephaletic fetuses or neonates have no brain hemispheres though their brain stems can sustain vital functions. Most fetuses afflicted in this way die before birth, but neonates can survive for periods from twelve hours to a week after birth. What are the moral responsibilities of parents and others in these and other cases of severe and irreparable birth defects? Even those who would argue for the sanctity of life on the grounds that we are dealing here with a potential person are confounded by such cases. There is no potentiality for personhood here. Calling it a human life would be simply to appeal to an essentialist category so as to apply a theoretical prohibition that any loving and responsible person would be right to reject. Parents of such a fetus or neonate will be faced with a heartrending decision, but the loving and responsible thing to do will be to minimize any suffering that this young life might undergo if it is kept alive simply because of moral doctrine. And if the decision is to let it die, then the loving and responsible implication of that decision will be to bring about

the death as swiftly and painlessly as possible. A positive act of ending the life can be a loving act, albeit one that will occasion profound grief. There is no love expressed in a determination to prolong the organism's life or to keep it alive out of a sense of duty. There is no loss to the infant who would never have been capable of awareness or thought. It is the parents who face the situation of having to accept into their lives, not a new infant and source of joy, but a tragic loss. Morality does not protect us from such losses. Instead, it calls upon us to act responsibly and lovingly in the context of the particular situations that we face.

My arguments would appear to encourage artificial reproductive technologies. Whatever moral hesitations have been expressed about these by moralists of all stripes, the fundamental idea appears to be clear. If parents are prepared to undergo the costs and hardships associated with IVF procedures, they must have an intense desire to have a child. We could hardly ask for a more appropriate situation for bringing a child into the world. Where there is such love, anticipation, and preparedness to accept responsibility, we could hardly find moral fault. Of course, there may be issues surrounding the safety and reliability of the procedure. If it were shown that it resulted in a significantly higher number of birth defects or other problems, then our sense of responsibility would give us pause. But to the extent that the technology is safe and reliable, there would appear to be no reason for ethical misgivings. Those who say that the process is "unnatural" or that medical technology is here "playing God" are merely mouthing essentialist rhetoric.

The practice of prenatal screening and diagnosis has come under the scrutiny of moralists because of its link to abortion. While there would appear to be no ethical objection to parents who, out of a feeling of love and responsibility, seek to detect any medical problems as early as possible in their fetus so as to enhance the likelihood of successful corrective interventions, there is a concern that parents who detect disabling defects may be tempted to abort such a fetus. I have already argued that there is only negligible ethical loss involved in any abortion where there is no one who will lovingly and responsibly accept the newborn into the community. The embryo or fetus makes no moral claim on anyone in and of itself. That said, any situation in which there is absolutely no loving acceptance of new life is ethically deplorable even if there is no one to carry moral guilt and no one upon whom a duty to care should be imposed. It is clear that it is ethically better for parents to love and accept a new human living organism that enters their lives than not. Accordingly, parents will have to exercise ethical sensitivity in order to discern whether love calls upon them to accept the new life into their lives, or whether love calls upon them to end suffering. I have already suggested that, in the case of anencephaletic fetuses or neonates, love would indicate the latter course. Other forms of birth defect that result in short and non-conscious lives might be treated similarly. But the range of cases is quite various. What of a fetus with malformed limbs but who would be otherwise healthy? What if it were known that a child would be born blind or deaf? These are not life-threatening defects and their bearers can live full, healthy, and happy lives. How might we think of Down's syndrome? It appears to be a clear intuition to most of us in the West that aborting a fetus on the grounds that it is female is a failure to exercise love and responsibility. Would we also add that parents in those societies where that practice is common are acting immorally?

One common theme in cases such as these is that parents are being asked to take responsibility in cases where their hopes and expectations in relation to their

newly born—whether or not these are justified—are frustrated. It would appear that fate is asking them to take on a greater or more difficult responsibility than would have been involved with a child that matched their expectations. It would be inconsistent for me to outline any general guidelines in cases such as these. I could certainly not endorse any appeal to generalized moral norms such as "human life is sacred" in order to argue that abortion in response to a bad prognosis arising from prenatal screening is never justified. I certainly feel that it would not be virtuous for parents to abort a fetus for less than serious reasons, and I would regard the sex of the fetus as such an inadequate reason. But I cannot consistently impose this view on others as a moral norm. I can only say that it would appear to me to be a failure of love and acceptance of responsibility to act in that way. I do not know what pressures other people are under and what personal resources they can call upon to cope with them. So it is not for me to be judgmental. I cannot understand the stance of those in many third world countries who reject female offspring. I consider it tragic, but I cannot judge. Similarly, I can admire those parents who welcome severely disabled offspring into their families and make extreme sacrifices in order to give those children the best life that is possible for them, even when those children cannot control the movements of their bodies or suffer intellectual disabilities that prevent them from ever appreciating what is being done for them. But I cannot declare such love and acceptance of responsibility to be a duty. And so I cannot condemn those others who might abort a fetus whose prospects contained such hardship and diminished forms of human life. Moreover, I cannot offer guidelines for when a diagnosed defect is sufficiently serious to justify an abortion. These are judgements that have to be made *in situ*. The ethical price of proceeding to an abortion should be higher in cases where the reason is less serious, but even this depends contingently upon the state of virtue of the parents or other responsible parties.

The life of a person is a narrative that begins before they are autonomous and able to exercise choices within that narrative. As such, the beginnings of such a life depend upon the caring and responsibility of others. Insofar as human living is a value for those who are mature enough to be aware of their own lives and thus to value it, it is also a value to bring human beings to the point where they can achieve that degree of autonomy. Accordingly, there is value in the love and acceptance of responsibility shown by those who bring new human life into the world and nurture it. It follows that, even in those unfortunate cases where such full self-awareness may not ever be reached because of disability, the self-sacrifice of those parents who choose to nurture such human existence is also valuable. The nurturing and love of parents for their children, except in the rare cases where the prospects of the latter do not include any form of self-aware consciousness, is a bringing into being of subjectivity and an establishment of relationships of intersubjectivity that is admirable in itself. It inaugurates a new existential project of living as well as enhancing the lives of the parents.

Tragic choices are involved in separating conjoined twins in those cases where only one can survive the procedure. Moralists in the natural law tradition often circumvent the quandary posed by apparently having to kill one twin in order to save the life of the other by appealing to the principle of double effect. As Norman Ford puts it, "if a life-saving procedure has reasonable prospects of saving one twin but has the foreseen and inevitable, but *unwanted* side-effect of causing the death of the other twin, this could be deemed to be ethically defensible."[20] This might be a useful piece of casuistry designed to avoid having to say that the dead twin was actively killed so that no moral blame need attach to

anyone, but it does nothing to overcome the need for a tragic decision on the part of the parents, clinicians, and other concerned persons. A decision has to be made. Sometimes the clinical circumstances are such that this is a decision of choice between the two twins: which one will be allowed to live? On other occasions it will be clear which twin can survive and which is the more vulnerable. There is no hiding from the fact that one has to die in order that the other may live. Love and responsibility accepts the need for such choices and, however fraught with grief and loss they might be, they have to be made. It would be irresponsible to endanger the life of the twin with the better prognosis by avoiding such a decision, whether we use moral doctrine to justify such avoidance or not.

Cloning of human embryos is less readily endorsed, in my view. While it may be argued, as in the case of IVF, that the cost and effort involved in cloning bespeaks a degree of love and desire for offspring that promises an ethically good outcome (and I am assuming in all of these cases that the desire for offspring is not grounded in self-aggrandizement or some other vicious motivation), the need for responsibility would appear to rule out cloning at the present time. At the time of writing, the world's first cloned animal, Dolly the sheep, has had to be put down because of lung problems and other degenerative diseases and symptoms of premature aging. It would follow from this, and from much other evidence, that procedures for cloning are not yet safe or reliable. The risks of birth defects, even were implantation successful, are simply too great. Being responsible, therefore, simply rules out human cloning for the time being. Notice, again, that I do not oppose such procedures for moral or essentialist reasons. It is not that it is "unnatural" or that it is an inherently inappropriate thing for human beings to try to achieve. It is not that it challenges the individuality and uniqueness of human beings (genetically identical twins do not fail to be individuals). It is simply that there is too great a risk of harm. I would also suggest that, in a world fraught with hunger, poverty, preventable illness and mortality, and injustice, it is not a just allocation of resources to spend the necessarily huge amounts of money to make the procedure safe for humans.

Aside from cloning, advances in genetics promise further changes that have raised ethical misgivings. It is suggested that it will soon be possible for genetic technologies not only to screen for heritable diseases in fetuses, but also to enhance those fetuses so as to produce children with much higher than average intelligence, greater than average physical strength, or other talents. Genetic enhancement of fetuses and thus of newborn infants will soon be within the realms of possibility. For the sake of the discussion, let as assume that the risks involved in these procedures will be minimal. It might be thought that because I consider the love with which parents and the community welcome new life into their midst is the most relevant matter in deciding the ethical issues, I would say that, since parents want these enhancements, this bespeaks a love of their children and a wish to give them every opportunity in life, so these developments should be welcomed. However, such a position would be too individualistic in its social outlook. While it may be desirable for parents to give their offspring every chance in life, this should not be done at the cost of social justice. My argument has been that the moral and ethical status of new human life is a function of its acceptance by parents and by the community. This implies that the community has a role. It is not just a matter of what the parents want. In such cases there is an issue for public deliberation because it relates to genuine community interest. The relevant community interest is that of justice. Both at a national and at an

international level, it can be argued that there is no justice in allowing a relatively few well-off parents to appropriate the resources of medical technology for such specialized wants, when general services to the poor and to the third world are so inadequate. If a child in Africa is condemned to a life of far below average intelligence because of the stunting of its brain that results from hunger and poverty, then it could hardly be argued that committing resources to enhancing the intelligence of a privileged child by genetic technologies would be just.

These conclusions may still appear to be unacceptably vague and indecisive. Moral theory announces itself as having the goal of providing guidance for life's difficult decisions. For example, Mark Timmons argues that "The practical aim of moral theory is to discover a decision procedure that can be used to guide correct moral reasoning and decision making about matters of moral concern."[21] I have said what I would find admirable or deplorable, virtuous or vicious, but not what I think duty or responsibility demands of us. But in my view this is all that can be said. I see no role for "moral experts," if that term refers to people who claim uniquely to know what duty demands and seek to control what others would do on such a basis without themselves taking responsibility for the consequences. Such "moralism" is an instrument of power that causes immense suffering. The prohibition against responsible birth control or even the dissemination of relevant information issued by the Catholic Church, for example, is a significant contributor to third world poverty and global injustice. The question of what people should do is to be settled on the empirical basis of what causes preventable harm, instead of upon traditional, essentialist, and metaphysical doctrines that purport to show us our objective and absolute duties.

Of course, it remains true that I have to have reasons for what I find admirable and deplorable if I am to enter into public debate on these issues. I have offered such reasons. A new human life becomes valuable to the extent that it is loved and accepted into the human community. This love is an ethically apt basis and a real motivation for accepting responsibility for that new life. This position has the theoretical advantage of being "internalist." What this means is that it alludes to motivations that people can actually have so as to be valid reasons for their actions. It touches upon the moral sources of their ethical positions. It does not allude to putative "moral facts" that are established on the basis of metaphysical or essentialist theories and that are claimed objectively to be reasons to act in certain ways that people "have." As an internalist, I would argue that a reason to act that anyone can have would also be a motivation for them so to act. Moral theories promoted and believed by someone other than the agent and not by that agent are not reasons for that agent.

I should add that I am also suspicious of the notion of a "moral fact." There is a view called "moral realism," which argues that moral views can be true or false by virtue of their corresponding to such "moral facts." Another variation of this position is "moral cognitivism," which argues that we can know such facts instead of just have opinions or feelings about them. These theories would imply that moral views could have the kind of objectivity and universality that many moral theorists demand. In this way, for example, it will be said that the proposition "theft is wrong" is true because of the fact that theft is wrong. It does not matter what anyone's opinion on the matter might be or even whether anyone believes it. There is a moral fact with which our moral beliefs have to be in accord. And this fact is not culturally relative and so is true for all agents in all circumstances. But it will be clear that this is an essentialist position. It is easily countered. What about stealing a loaf of bread to save the life of my child? At

this point, moral theorists will retreat to a variety of ploys ranging from positing *prima facie* duties to creating new moral facts with descriptions like "stealing is wrong, except when it is for a greater good." Follow this path and quite soon there will be an infinite number of moral facts and no confusions will have been resolved. It is much better to say, as particularists do, that the moral quality of an action is specific to its circumstances instead of being tied to its description or "object." And I would add that the most relevant of these circumstances will be the intention with which it is done and the caring that motivates it. This does not render reflection and discussion on the question of what should be done otiose. And it does not mean that we may not express an opinion as to whether some actions are more acceptable than others. It means only that our reasons in such discussions and for such judgements must be based on an assessment of the nature and appropriateness of the virtue and caring of the agent, and the ethical quality that caring gives to the consequences of the act. This is why I can say that it is not admirable for would-be parents to abort a fetus for flippant reasons even though there is no "moral fact" that makes this opinion true.

The denial of moral realism does not imply the kind of radically subjectivist view that suggests that anyone can have any opinion on ethically sensitive matters provided they are genuinely based upon their deepest motivations. Moral statements can be true or false and moral opinions can be subjected to the test of whether they are true or false. But the basis upon which a moral claim is true is not whether it accords with a "moral fact." Instead, it is whether it accords with a socially established consensus.[22] In a society such as ours and, indeed, in most societies with a rational structure, stealing is indeed regarded as *prima facie* wrong. And there are good and obvious reasons for the existence of this norm, reasons that can sometimes be overruled in exceptional circumstances. As Ricoeur argued, it is our concern for others and for such values as order and self-expression in society that motivate these moral beliefs and the social consensus that surrounds them. This is the implicit social contract of which I spoke earlier. There is, moreover, a continuing need for debate and discussion within society around this consensus so as to make it meaningful in changing circumstances. Is seeking to minimize my tax bill a form of stealing or is the government's exacting tax an instance of stealing? Only social debate could yield clear answers to such questions. Such debate may be ongoing and indecisive, but it is the only means we have for establishing consensus on norms in pluralistic societies that no longer believe in traditional and metaphysical certainties. If our society evinces a consensus on the wrongness of simple cases of stealing, there is little consensus on the moral status of prenatal life. As Peter Singer has argued, the doctrine of the sanctity of life is dead.[23] Accordingly, the only valid source of guidance in a pluralist society such as ours is not the moral doctrines based on the tradition and metaphysics of a section of that society, but a discourse aimed at forming a consensus that takes place within all sectors of that society. If this discourse is inconclusive, then guidance must be sought from virtuous motivations of caring and acceptance of responsibility. The law should encourage such discourse and also leave room for the expression of such motivations.

Abortion is only the most obvious issue around which there has been public debate with a view to settling what the law should dictate. Medical research using embryonic stem cells and human cloning are other issues about which there has been government directive or statute law. What this situation produces is public debate and struggle between traditional and conservative forces such as the right to life movement and the religious right on the one hand, and liberal forces such

as the pro-choice movement and the interests of scientific research on the other. Both sides seek to make use of the power of the state in order to give their own positions the backing of law. From the perspective of political liberalism, the apparatus of the state should not allow itself to be appropriated in this way. If political liberalism asserts that the state should be based upon a minimalist conception of morality that does not commit itself to any of the varying conceptions of the good and of morality that will be adhered to in a pluralist society, then the law should have a minimal involvement in those issues about which disagreement is primarily moral in nature. Decisions of ethical complexity should therefore remain in the private realm. It would be an implication of my position that decisions taken on these issues that do no definite harm in the context of the life narratives of living individuals, and that therefore have no victims, belong in the private realm instead of the public.

However, justice is a public issue. It follows that where a medical procedure can give benefit to but a few or would involve the use of resources that necessitate the denial of more needed resources to others, then that medical procedure is ethically questionable and public debate and decision about it is appropriate. Moreover, medical research is funded by the state as well as by private companies. Accordingly, it is appropriate for there to be public debate about the goals of publicly funded research. Questions of the justice of resource allocation arise in these contexts. As I have suggested, such is the case with cloning, genetic engineering, and other procedures research into which is quite expensive and resource intensive. The difficulty arises when considerations other than those of justice in the distribution of resources enter this debate. Is it appropriate to counter such research on the ground that it involves "playing God" or interfering with the very design of life, as if the latter were an essential given that was not constantly undergoing subtle alterations due to environmental and chance changes? To introduce such considerations would be to interpolate conceptions of metaphysics and morals that are held by only portions of the society. This contravenes the conventions of political liberalism. It would be to go beyond the minimal terms in which debate on such issues in a pluralist society should be conducted. Justice, property, and the avoidance of clearly definable harm are the only values on behalf of which the law should be used. That is why the state may ban procedures that involve unacceptable levels of risk or unjust distributions of resources, but not those that cause moral offence to just some groups within that state.

However, does not the state also have a duty to defend human life? Certainly, but the notion that the state has a duty to preserve human life should not be given an essentialist interpretation so that the concept of "life" covers every instance of biological functioning in a human organism. It should be confined to those lives that partake of a living narrative: lives that are either loved and accepted into the community or that are autonomous: lives in relation to which there is an attestation of value. The state's responsibility is to prevent and punish the crime of murder understood as the killing of a person where that person or someone else is concerned that they not be killed.

The central focus of the liberal mentality is to exclude the power of the state from realms in which it has no business. So the struggle to keep the state out of the bedroom—especially in the case of consenting same-sex adult couples—has been largely won. In a similar way, the state should be excluded from the realm of beginning-of-life decisions and end-of-life decisions when those decisions result in no unwanted harm or loss. It follows that there is no need for a

resolution of the debates surrounding these issues in the public realm. I distinguished earlier between a bioethics discourse centered on the realm of public policy and law, on the one hand, and a discourse centered on assisting with difficult personal decisions on the other. It follows from my position that public discourse and law should confine itself to defining and protecting a realm of private decision making in which the often tragic situations that have to be faced can be resolved in an ethical manner by those who are concerned. Interference by the state or by any other organization or person on the basis of moral doctrine, tradition, or precedent should be excluded and the focus of public debate on these issues should be to ensure that the law protects such a private realm. The deaths that the law should protect us from are the unwanted and premature deaths of full and loved members of the community.

While it is not appropriate for the law to forbid abortion, since to do so would be to impose the moral convictions of a sector of society, it is appropriate for the law to set the allowable parameters for private decision making on such an issue. It is appropriate, for example, to insist that there be proper consultation with relevant medical and counseling staff so that the society can be assured that the decision was taken responsibly. But the decision itself is a private matter. By all means let those groups who oppose abortion forbid their own members from participating in that practice. But that prohibition should not extend to people outside those groups. The state should protect the liberty of all to act in accordance with their conscience where no harm would result to clearly acknowledged others.

I do not contest Ricoeur's claim that there should be public debate on comprehensive moral issues in society. I do not completely endorse the position of political liberalism that argues that there is no room in public discourse for questions of the human good and moral standards of behavior. It would be a denial of freedom of speech to disallow traditional and religious voices from seeking to convince others of their position. However, the law and regulative powers of the state should not be invoked by any one group in order to impose its views on others when there is no broad consensus on those views. Modern pluralist societies are marked by precisely such a lack of consensus. Accordingly, different groups within society are free to hold any views on moral issues that they may consider reasonable, and act upon them, provided that they do not cause identifiable harm or injustice to anyone within society. I might add that if anyone within those groups disagrees with those beliefs and practices they should be allowed to leave the group.[24] Moreover, those groups should accept responsibility for the material consequences of their practices and should not demand support from the state for handling those consequences unless they have a case based on justice for doing so.

The notion that life is something we live over a narrative trajectory also gives our deaths a tragic dimension. It would appear that our deaths cannot but be the frustration of our existential project of living. And this would appear to be the central reason why it is wrong to cause such a death in the case of autonomous persons. It is not that life is sacred or that death is an evil the causing of which is absolutely forbidden. It is that death brings the narrative of our lives and our existential project of being and of loving to an often premature end. I will explore these ideas more fully in the next two chapters.

Seven

WHAT IS DEATH?

> The experience of dying does not belong to the heart alone. It is a process in which every tissue of the body partakes, each by its own means and at its own pace. The operative word is *process*, not *act*, *moment*, or any other term connoting a flyspeck of time when the spirit departs.
>
> Sherwin B. Nuland[1]

Death is a constant presence in the life of every authentic person. As a limit to life, it defines the anticipated end point of the narrative of our personal existence. From another perspective, it is an especially strong presence in the professional lives of many health care workers. Accordingly, death raises issues in relation to the meaningfulness of life and in relation to a range of bioethical problems, such as organ transplantation and euthanasia. But before we can consider such issues and problems, we need to be clear on what death is.

One way of approaching this question is to ask when we take death to have occurred. If we can specify what we take to be the indicators of death, then we will have gone some way toward specifying what we mean by the term. I say "some way" because there is a distinction to be drawn between specifying the criteria for when death can be said to have occurred and saying what death is. This distinction is not made often enough in the bioethical literature. In the past, doctors would hold a feather to the mouth of a dying patient and when it no longer moved, thereby indicating the absence of breath, they would declare the patient dead. Feeling the pulse and listening for heartbeat were further means of determining when death had occurred. Contemporary monitoring equipment increases the accuracy of such assessments but the absence of heartbeat, like the absence of breathing, continues to be a traditional indicator of death. Peter Singer has argued that the traditional, everyday, and intuitive idea of death is centered on the cessation of the flow of body fluids. On this conception, death was definitively indicated by the coldness and stiffness of the body. But these traditional conceptions are being displaced by contemporary medical definitions such as "brain death."[2] The Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to examine the definition of brain death was formed in the 1960s with the purpose of defining irreversible coma as a new criterion for death.[3] It set out a number of tests that clinicians should apply, tests whose purpose was to establish that there was no discernible central nervous system activity. The upshot was that when a person's brain is irreparably damaged to the point where that person is in irreversible coma, that person could be declared dead. This criterion for when death occurs has been largely accepted as the new meaning of the notion of death.

And yet none of this tells us just what death is. The concept of death contains depths that elicit a range of responses that goes well beyond the actions that are of interest to bioethicists. If the criteria for when death has occurred are important for defining when those actions should or should not take place, the deeper concept of death is important for elucidating why these actions and their

guidelines matter. Death is a moral source in the sense that it motivates our ethical stances in relation to it. In one sense, everyone knows what death is. But to the extent that this concept remains unarticulated there will continue to be confusion about what ethics asks of us in relation to its occurrence. Much recent bioethical debate surrounding death refers to the everyday concept of death as being somehow normative for our policies surrounding death, dying, and the treatment of the bodies of those who have died, including the harvesting of organs from such bodies. So James L. Bernat, in challenging the role that the conception of "brain death" has gained in bioethical decisions, says that

> *Death* is a nontechnical word that is and has been used broadly and correctly by the public. Any formal attempt to define it should strive to capture this ordinary, nontechnical meaning, and neither contrive to change its essential, consensually agreed upon meaning nor convert it to a technical term.[4]

After all, if our focus is to be on what engages the caring motivations of health care workers so as to ground responsible decisions, we should take heed of the everyday and intuitive conception of death that such workers are likely to give expression to. It has been reported that nurses in hospitals regard warm, breathing bodies as alive even when there is irreparable brain damage of the kind that would entail that, on the Harvard criteria, the person had died.[5] Bioethical policy, if it is to maintain public support, needs to be sensitive to this. Accordingly, before commenting further on some of these bioethical debates, it will be important to explore what this non-technical notion of death is, how it relates to the medically defined criteria for when death has occurred, and whether it can sustain the pressure that bioethical problems might put upon it.

1. A Paradigm Case

Let us approach an explication of the non-technical meaning of the concept of "death" by taking a simple example. You are sitting by a river relaxedly fishing when a mosquito alights on your arm. It is about to bite you. You quickly bring your hand down upon it and it is squashed where it landed. It is clearly dead. What does "dead" mean in this context? It is fairly obvious that the mosquito is no longer operative. Its biological systems are damaged to the point where they can no longer function. It is no longer living. Let us take this to be a paradigm example of what it is for something to be dead. In more formal terms we could describe this state of the squashed mosquito as one where there has been a permanent cessation of vital functions. Bernat helpfully defines death as "the permanent cessation of the critical functions of the organism as a whole."[6] The problem, of course, is that we cannot know which functions are critical or vital without first seeing which are the functions the cessation of which would lead to death. So the definition of death as the cessation of vital or critical functions is circular. Nevertheless, a lay person's knowledge of biology is sufficient to tell us that, for a mosquito, such functions include respiration, heart beating, metabolism, and quite basic forms of responsiveness to its surroundings. We do not need to be experts in biology to grasp intuitively that when pretty nearly all such functions have ceased, the vital functions will also have ceased. We do not need sophisticated distinctions to comprehend death by swatting. The point about

using swatting as an example is that, for the mosquito, the termination of vital functions is manifestly complete, irreversible, and catastrophic.

This point is important because there are other ways in which the life of an organism can come to an end. Certain amoebas subdivide themselves into two new beings.[7] Such an organism "becomes" two new organisms. Neither one of the new organisms is a continuation of the parent organism. That organism has ceased to exist. Yet, we would not be inclined to say that it has died. Certainly, it has not been destroyed in the sense that the mosquito was destroyed. Indeed, it could be said that it has flourished in the sense of fulfilling its biological destiny or task: that of continuing life by fission. Nevertheless, the organism that split into two has ceased to live as that organism. It has come to an end. The vital functions of *that* organism have ceased permanently. Yet it has not died. So it appears that our concept of death has to include such concepts as "damage" and "destruction" to capture what our paradigm case shows us. A mere permanent cessation of vital functions or of the functioning of the organism as a whole is not enough.

In speaking of damage and destruction, I am not ignoring the fact that something remains after the catastrophe has occurred. There is an unfortunate little mess on your arm that used to be the mosquito. There is a mosquito corpse. So the destruction of the mosquito has not been complete or radical. It has not disappeared. It is not annihilated. It has, however, ceased to live and this is because those structures of its body that are required for the vital functions to be able to continue have been crushed. This is why the word "damage" is more suitable than "destroy." Of course, not any damage will be serious enough to kill the mosquito. If you had cruelly pulled off one of its wings, you would have damaged it, but not killed it. To kill an organism you need to damage it in such a way as to stop its vital functions as a whole.

The presence of a corpse is important for a further reason. Cases of death can be distinguished from cessation of an organism's life by fission because there is a corpse left over. The swatted mosquito is present on your arm as a squashed mess. This mangled mosquito corpse is what the living mosquito turned into when you swatted it. It is because the organism that subdivided changed into two living organisms that we are not inclined to say that it died even though its life as that organism came to an end. For death to have occurred, there needs to be a dead body. Of course this body will effectively disappear over time. After you have flicked the dead mosquito off your arm, the ants will soon take care of it and it will have all but disappeared soon after. Other corpses may take longer to decay and disappear but most do eventually, though bones have been found that are many thousands or even millions of years old. If a dead body is a criterion for the occurrence of a death, it is a criterion that cannot be insisted upon for an indefinite period of time. It would be silly to deny that the mosquito had died simply because it was now impossible to find the corpse. Similarly there may be cases of death by destruction where the destruction is so complete that no corpse is ever found. Victims of the atomic blasts in Nagasaki and Hiroshima who were near the epicenter of the explosion were totally annihilated in this way. Nevertheless, we can conclude from our paradigm case that death is the permanent cessation of vital functions in an organism as a whole caused by damage or destruction, and resulting in a corpse.

And yet, for death to occur, the destruction or damage need not be as immediate and catastrophic as it was for the mosquito. An organism may die because its vital functions decay or become decrepit. We all know that for many

organisms old age is accompanied by an ever-decreasing vitality in its functions. They become slower and more labored and may gradually reach a critical point where the vital processes are no longer vigorous enough to maintain the life of the organism. Such a gradual decay is quite unlike the sudden death suffered by our mosquito and yet it is no less terminal. These are cases of death by senescence. And there will also be cases where the decay and eventual death are the result of disease or serious injury.

What is interesting about such cases is that it is often difficult to identify exactly when the moment of death occurs.[8] For the mosquito, the catastrophe occurred at a definite moment. But for an organism that withers and dies, the process of decay and decrepitude is gradual. There will be times before its death when it is clearly alive, and there will be times after its death when it is clearly dead, but there will also be a period when its functions are so slow or labored that it gives the impression of being dead when it is not. And its condition when it has finally died will not appear all that different from this almost-dead condition. In this context it will be difficult to detect the moment of transition from life to death. Even the use of sophisticated medical equipment will not help here. Such equipment will monitor different vital functions, but these functions will not all cease at the same moment. The heart may stop beating at one moment, the breathing cease at another, while the electrical activity of the brain indicative of consciousness or the control of vital functions may cease at another moment again. At which of these moments has the organism died? The problem is that, conceptually, the everyday notion of "death" does not admit of degrees. It cannot be a little bit dead, or partly dead and also partly alive. It would follow that, even if death comes slowly, there must still be a moment when the organism dies. Even if it is difficult for clinicians to identify it, the transition from being alive to being dead must be a momentary one instead of a process. While it may be difficult to identify the moment of death in the case where the death comes after a process of senescence or malady, the concept of death appears to demand that there be a clear distinction drawn between the organism's being alive and its being dead.

One reason why the identification of a clear moment of death is difficult is that, as I have noted in the case of persons, such an identification depends upon clinicians making decisions as to which vital functions to take to be criterial for life and death. Is it the cessation of breathing that defines death, or the cessation of heartbeat, or is it the end of the functioning of the brain-stem that controls those functions, or is it the destruction of those hemispheres of the brain that subserve consciousness? These various events may occur at different moments and may even be separated by considerable periods of time. Breathing and heartbeat may continue spontaneously for some time after the neocortex has been destroyed. So which is the moment of death? Following the recommendations of the Harvard Ad Hoc Committee in 1968 and subsequent commissions of inquiry in numerous legal jurisdictions, most health professionals now agree to define death for persons as the moment when the whole brain ceases to function.[9] The concept of "brain death" suggests that a person is dead when there is no longer any functioning in his or her brain. This is because both the brain-stem and the higher brain functions are involved in maintaining the crucial life functions of the organism as a whole. But, although the Ad Hoc Committee did not make the distinction, the brain-stem controls respiration and heartbeat, while the neocortex supports consciousness and other forms of information processing. Accordingly, some bioethicists insist that only the destruction of the neocortex indicates

death.[10] So it would appear that these disputes have to be resolved before we can decide when a person has died.

2. Death and Dying

I will take up this debate presently. But first, let us return to our everyday, unsophisticated conception of death. Leaving persons aside for the moment, we are taking the swatting of the mosquito as a paradigm case of death. In the mosquito case there is no doubt as to the moment of death and as to the applicable criteria for death.

An important distinction that we now need to make is that between death and dying. Our unfortunate mosquito suffered death. At a given moment it died or was killed. It did not have any appreciable time to suffer a process of dying. An organism that dies of old age or of a terminal disease, on the other hand, does suffer a process of dying. At some stage of its life it contracted a disease or reached a degree of senescence that resulted in a reduction of the effectiveness or efficiency of its vital functions. Its breathing might have become labored, or its heartbeat irregular. The blood might have had more difficulty making its way through the veins. The brain might have begun to receive less oxygen resulting in hindrance to those vital processes. The bones might have become brittle and the muscles less pliable. The end point of this syndrome of events will be death, but the processes that are involved may go on for days, months, or even years. Given that the end result is death, the organism suffering these degenerative changes can be said to be dying.

The problem, of course, is that, like the problem of fixing the moment when the process of dying ends in death, it is difficult to say when the process of dying begins. Organisms are growing older all the time. Indeed, it has been suggested that we begin dying at the moment when we were born. Whatever may be its salutary message for the way we live our lives, I think this last suggestion is biologically inaccurate. The bodies of most organisms can renew themselves fairly successfully for the greater part of their normal life span. But there does come a time, however hard it might be to specify, when the body no longer renews itself efficiently and it begins to deteriorate. This is the process of senescence and decline to which organisms are subject and that terminates in death. As such, it can be described as dying. Similarly, it is clear that disease and injury can lead to the dying process and to death. While it will not be easy to specify the time at which dying begins, clinicians can tell when disease or injury begins to damage those cells and processes in the body that are essential to life and when that damage becomes irreversible. This will be a matter of subtle judgment, influenced as it is not just by observation but also by an awareness of therapeutic possibilities. But the central concept is clear. This concept is that of dying as a process as opposed to death as a termination of that process. That it is a matter of judgment or even of decision just when the dying process begins and just when it ends in death does not prevent us from understanding and distinguishing the concepts in question. The mosquito did not have time to undergo its dying. In relation to it, we can speak just of death.

Just as we can see death as the end point of the process of dying, so we could see it as the beginning of a new process: namely, the disintegration of the body. If we take the word "disintegration" literally, then the disintegration of the mosquito's body occurred instantaneously when it suffered the catastrophe of

being swatted. This disintegration will continue as the cells of the body gradually cease to function and the ants begin to eat the corpse. To understand this adequately we need to recall the system-theoretic approach to biological concepts that I made use of in chapter four.[11] In such an approach, a living organism is a negentropic system of metabolic and information exchanges with its environment. The word "negentropic" alludes to those theories of life that make use of systems theory to model a living organism as a system that engages in feedback-controlled processes of homeostasis and development so as to preserve dynamic forms of steady state or functional equilibrium within the system by way of information and fuel exchange between its own subsystems and between itself and its environment. A living organism is seen as a hierarchical ordering of subsystems, each of which uses feedback mechanisms to control its processes and to contribute to the dynamic steady state of the system as a whole. This "steady state" can include growth, outputs with effects in the outside environment, self-propagation, and the maintenance of the order of its internal environment. This exchange comprises the consumption of nutrients, the intake of oxygen, and the receipt of other life-supporting inputs from the environment on the part of living systems as well as the output of wastes and other products and the contributions that the organism makes to the structuring of the groups or colonies it might belong to.

The key point about the notion of disintegration is that it consists of a number of processes that increase the entropy of the organism. The body of the organism now becomes less organized in a system-theoretic sense. It falls to pieces. Whereas the critical vital functions that the brain or nervous system had maintained resulted in processes of negative entropy—namely, the maintenance of the organization of the body and the processes of exchange of fuel and information with the environment that were necessary for maintaining or even increasing these levels of organization—when death occurs this organization collapses and decay sets in. The organism is no longer able to defend itself against the predations of its environment and thereby to maintain its internal structure and equilibrium. Death is the moment of complete transition from the negentropic processes of life to the entropic processes of disintegration. If life depends upon the maintenance of the structures of the organism, then death consists of the inability of the organism to maintain those structures. Even simple organisms that do not have brains to maintain the processes required for structural integrity do nevertheless have controlling and integrating mechanisms of some kind, the most basic being the code written into the DNA itself. The destruction or critical decay of these mechanisms would be, for these simple organisms, their death.

3. Other Cases

With the swatting of the mosquito as our paradigm example of what death is, what sense can we make of other uses of the word? There will be some cases that are clearly metaphorical. I might be driving my car and find that the car suffers a sudden loss of power. I stop and discover that a mechanical fault has occurred in the engine. You often hear such a scenario described by saying that the car (or the engine) has "died." If we think of death as a biological event (which the mosquito paradigm encourages us to do) then we would take such a usage to be metaphorical. The car and its engine are not biological entities. They are not

alive. Hence, they cannot die in a literal sense. However, there is some sense to this usage. Clearly the car has a function and this function is supported by the structure of the engine. The parts of the engine and the processes that take place within them are integrated into a complex system of interactions and if any part is damaged or broken, or if any constituent process fails, then the system will cease to function. As I have just noted, living systems are thought of in similar ways. Even though a car engine is made of inorganic materials, it bears some system-theoretic similarities to living systems, and so the failure of such an engine could well be described in ways similar to those in which we describe the failure of a living system. To speak of a car engine as having "died" may be a metaphor, but it can be an instructive one.

Nevertheless, I would want to say that in our analysis thus far, based on the mosquito paradigm, death is a biological concept. The sorts of things that can be said literally to die are organisms.

So let us apply this insight to the simplest organism that we can think of. Let us consider a simple cell. We may consider it *in situ* as part of the functioning organism within which it exists, or we may consider it *in vitro* in a laboratory where it is being kept in a culture dish. In either case it could be described as either dead or alive. Whether in the dish or in the body, it needs to be supplied with nutrients and to engage in those metabolic processes that are specific to it. It needs to be able to divide and replicate itself. Most importantly, it needs to be able to maintain its internal structure. If it does not do any of these things, it is said to be dead. It can also be in a transitional stage where it is starved of nutrients or other necessities so that it slows, withers, and gradually dies. There are internal structural conditions that need to be maintained as well as metabolic processes and other interactions with its immediate environment that need to be sustained for the cell to be described as alive. When these conditions are not met, the cell is dead. Further, the cell is subject to damage and destruction in just the way that larger organisms are. So it would appear that to speak of the death of a cell is to speak literally instead of metaphorically.

What is interesting about this is that there are many millions of millions of cells in larger animal bodies, and many of them are dead or dying at any one time. In a healthy and relatively young living body they will be replaced and disposed of, but in an older or sick body they will not. In this case, a living body may contain many dead cells. Moreover, an organism that has died may contain, for a time, a great many cells that are still alive (leaving aside the cells of invading parasitic organisms that may enter the body after death). Apparently hair and nails continue to grow for a time after the death of many mammals. It follows from this that the life of a body is not a simple sum of only living cells or a dead body a simple collection of dead cells. It is the structural integrity of the body, sustained by a critical number of living cells and their systemic functioning, that is crucial, and this is consistent with the presence of a large number of dead cells. Again, the destruction of the structural integrity of the body that results in death is consistent with the presence in that body of a large number of living cells. In complex organisms it is the structure of those organisms as well as a viable number of living cells within it that is essential for life. Maladies may leave a great many cells alive, but if the structure of the organism is damaged in definable ways, vital functions will not be supported. It follows that death consists in the loss of structural integrity and cessation of vital processes leaving a corpse behind.

What about plants? We often do speak of plants as being alive or dead. A tree displaying the full vigor of its growth and flowering is clearly alive, while a tree that has no leaves (in a season when it should), is lacking in sap, puts out no seeds, and has many broken and dry branches, is said to be dead. In a similar way we speak of fresh green grass as alive, while dry and yellowed grass is described as dead. When we analyze these usages in the light of a layperson's knowledge of botany, we again find that a combination of structural and functional concepts defines the difference between life and death. If the plant is able to maintain and reproduce its internal structures and to repair damage to those structures, and if it is able to maintain processes of exchange with its environment, such as photosynthesis and taking nutrients from the soil around its roots, then it is alive. When the plant suffers the sort of damage or deprivation of nutrients and moisture that destroy those structures or hinder those functions, it is said to die. There is no reason to suppose that the concept of death is any different in this context than it is in the case of the squashed mosquito or the senescent organism that has reached the end of its life. It is the disintegration of the plant's systemic structure as a whole that marks it off as dead.

There is one odd usage in relation to plants: namely, the case of cut flowers in a vase. In one sense we might think of them as dead. They have been cut off from their host plants and separated from their roots and thus most of their necessary nutrients. Yet we also distinguish between freshly cut flowers and those that after a time are looking droopy, dry, and discolored. These latter we describe as "dead," in contrast to the freshly cut flowers, which are described as "alive." Yet, being cut, these latter are dead, in the sense that many vital functions have ceased and the structures needed to support them are irreversibly damaged. The irreversible process of disintegration has begun. Perhaps the best way to solve this marginal problem is to suggest that a flower, when cut, is indeed dead but that the presence in it of many living cells gives it the appearance for a time of being alive. These cells can even be kept alive for a time by supplying nutrients to the cut flowers, but the plant as a whole is dead. Some might want to suggest that the flower is dying and that this process of dying can be slowed by supplying water and other nutrients, but is nevertheless irreversible. On this view, the flowers are dying now, while they are fresh, and they will be dead at some later point despite our best efforts. I think it preferable to say that they are dead from the moment that they are cut, but that they can be helped to look alive for a time. If death inaugurates the disintegration of the organism as a whole, then a cut flower, which is removed from its host plant and which is on its way to disintegration, is dead. The process that will result in their looking dead has already begun, even while they still look fresh and alive and can even put out fresh blooms.

All of this supports my claim that the concept of death is tied to the concept of an organism. If an organism is a system that maintains metabolic and self-reproductive processes by way of an integrated structure, and if death is the cessation of such processes, whether as a result of catastrophic damage to those structures or of malady, then the concept of death is inescapably a biological or organic concept. It is for this reason that I argued that to speak of the death of a car engine is to use the concept metaphorically.

But what of a case like an ecosystem? Take a lagoon in which there live some varieties of fish, frogs and other reptiles, and many insects upon which birds feed (including birds that might live on or near the lagoon as well as birds that migrate from further afield). There will also be other animals that depend

upon the lagoon for their lives: mammals that feed on the fish or insects and so forth. The ecosystem, too, is a system, and it has a structure that, while not corporeal, consists in the systemic interactions of processes and materials between different elements. Not only is there a food chain, but there is also the transformation of materials such as gases, the breaking down of plant materials in the bottom of the lagoon, and so forth. Is it a metaphor to call this a living system? Let us go further. Suppose that a nearby factory has been pumping pollutants into the stream for some time and that now, many of the fish are dying, along with the frogs and insects that live in or near the water. The birds that used to eat the insects have gone elsewhere and the whole area is beginning to stink of foul gases. Such a lagoon could be described as dead and this description is often used in cases such as this.

Is this a metaphor? It follows from what I have just said that if we were to take the term as being used literally in a case like this, then we would have to regard the ecosystem centered on the lagoon as an organism. If the literal use of "dead" is applied to organisms, then to speak of an ecosystem as literally "dead" is to suggest that that ecosystem is an organism. It is interesting that many biologists, ecologists, and environmentalists do indeed speak of ecosystems in this way. Indeed, the whole earth has been described as an organism.[12] New understandings give rise to reconceptualizations. If it has only recently become clear just how interactive and systemic the biosphere is, then we should not be surprised if our concepts have recently been undergoing a gradual change in meaning. To the extent that it makes sense to speak of an ecosystem as an organism, it will make sense to speak of such a system as alive or dead. Or perhaps the conceptual pressure is in the opposite direction. To the extent that it makes sense to speak of an ecosystem as alive or dead, it will make sense to speak of an ecosystem as an organism. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that such a revision of the concept of an organism is at variance with the more usual usage in which the boundaries of an organism are coextensive with the skin that surrounds a living body. As a result, I prefer to think of descriptions of ecosystems as "dead" as metaphorical.

4. The Deaths of Persons

Thinking about what death means in the case of persons has gone on within human cultures since their very beginning. It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to review all that thinking here, although I will explore these matters somewhat more in the next chapter. Much of religion in all its myriad forms concerns itself with death. And within the tradition of Western philosophy there has been much insightful thinking about it.[13] However, the central question that much of this thinking has concerned itself with is the question of what happens to persons after death. Doctrines about an afterlife, about reincarnation, about the existence of an immortal soul, about heaven and hell, and so forth, have been frequent. Because death is seen in these ideas as a form of transition from one mode of existence to another, these ideas raise the question of whether the concept of death as it applies to persons is the same as that which we took to be paradigmatic in the case of the mosquito.

Doctrines of a life after death appear to suggest that death is not the end of the process of dying and the beginning of the process of disintegration. Instead, they suggest that death is a passing from one form of existence to another, or a

gateway from one life into another. The notion of death as transition is ineluctably linked to the notion of a life after death. Herbert Fingarette is one of many thinkers who have eloquently challenged such concepts.[14] Fingarette begins his inquiry by arguing that the state of death cannot be imagined. Being the end of our existence as persons we cannot now envisage what it would be like to be dead. The most obvious reason for this is that we would be non-existent after death, and so there would be no state of our being to imagine. But this argument begs the question as to whether there is a life after death. So let us imagine a post-death condition anyway. What do we imagine it might be like to be dead? Were it counterfactually possible to imagine it, we might envision a state of loss of the things we love (a state that we might regret). But Fingarette argues that it is misleading to think of this as an image of what death is like. Instead, it is an image of what we value in life seen through the prism of their imagined loss: a prism that highlights their value to me in this life. Fingarette then clears away further misconceptions about, and inappropriate metaphors for, death. Take "separation," for example. This metaphor misleads, because it suggests a continuing existence for the deceased without those from whom the deceased has been separated. But in death there is no continuing existence. However, it might be replied that the loved ones who are left behind will be separated from the deceased and it might be appropriate for me to anticipate with regret and concern the loss and sorrow that others will feel when I die. While this is true, it does not imply that the state of being dead is a state that can then be experienced as a state of separation from loved ones.

Take another metaphor: that of "sleep." Death is sometimes described as an eternal sleep. Indeed, sleep does appear to be similar to death in that it involves the cessation of consciousness in those cases where there are no dreams. Dreamless sleep is not experienced. It is a nothingness. And yet the temporary and restful cessation of consciousness involved in sleep is radically different from death's permanent form. Sleep aids the restorative and integrative functions of the body, whereas death inaugurates disintegration. Sleep may be thought of as a gateway to a new day and to new health, but death is not a gateway to anything. Fingarette rejects doctrines of immortality, and the many metaphors that suggest a form of living after death, as being a denial of the reality of death.

But we should not foreclose on the question of immortality prematurely, because to do so would raise a quandary. Given that a great many people believe in some form of immortality, if we are going to remain true to the everyday and non-technical concept of death, we ought not to reject a belief in immortality outright. On the other hand, if we want to be rational, then we may need to accept that such a belief is incapable of being expressed in intelligible terms. As Jay Rosenberg has argued,[15] the phrase "life after death" is deeply contradictory. Most importantly, immortality would be logically inconsistent with our everyday concept of death if the latter were based on the mosquito paradigm. If the concept of death in "the death of a person" is to be the same concept as it is in the case of "the death of a mosquito," then we have to think of it as the cessation of the critical and integrative life functions of the organism as a whole. To think of it as a transition in the immortal life of another kind of entity that inhabits the organism is to think with a different concept from that of "death." If death is to be thought of as neither more nor less than the cessation of the critical vital and negentropic functions of an organism resulting from malady, catastrophe, or senescence, and resulting in the existence for a time of a corpse, then do persons die? This question may appear odd. It is obvious that persons die. And yet I

would suggest that those many views of the matter that would suggest that there is "life after death" actually involve answering that question in the negative.

We could not make sense of the idea of life after death or of personal immortality without adopting a pre-modern conception of personhood. Under the influence of Christianity and later of Descartes, Western ideas of the human person involved a kind of metaphysical dualism in which a person was deemed to be a combination of two kinds of thing: a biological body with features like the bodies of animals and plants, and a "spiritual substance" called a "soul" that was immortal and that, in the religious versions of the doctrine, had a glorious destiny with God in heaven; a destiny that persons could fail to achieve because of their sinfulness. Such views are not unique to the Western tradition. Immortality in one form or another is promised by most of the great world religions. Whether it is through reincarnation, through a merging with the great One, or through bodily resurrection at the last day, most religions promise some form of immortality to their adherents.

The dualism that is endemic in most beliefs about immortality—a dualism that distinguishes between a mortal body and an immortal soul—poses some serious problems for our understanding of death. If such dualisms suggest that, for persons, death is the separation of the soul from the body, then it would appear that the concept of death means something different in the case of persons from what it means in the case that we have taken to be paradigmatic: namely, the case of the mosquito. Whereas the swatting of the mosquito simply and clearly put an end to the life of a living organism, the death of a person would appear to be two things: the death of an organism, and the passing into a new form of existence of a conscious non-biological entity that had inhabited that organism.

But it would follow from this view that when we see a living person we are seeing two things: a living body and a mind or soul. Or at least, given that the mind or soul is not visible, we would assume that there was such an entity present when we see a human body. In our own case, we would be aware not just of our body but also of some metaphysical entity within ourselves that we have access to by introspection and that we would take to be the "owner" of our consciousness. But are such views still viable today? Such views have been brilliantly lampooned and undermined by Gilbert Ryle and more recently by Richard Rorty,[16] and there are not many philosophers today who would adhere to them.

In the traditional philosophical discourse there is more than one driver for the dualistic view of persons, however. Not only were thinkers driven in that direction by the need to theorize immortality, but they were also driven to it by the need to theorize consciousness and subjectivity. For Descartes, especially, it was inconceivable that a body could think. If there was thinking there had to be a thinking thing, and the body was not such a thing. Therefore there had to be a mind. Hidden somehow within the "extended substance" of the body was a "thinking substance" called mind. However, it is now recognized that those functions of thinking that Descartes attributed to the mind and that Socrates had attributed to the soul are capable of being performed by the body. It is the body that gives us the senses from which our experience and hence our thinking starts. It is the body that gives us our location in the world from which our perception and thence our thinking becomes situated in space and time. It is the body that gives us our affective life by opening us to a world that we can be concerned about because it contains the things that we need. It is the body that provides the

material infrastructure for thinking, consciousness, and subjectivity in that it is the brain whose operations subserve such thinking and consciousness. It is the body that is born, grows, and dies, and thus gives us the time frame in which we exist and through which we pursue our concerns. Our very existence as living, desiring, thinking, and meaning-seeking beings is bound up with our bodies. While we could explain all this by positing a spirituous substance residing in our bodies or, even more abstractly, a "transcendental subject" who would be the owner and source of conscious experience, we might ask why we need to posit such a thing. Why not just attribute the functions of desiring, emoting, thinking, and contemplating higher things to the body?

This was the thesis of the great French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who argued in his *The Phenomenology of Perception*[17] that the body can sustain those functions for which Descartes had had to postulate a mind, and for which Kant had had to posit a transcendental subject. Subjectivity is that bodily function that gives us our identity, our place in the world, and our concerns within it. It relates us to the world as to a situation in which we must unfold our existence and be who we are. Forming my identity is the project that constitutes my subjectivity. But this identity is bound up with my body and with its place in the world. Without this body I would be nothing. This is why it has been argued that if I were to enjoy a kind of disembodied existence after my death, my existence would be impossible. I would enjoy no further sensory inputs and, without a brain to sustain it, my memories and consciousness would simply fade into nothingness. The notion of life after death simply cannot be made sense of in the terms that we have developed to understand ourselves as historical persons. There may be some form of faith within which this belief can be held, but the terms in which such a belief can be expressed could not be consistent with those that we use to explicate our everyday existence. The line of thinking that links Kant with his positing of a realm of faith beyond reason, and to Kierkegaard with his postulation of a leap of faith based just on a subjective outlook, encourages me to think of "life after death" as an affirmation that can be made but not justified. It is an irrational affirmation of faith. It follows that it need not be consistent with our everyday conception of what death is. So perhaps we should put doctrines of immortality to one side for a moment and ask how a human death might be understood in modern, secular terms.

5. A New Beginning

Death is a biological phenomenon. In the light of my discussion thus far, death in any organism is the cessation of those critical, negentropic, life functions of the organism as a whole, brought on by malady, catastrophe, or senescence, that results in there being a corpse. How can we understand the death of a person in these terms?

Before we can answer this question we should be clear on what we mean by a person. I argued in chapters one and two that it is unhelpful to posit essentialist doctrines of what a person is, and that the primary function of calling something a person is to accept it into a matrix of moral considerations. Nevertheless, for the sake of the present discussion it will be necessary to use the concept of "person" as a classificatory and descriptive category. This will allow us to ask whether the death of a person needs to be conceived of in a different way from the death of any other organism. As I have just suggested, it is not rational to adopt any form

of dualism that understands a person as a combination of body and mind or body and soul. The notion of a person is simply the notion of a highly sophisticated animal that has evolved through aeons of natural selection into an organism capable of highly complex activities, including the building of civilizations, the creation of language and art, the construction of social order, and the living of life as a quest for meaning as well as for mere survival. Charles Darwin has taught us that we are continuous with the rest of the animal kingdom. Our abilities are highly evolved variations on the abilities that other animals have. While we cannot run as fast as gazelles and reach as high as giraffes, we can manipulate tools and communicate with language better than most. These skills, in turn, allow us to plan and coordinate our actions to the extent that we can produce the cultural and historical achievements that we see all around us. Our brains are sufficiently complex to sustain language and thought, and our curiosity insatiable enough to lead us to seek the ultimate explanations of things and their significance for our lives and for our societies. So great have been our achievements that we have been tempted to consider ourselves different in kind from the rest of nature. But this is hubris. We are different from other animals only in degree. So great also have been our aspirations, plans, and hopes that we have considered ourselves immortal. But this too is hubris. We are finite, mortal, and fallible beings destined to live our lives in this changeable, dangerous, and imperfect world.

So how must we conceive of persons? As Peter Strawson has emphasized, persons are beings of which many kinds of things can be said.[18] Being bodily, we can be described in physical terms. Our weight, height, and physical position can be described. In this we share properties with all physical entities, including rocks and motorcars. Moreover, we are biological organisms, and the kinds of description and explanation that biologists have developed in order to make sense of the organic realm can be attributed to us. We can measure our blood pressure, study the cells that make up our bodies, and we can monitor the beating of our hearts, and the growth of our young in the womb. Further, we have emotions and mental functions so that we can be described as angry, looking for food, or highly intelligent. Such descriptions, along with the physical and biological ones, can also be applied to many animals. In the case of persons there might be a further set of descriptions that is not typically applied to other living beings. For example we can be described as being in love or as enjoying music. We can be said to be building a house or writing a novel. We can be said to laugh at jokes or to cook our food. We can be described as writing poetry or making war. It is debatable whether these descriptions are unique to persons. But there are some that must be taken to be unique in this way: for example, attributions to us of the kind of autonomy that allows us to act in the light of moral demands and social standards of behavior. Acting freely with reference to the demands of moral principles and of our conceptions of goodness and of ethical ideals would appear to be a unique attribute of persons. Being aware of our own death and being able to take an attitude toward it is another. As we saw in previous chapters, for a person to "have a life" is to do all of these things as an integrated being over time structured as a narrative.

The reason that such a large range of predications can be attributed to persons is that they are highly sophisticated and complex intentional systems with an inner life of subjectivity. But Strawson's central point is a logical one. It is simply that the physical predicates and the intentional predicates are applied to the same "basic particular." It follows that this basic particular need only be one

thing: not a combination of two things: namely, body and mind. A person is not a dualistic entity.

In order for it to capture the everyday understanding of lay people, the term "death" must be taken to be univocal. It means the same thing whether it is applied to plants, animals, human beings, or persons.[19] The concept "death" in "the death of Aunt Mabel" is the same concept as the concept "death" in "the death of the mosquito." And death is a biological phenomenon. Does this mean that it makes no sense, or only metaphorical sense, to speak of the death of a person? No, the death of a person is the death of an organism. But it is the death of an organism to which, when it was alive, a large range of descriptions could be applied, including those that pointed to a life of cognitive functioning, consciousness, and subjectivity. To say otherwise is to be dualistic. Although in the plant and animal cases that we have so far discussed the disintegration begun by death referred to the break-up of the biological organism and the cessation of biological functions, it is not a metaphorical extension of this concept to have it refer as well to the permanent cessation of higher brain functions and the consequent inappropriateness of ascribing either intentional predicates or subjectivity to the organism. I will argue below that the permanent end of consciousness, of intentionality, and of subjectivity is literally an organic disintegration of the person. Accordingly it is literally a case of death.

6. Bioethical Problems

This view of the death of a person may be a philosophically sound reflection of the nontechnical notion of the death of a person, but let us test its adequacy by seeing if it can help us to solve any of the bioethical problems that recent advances in medical technology—especially those that permit the artificial maintenance of vital functions—have raised.

In the United States of America all states have adopted a Uniform Determination of Death Act (UDDA). It states that:

> An individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain-stem, is dead.[20]

These two clauses identify clear indicators of death. While they do not tell us what death is or what the concept of death means, they tell us how to discern it. Persons are dead when they are no longer breathing and have no heart beat, or when their brains are damaged to such an extent that both the control of those vital functions and of consciousness are no longer possible. Although these criteria appear to be alternatives, they are closely linked. They differ in that medical practitioners discover whether breathing and blood flow have stopped in fairly simple ways at the bedside, while they need sophisticated techniques such as electroencephalograms to detect whether the brain has ceased to function. But if the whole brain has ceased to function, then not only will consciousness have ceased, but the control of breathing and heartbeat will have stopped also. In this way it is the whole-brain criterion that is most crucial. If the whole brain is destroyed, respiration and circulation will not be possible. However, it might also be suggested that if the breathing and heartbeat have stopped, then the brain will soon be starved of oxygen and will die. In this case it would appear to be the

breathing and heart beating that are crucial. It would appear, then, that in saying that one *or* the other criterion might be used, the UDDA has left clinicians with some conceptual confusions. Which cessation is the mark of death? Is death simply the cessation of vital functions, or the cessation of brain functioning (and of consciousness)? And this confusion is manifest at the practical level. Problems arise from cases where respiration and circulation can be maintained by artificial means even while the brain-stem or the whole brain is destroyed, and from even more extreme cases where much of the brain is destroyed so that consciousness is irreversibly lost but where the brain-stem is still able to maintain breathing and blood flow without artificial means (although even in these cases, artificial medical means will be required to meet the nutritional needs of the body).

The reference to the death of the whole brain hides a further source of possible confusion. The brain-stem controls such vital functions as breathing and heartbeat, but the cerebral cortex supports consciousness, intelligence, and subjectivity. These two parts of the brain can each separately be irreparably damaged. If the hemispheres of the cortex are badly damaged, all possibility of consciousness can be destroyed even while the brain-stem, with or without the assistance of medical life support, keeps the rest of the body functioning. This is described as a "permanent vegetative state" (PVS). It can also happen that the body is all but inert, except for the artificial maintenance of breathing and heartbeat, while the cortex is undamaged, so that the victim is conscious and "locked in" within a barely functioning body. This has raised the question of whether the whole brain criterion for death is too crude. Which part of the brain is crucial to the question of whether a person has died?

These confusions have given rise to a considerable bioethical literature. But, as I will argue below, some of this discussion is still dualistic in the way it expresses itself. In order to be true to both rationality and to the non-technical biological conception of death I am espousing, we need to explore what death is in a way that is not dualistic in any way. Accordingly, I will not concern myself with theorists like Josef Seifert,[21] who espouse forms of body/mind or body/soul dualism that permit conceptions of death as the separation of the soul from the body. But even without espousing an archaic form of "substance" dualism, many bioethicists still write dualistically as if the notion of "death" that applies to persons is not the same as the concept that applies to organisms as such. If the notion of death as it applies to persons is not the same as the notion that applies to organisms, then persons are being distinguished from organisms dualistically. In this way the denial of the univocality of the notion of death goes hand in hand with dualistic ways of thinking about persons.

For example, Jeff McMahan has recently argued that we can speak both of the death of the person *and* the death of the organism, and that they can occur separately.[22] When the hemispheres of the brain that sustain consciousness and hence the mental life of a human being are destroyed, he says, the person has died and we are left with a damaged but living organism. Where there is irreversible loss of consciousness, as in PVS cases, a person has died even if the brain-stem or medical technology is able to sustain respiration and thus halt the disintegration of the body. So long as the body engages in metabolic exchanges with its environment, even if it can only do so with medical assistance, it is alive. McMahan is quite ready to accept the dualistic implications of his view. Indeed, they are his premises. For him, the person and the body are entities that can be conceptually separated from each other. Even if the person cannot exist as a

disembodied entity when the body has died, the body can exist as a living entity when the person has died.

Basic to McMahan's argument is his explicit denial that we are identical to our organisms. Interestingly, he does not use the concept of "person" when putting this point, but simply says, "I am not identical to my physical organism."[23] But this statement does not support the claim that persons are separable from their bodies. There is a distinction between the concept of an "I" or a self, and the concept of a person. The concept of a "self" is a phenomenological notion given content by reflection. Its meaning is based upon a first person point of view. In contrast, most philosophers take "person" to be a descriptive category subject to the epistemological and logical constraints of appropriate attribution based on valid criteria such as autonomy or self-consciousness. For such philosophers its meaning is based upon a third person point of view. It is true that, from a first person point of view, I am not an entity. I am my existential project of self-creation. There are certain unusual circumstances, such as when I am ill or injured, when my body may seem like an entity instead of an intrinsic part of my identity. In such circumstances, I could deny the identity of my self and my body. But this would be an existential stance of self-alienation instead of a categorical distinction warrantable in theory. It does not follow from such a stance that we can logically and metaphysically deny the identity of persons and organisms. The third person point of view provides no basis for such a distinction. What else could a person be if not a living organism? The metaphysical challenge of answering this question could not be met by anyone other than a totally unreconstructed substance dualist. McMahan even denies that my organism is conscious. Which leaves us to wonder what metaphysical fiction we would need to invent in order to identify whatever it is that *is* conscious. We should not think of the organism as if it were separable from the person. The person and the organism are one. It is dualistic to speak of the organism as alive while also speaking of the person as dead. When a human being dies there are not two deaths: the death of the person and the death of the organism. Just as a person is not an amalgam of two things: body and consciousness, or organism and personhood, so the death of a person is not two events: the death of an organism and the death of a conscious entity. It is the death of one biological thing: namely, the person.

In objecting to McMahan's view, Bernat argues that it makes no sense to speak of the death of a person where a person is understood as a separate "substance" in some sense. For Bernat, death is a biological phenomenon. Personhood, on the other hand, is a "psychosocial or spiritual concept. Personhood may be lost, such as, according to some, in a patient in a permanent state of unconsciousness, but personhood cannot die except metaphorically."[24] But Bernat makes his case a little too easy by referring to "personhood." Personhood is an abstract concept, and concepts clearly do not die. It may be true that personhood is a concept that arises in psychosocial contexts where the privileges, rights, and dignities of personhood are attributed to organisms or where the social or mental abilities that are typical of mature persons are acknowledged. But, being a concept, personhood can indeed not be said to die. Bernat should have made his point against McMahan by saying that *persons* do not die in the way that organisms do. However, I would claim that even this would be inconsistent with the "nontechnical" notion of death that Bernat espouses: the notion that applies in the same way to all organisms including

human ones. On the univocal view of death, persons can die and all of them eventually will.

Bernat rejects McMahan's view that the death of a person is the death of a non-biological entity that is distinguishable from a human body. Instead, he makes the intriguing suggestion that personhood can be "lost." I take it that this means that an organism can cease to be a person while it continues to live. Bernat's point is that this cessation of existence as a person should not be described as the "death" of a person. But how then might we understand this cessation of personhood? In my view, the death of a person is the death of an organism that typically had been open to a number of descriptions, including moral, physical, biological, psychosocial, and mental ones. When a person dies, there is nothing left but a corpse. This means that that full range of descriptions can no longer be attributed to it. But it does not mean that none of them can. Just as a cold and disintegrating corpse can have physical descriptions applied to it as well as some minimal biological descriptions, and a recent and warm corpse can have a larger range of biological descriptions attributed to it, such as "hair still growing," so a person who has ceased to exist because the higher portions of his brain have been destroyed, might leave a corpse to which further biological descriptions might apply: including descriptions such as "still breathing." The issue is simply whether we would describe this circumstance in McMahan's way by saying that the person has died while the organism lives on, or in Bernat's way by saying that the personhood of that person has been lost while the organism continues to live. Still other options include saying that the person has died leaving a corpse that is not yet decomposing, or saying that the person is dying, or saying that the person has permanently ceased to exist as a person even though he or she is still alive.

Bernat's solution is to say that no death has occurred until the whole brain has died so that no spontaneous critical vital functions can continue. For him the person is alive until not only consciousness, but also spontaneous breathing has stopped. Artificial respiration in the case where all brain function is irrevocably lost would therefore be the artificial respiration of a dead person. In accordance with the Harvard Ad Hoc Committee, there is no moral problem in turning such technology off because the person is already dead. But this appears unsatisfactory for cases where there is spontaneous breathing and heartbeat in a person whose consciousness is irrevocably lost: that is, persons in irreversible coma or PVS patients. Would such spontaneous breathing be the spontaneous breathing of merely a live organism but a dead person, or of a living person? For Bernat, such a person must be treated as still alive because the organism has not died. Personhood may be lost, but no death has occurred. For Bernat, persons cannot be said to die except metaphorically. Only organisms die.

It appears that here Bernat is still caught up in a dualistic way of thinking in that "personhood" is distinguished from organic life. If I am right in suggesting that the concept of "death" as it applies to mosquitoes is the same as that which applies to persons, then it must be possible to say literally that persons can die. How can we say this? Let us recall that death leaves a corpse and that, typically, a corpse begins to disintegrate or decompose at death. Although in plant and animal cases the disintegration begun at death refers to the decomposition of the biological organism, it is not a metaphorical extension of this concept to have it refer to the permanent cessation of consciousness supported by the higher brain functions and the consequent inappropriateness of ascribing mental predicates to the organism. At death, a "basic particular" to which both physical and

intentional predicates had been applied changes to a basic particular to which only bodily predicates are applied. Given that the brain and other parts of the central nervous system subserve consciousness and intentionality, this state of affairs is literally an organic disintegration of the person, and so it is literally a case of death.

Dualism and the positing of human death as different in kind from biological death can be avoided by my Strawsonian strategy of saying that the loss of personhood should be interpreted simply as meaning that intentional kinds of description could no longer be applied to the organism when the neocortex is destroyed. This is enough to warrant saying that the person has died. But there is more. We should note the important point I established in chapter two: namely, that "person" is not a purely descriptive concept. It is not used just to classify certain organisms. It is a moral concept: one that signals a range of rights possessed by that which is said to be a person and a range of obligations borne by others toward that entity. This way of seeing the concept preserves the insight that being a person cannot be separated from being an organism, but it allows a new insight: namely, that an organism can cease to be a person in the sense of no longer having the moral standing of a person that would arise from its insertion into an interpersonal, moral web of affections, obligations, and rights. In some unusual circumstances this can happen even when the organism is still technically alive. Whether or not an organism ceases to have such a moral status when it suffers such a serious injury that all possibility of consciousness and autonomy is lost is a matter for ethical decision on the part of the community or of those close to the victim instead of its being settled by a definition of personhood offered by moral philosophers and other theorists. I will return to this point presently.

Another theorist who speaks in dualistic terms is Karen G. Gervais, who does so while espousing a more radical response to PVS cases.[25] Like McMahan, Gervais argues that a person dies on the permanent cessation of any possibility of consciousness. For her, human death is the death of the person and the person dies when consciousness is irreversibly lost. Further, seeing as consciousness depends upon the neocortex, the destruction of this organ, rather than the death of the whole brain including the brain-stem, is sufficient for the death of a person.

In pointing to irreversible coma as a sign of death, the Harvard Ad Hoc Committee had sought to solve the problems arising from the possibility of artificial maintenance of heartbeat and respiration. Given that the cessation of either heartbeat or respiration had been the traditional indicators of death, and given that this had been adequate because such cessation inevitably leads to complete brain death, Gervais argues that what had always been crucial in the traditional signs of death is that they lead to brain death and thus the permanent end of consciousness. This last was what death amounted to. Harvard merely makes this explicit by alluding to irreversible coma. That brain death also includes the destruction of the brain-stem that controls respiration and thus heartbeat is not the crucial point. It is the presence of permanent coma that is crucial, and this relates to the destruction of only the neocortex. In this way, even a permanently unconscious person whose brain-stem is spontaneously maintaining respiration and heartbeat is dead despite this activity. Gervais admits that settling the criteria for when death has occurred is partly a moral matter. She calls it a "decision of significance." But she argues that permanent loss of consciousness was always central to our understanding of what death is. Modern high technology medicine has forced us to revise the specification of when this

happens but not the concept itself. The death of a person is the permanent end of consciousness, and this can now be indicated by the destruction of the neocortex, even in those cases where the brain-stem continues to function and keeps the organism breathing.

John Lizza agrees with this conclusion, although he reaches it by a different route. Lizza begins by arguing that the concept of death is not purely biological in the way that Bernat had suggested and is not univocal across all cases. The death of a person must be understood in non-biological terms. Central to the biological conception is the idea that death occurs when those vital functions that sustain the integrity of the organism fail. The brain-stem supports this integration, and so failure of the brain-stem would be enough for death to have occurred. However, consider the case of the "locked-in" patient whose cortex is sustaining consciousness, but whose vital functions are being sustained by machines after the brain-stem is destroyed. Surely such a patient is alive. And what about the PVS case whose cortex is destroyed but whose vital functions are spontaneously continuing—even to the extent that a fetus is growing in her womb? Surely she is alive, at least in a limited biological sense. And what about a science fiction scenario in which a decapitated body is being kept "alive" by artificial means? Is this a genuine case of being alive? Lizza concludes his critique by saying:

> In sum, consideration of the artificially sustained decapitated human being, the locked-in patient, and PVS support the idea that death cannot be defined in the strictly biological terms of the Presidential commission.[26]

Instead, Lizza suggests that his examples all turn on a crucial change in the way that the organism exists. After further elaboration of this idea, Lizza concludes that:

> death can be defined as a change in kind of living entity marked by the loss of some essential property. The criteria for the death of a person or human being will therefore be determined by the loss of whatever properties are deemed essential to the nature of persons or human beings.[27]

He goes on to argue that what are deemed to be the essential properties of persons are culture relative, but, in the West, the consensus is that "some cognitive function is an essential condition for being a person."[28] Accordingly, the loss of such functions—which arises from the destruction just of the cortex — is the death of the person. It will be clear that while it is culture relative rather than universal, this definition is essentialist in form and depends on there being agreement on the essential conditions for being a person. But, this quibble aside, Lizza's position is consistent with my own when I speak of death as a disintegration of the person-organism on the grounds that only physical predicates can now be applied to it. In saying that intentional predicates cannot be applied to a dead body, I avoid any essentialist arguments as to what those predicates might specifically be.

But to return to Gervais. Gervais calls her view a person-centered conception of death, and contrasts it with an organism-centered conception that would focus on the end of respiration, of heartbeat, or even of brain activity. She accepts that a form of dualism is implicit in her analysis when she says:

> In my own analysis, I use *human being* to refer to the kind of entity in question, and *person* and *organism* to reflect the two central aspects of this functioning—namely, consciousness and the integrated bodily functioning promoted by the heart and lungs.[29]

And again, "I assume here that demonstrating the necessity of a person-centered conception of human death will undermine the focus on the unity of living things."[30] This last remark indicates that she accepts that the concept of death is not the same when applied to human beings as when applied to other animals.

The problem with Gervais's citing the possibility of consciousness as a prerequisite condition for personhood is that it focuses on that very condition, consciousness, that tempts theorists to various forms of dualism. A stress on the neocortex would not do so, but without alluding to the possibility of consciousness there would be no reason to suppose that the destruction of the neocortex should be taken as the death of the person. In order to show that the irreversible cessation of consciousness does indeed mark the death of the person, we need to show that consciousness is an integral part of personhood, and this requires that it be integral to the organism instead of being just supervenient upon it. The trouble is that such organismic functions as breathing and heartbeat can be maintained by the brain-stem alone. It is this that tempts Gervais into speaking of a live body when the neocortex is destroyed so that the person has died. Gervais's organism/person dualism appears to be grounded in a brain-stem/neocortex distinction. If the work of a destroyed brain-stem in maintaining respiration and heartbeat can be maintained by artificial means while the person remains conscious and therefore alive (a situation that might be described by saying that the person is alive while much of the organism is dead), then we might also be tempted to say that when only the neocortex is destroyed the person is dead while the organism is alive. How can we avoid this kind of dualism?

It will not do to show that consciousness is integral to the essential properties that constitute personhood and make a person the proper object of moral obligations and rights. We do not need to return to essentialist arguments or moral arguments for personhood based on consciousness (arguments that would link consciousness with autonomy and then autonomy with rights and use these features as criteria for ascribing personhood). As I pointed out in chapter two, Tom Beauchamp has already suggested that such arguments are spurious. We need an argument that consciousness is a property of that integrated "basic particular" that is the person. If Gervais wants to argue that the permanent cessation of consciousness is the death of a person, and if a person is a "basic particular," then, to make her conclusions non-dualistic, she needs to show that the cessation of consciousness is also the death of the organism. What this means is that she needs a biological argument in which consciousness is shown to be central to the organismic functioning of the person.

We can derive such an argument from a system-theoretic approach to the concept of information. In the context of the negentropic life processes of an organism, information means any input or internal energy flow that is not absorbed as food or as raw material but that contributes to the control of steady state processes or to their success, including the finding and absorption of fuel. It also includes outputs that contribute to the order of the larger system of which the organism is a part. Entropy is the tendency toward the reduction of complexity of an entity that can be observed when we note that, eventually, things fall apart. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the natural world is said to

tend toward states of greater probability: that is, the simplification and breakdown of its structures. Living systems and the evolution of life forms represent a counter to this tendency. Negative entropy is the maintenance and growth of structural differentiation and functional integration of a system against the natural tendency of things to disintegrate or wear out. For living systems, the maintenance of negentropic states and processes requires fuel and information. Steady state open systems respond to information by appropriate internally wired reactions and behaviors and sometimes by different levels of cognition. A simple organism that folds in upon itself when prodded, a flower that turns its petals to the sun, a worm that seeks its food, a bat that orients itself in the dark, and a dog that chases a ball are all biological systems that depend upon, and respond to, information exchanges with the environment. For some biological systems this information exchange involves different levels or kinds of consciousness. The input of information that is essential to the maintenance of steady states and growth includes the sensory input of a conscious creature by way of which it orients itself in its world and seeks and finds its nutrients. According to the systems-theoretic conception, therefore, an organism is alive not only when its critical internal steady state processes are functioning as a whole but also when its information-processing systems, including relevant kinds of consciousness, are functioning in a way that integrates with and supports its metabolic and homeostatic processes.

With death, entropy takes over. When we swat a mosquito, those processes that preserved the steady state of the organism against the increase of entropy come to an end, and the body of the mosquito begins to disintegrate or decompose. Accordingly, in the case of any organism, I would define death as the irreversible cessation of those critical, negentropic life functions of the organism as a whole that constitute it as an intentional system—including those of consciousness in systems capable of it—brought on by malady, catastrophe, or senescence, that results in there being a disintegrating corpse. When we swat a mosquito, we do indeed bring to an end "the critical functions of the organism as a whole," as Bernat had said. But we can now identify those functions that are critical. They are those that conduce to its dynamic homeostasis. As a result of this cessation we are left with a decomposing corpse.

Or at least, we usually are. In PVS cases we have the unusual situation of a "corpse" in which some of the homeostatic processes continue because their control centre, the brain-stem, is not destroyed. Indeed, even cases where the brain-stem is destroyed but where medical technology is maintaining such processes as respiration and heartbeat are not different in principle from PVS cases. Systems theory makes no distinction in the hardware that is used to maintain the system's functioning. From a system-theoretic point of view, it is immaterial whether respiration is being maintained spontaneously by the brain-stem or artificially by a respirator. But an important question from a systems theory point of view is whether consciousness is still operating as an information system. If it is not, then the system has begun to collapse because crucial information flow integral to organismic functioning has ceased. Moreover, there is no systems equivalent to the neocortex that could take over those functions. Gervais would argue that therefore the organism is dead. This is the case both with the whole-brain dead person and with the PVS patient. Consciousness has ceased, therefore the organism is dead, and therefore the person is dead. My argument overcomes Gervais's dualism because the links in my chain of implication include the death of the organism as system. It appears to support her

conclusion that the person has died when there is irreversible coma, but adds that the whole organism should also be construed as dead. The problem is that there are many cases when we would not want to construe the state of the person in that way.

Even if my argument that death should be conceived in a system-theoretic manner successfully helps Gervais overcome her dualism, it leaves us with a number of conceptual and practical problems. It implies that a person has died when his or her consciousness is irrevocably lost because of the destruction of the neocortex. But after death, there is a corpse. And so a PVS case leaves us with the anomalous phenomenon of a breathing corpse.

We should note that these conceptual and practical problems arise in extremely unusual cases, and that in normal circumstances the death of a person leaves us with a disintegrating corpse just as the death of the mosquito did. It is medical technology that allows for the artificial respiration of dead persons and even for the spontaneous breathing of dead persons since nutrition and other vital functions still have to be maintained artificially in such cases. Outside of the context of advanced medical technology, persons simply die. We should not expect our everyday language to be adaptable to cases that contemporary science has only recently made possible. And yet, because our everyday intuitions about death and about what a corpse is motivate our reactions even in such cases, we should not make an exception in our understanding of death in these unusual cases.

How can we overcome the anomaly of positing a breathing corpse or the even worse anomaly of calling it a "living corpse?" Instead of describing the time while the corpse is breathing as a stage between the death of the person and the death of the organism—a formulation that is clearly dualistic—we could perhaps describe it as the gradual dying of the person. There are plenty of cases of dying persons who are no longer conscious and who linger for some time before they die. It may be that in those cases consciousness has not ceased irrevocably because the relevant parts of the brain are not completely destroyed, but, nevertheless, as it happens, consciousness does not revive. Would we say that the death of the person occurred when the person went into a coma or when all the vital functions had ceased? Clearly we say the second. The unconscious dying patient is still alive. Perhaps we should think of the person whose neocortex is destroyed but whose body still breathes in the same way. Such a person is dying but not yet dead. A person whose damaged brain can still sustain breathing for a time is simply taking quite a long time to die. This sounds highly plausible and, although the dying process would have to be described as taking a quite long time in cases such as that of Nancy Cruzan, who was in a coma for eight years, this may be preferable to saying that she was dead and that her parents attended to a breathing corpse for all that time.

But does this help us to answer bioethical questions about harvesting organs, the demand for which is also ethical? Would we permit ourselves to harvest the organs of a dying patient instead of a dead one? It would certainly settle many moral qualms if we could say that the patient was dead before we harvested the organs. But should we settle such qualms at the cost of confusing our concepts of death, of a corpse, and of a human person? Saying that a person is dead while his body or even corpse is still alive might help salve our conscience when we harvest that person's organs, but it cannot but confuse us as to what persons are and about what it is for a person to die. A person is an organism to which a large range of descriptions, including psychosocial and

spiritual ones, can be applied. To describe a person as dead is not to speak metaphorically. A person is dead when she has suffered a malady, catastrophe, or senescence such that the critical vital functions, including consciousness of any kind, can no longer be sustained and disintegration of the corpse has begun. A person is either dead or alive. If the changes that result in death can take time to take place, and if they can be interrupted or suspended for a while by artificial means or by a combination of artificial means and biological serendipity, then during such times, the person should be said to be dying.

The question of what should be done with a person who is dead is relatively clear. Such a person can be buried and his or her organs can be harvested if viable, and all due permissions have been given. Respect and dignity must be accorded to the corpse in accordance with the customs of the culture, and the memory and wishes of the dead person must be respected. The question of what should be done with a person who is obviously alive is also clear. Such persons have rights and privileges, and it would be immoral and unjust to usurp any of these without reasons that could be sustained in impartial moral discourse. It would certainly be immoral to harvest their organs or use their bodies against their will or expressed wishes or against the norms prevailing in their society. The difficulty arises when we are considering persons who are dying. On my argument, this category might include patients who are in a PVS condition. It would appear that the situation at the present time is that when such patients are being sustained by artificial means we can declare them dead and harvest their organs. But when some vital functions are being sustained by the patient's own brain-stem we cannot do so and we must consider them alive.

But the decision whether to regard such persons as dying or dead is a policy decision instead of a conceptual one. The key decision is whether we could bury such a person or harvest the organs or both. If we decide that we can do any of these things, then we had better say that the person is dead, while if we feel that we cannot, then we could continue to consider him or her as alive but dying. Of course, we could also decide to suspend the implicit rule that organ donors must be dead and allow organ donation from dying patients. But, as Bernat suggests, this would undermine public confidence in medicine and open a possible slippery slope where other kinds of dying patients might be killed in order to harvest their organs.[31] The question of whether it might be justified to hasten the death of a dying person whose brain is irrevocably damaged might also be raised.

The notion that death is not a momentary phenomenon but a process has been advocated by Rosenberg and others. For him, the point that the exact time of death is often hard to determine implies that the decision as to when a person is dead is a moral one instead of a scientific one.[32] We do not need to see death as a process taking place over time in order to give us the conceptual space for making such decisions. The process of dying already allows for this. Unusual cases, where we could say either that a dying person or the corpse of a dead person continues to breathe, whether by artificial means or by natural means, certainly highlight this. Bernat and Singer are right to point out that people are loath to bury, or harvest organs from, such bodies. So perhaps the debate should be about when we are prepared to treat the body as a corpse. If we could decide on policies in relation to this, we might be more willing to call a person dead earlier instead of later. Instead of seeking to use the concept of "death" to force the moral issue of what we may or may not do to a dying body, we should articulate principles about this matter directly. We might decide that, under certain stringent conditions, we could bury, or harvest organs from, the body of a

dying person, or we might decide that we could only bury, or harvest organs from, a dead person. The second is preferable. But we should perhaps decide when it is appropriate to bury or harvest organs first, and only then describe the person whose body we are burying or whose organs we are harvesting as dead. Defining a human organism as alive (or as a person instead of a corpse) is actually a moral decision relating to how we should treat that organism. If we call a PVS patient a living person, then we are deciding to treat it with the dignity due to persons or to accord it the rights that persons can standardly claim, whereas if we decide not to treat it in that way, then we do not call it a living person. And in the case of a PVS patient, we might do this by saying that, as a person, it is dead or that personhood has ceased to exist.

A position such as this has recently been argued by Chris Belshaw.[33] Indeed, he goes further. He suggests that the confusions and difficulties surrounding the concept of death in bioethical decision making are such as to make the concept useless in such contexts. Belshaw reviews the circumstances under which a definition of death is said to be important for making ethical decisions, like removing organs for transplantation, but argues that once we have given a description of the situation ("the patient is still breathing, but has no possibility of consciousness," for example), we have all the facts we need to make such a moral decision. There is no further fact described as "X is dead" that will settle the moral issue. To say that X is dead adds nothing useful to the description of her physical condition. Offering definitions and describing necessary and sufficient conditions for death is useless. There will be clear and obvious cases, of course, but the task of making decisions about borderline cases such as PVS patients is not helped by having a definition of death, especially if there is no agreement as to what that concept should apply to: the person or the body. The issue of whether whole brain death or upper hemisphere death is critical is similarly otiose. Moral decisions have to be taken on the basis of what is evident before us instead of in terms of a putative definition of death.

What Belshaw is arguing here is consistent with my attack on essentialism with regard to the concept of "person." Just as any attempt to define what a person is in the abstract falls prey to the charge of essentialism and leads, as my discussions above show, to a host of anomalies and confusions, so the attempt to define the death or cessation of a person in essentialist terms cannot but fail to advance the solution of bioethical problems in particular contexts. It is when a brain-damaged patient or relative is before us that we need to make decisions, and on such occasions we had best make them on the basis of a sensitive awareness of what is at hand, instead of on the basis of theoretical solutions to philosophical problems. In such circumstances we might ask what harm is done to the patient and his or her family if organs are harvested with the latter's permission and what benefit may be gained for others in doing so.

7. Death and Subjectivity

While this solution may resolve or dissolve the bioethical issues by sidestepping the essentialist issues, it does not clarify the notion of what death is in the case of human beings. How can we acknowledge the univocality of the concept of death while still recognizing its depth and complexity as applied to human beings? Following Lizza's suggestion, we could speak of death as a change in the mode of existence of the organism. In this way of speaking, a PVS organism no longer

exists or lives *as* a person though it continues to exist or live *as* an organism. Perhaps this is also what Bernat meant when he spoke of the loss of personhood. If it is possible for a fetus to be alive as a (human) organism but not yet as a person at a given time, and then to be alive as a person at a later time after a period of development, it may be possible for the process to occur in reverse. If the death of an organism may not always be locatable at a definite moment, then it may be that the transitions that gradually take place include a transition from being alive as a person to being alive as a mere organism and then a transition to being completely dead. In the PVS cases we simply have an unusually long period of transition between ceasing to exist as a person and being completely dead such that this transition is the stage of being alive as a non-conscious and dying organism. So there can be a period of time when the organism is not living-as-a-person, but still living-as-an-organism. The period of time when the organism is not living-as-a-person is best described non-dualistically by saying that the organism does not self-consciously have a life. During this time we would avoid speaking of the person as dead, since that would be dualistic and would imply a non-biological notion of death, but we might, perhaps, speak of the person as having "ceased to exist." This may be a more explicatory formulation than Bernat's "loss of personhood."

But have I now reintroduced a new form of the dualism, one that I impugned in McMahan, Bernat, Gervais, and others? Have I gone back on my argument that persons have disintegrated and therefore died when intentional predicates can no longer be applied to them, not just for Strawsonian reasons but also because consciousness of some form is central to the systemic functioning of a person? Not if we explore what it means for a person to exist.

It is conceptually legitimate to say that a person can "cease to exist" provided we understand the word "exist" in its existential sense. If we mean by "exist" something like "being an entity," then persons never exist. Persons are not entities. Being a person is a mode of being of organisms. Some organisms, by virtue of their cerebral complexity, can exist as persons and, given suitable environmental and interpersonal conditions, they do. Being a person is not being an entity or having an entity within. It is a mode of being that can be enjoyed by those organisms that are capable of self-conscious awareness. For a person to exist is for a conscious organism to gather its past into a dynamic present and to project itself into a future so as to secure its own identity and have a life, and to do so self-consciously. If the brain cannot support this existential stance because of malady, injury, or senescence, then the organism ceases to exist as a person even while it continues to live. An organism can be so damaged that it can no longer support that mode of being. It may, however, still be alive. The person will have ceased to exist while the organism is still alive. The mode of being of personhood is no longer available to it. The organism no longer exists as a person. This would not be a dualistic way of speaking because persons are not entities that stand in dualistic relation to their bodies and because we are not saying that the person has died while the organism lives on.

But there is a lingering doubt. As with Gervais's position, this view appears to place too great a stress on the role of consciousness in personhood. In the case of PVS patients, there was an inference from the destruction of the neocortex, to the cessation of consciousness, and thence to the ceasing to exist of the person (as opposed to the death of the person). Gervais might be right to suggest that consciousness was always what was of central importance in the layperson's understanding of human death, but I am left with the hesitation that comes from

my using the death of a mosquito as a paradigm. I assume that there is no consciousness present in the mosquito of the self-conscious kind enjoyed by persons. The cessation of such consciousness is therefore not a part of the concept of death in the case of that mosquito. If the concept of death is univocal, why should consciousness play such an important part in our conception of human death?

My father-in-law died recently of complications arising from chronic asthma. Although he spent several days in an unconscious condition (and this condition was, as it turned out, irreversible), he continued to struggle for breath. Nurses said of him that he fought to the very end. Yet, so far as anyone could tell, his consciousness had ceased. Would we say of him that he had already died when his consciousness ceased? Clearly not. Would we say that his person had died at that time? That barely makes sense. Would we say that he had ceased to exist as a person and continued to live just as an organism? This is the view that my analysis so far would appear to endorse. And yet it leaves me discontented. His consciousness had ceased. But consciousness is but a form of the wider phenomenon that we described in chapter one: namely, intentionality.

It will be recalled that an intentional system is one that behaves as if it had desires and some kind of awareness of its environment. Some intentional systems enjoy consciousness as well as being intentional, while still others enjoy that kind of self-consciousness that supports subjectivity and the narrative structure of living that is typical of mature human beings. The univocal definition of death that we have been seeking could now be summed up by saying that death is the change of the organism from an intentional system to a non-intentional one. In the case of human beings, this change will also imply the cessation of the existence of the person as expressive of subjectivity.

Our analysis of death has been, for most of the preceding pages, of a purely descriptive nature. We have been seeking to understand what death is by way of the question of what our criteria for declaring a person as dead should be. But this can only yield for us a descriptive, objective, and theoretical conception of death. Further, I have suggested that such a conception supports no practical implications for bioethics. Of course, I am not suggesting that a contrasting, reflective, phenomenological view of death is possible. Such a view of *dying* might be possible, but that is not my point either. My point is that, just as intentionality can be apprehended through sensitive perception in another organism that is healthy, and just as subjectivity can be intuited in another person by way of intersubjective rapport, so intentionality and subjectivity can be discerned by way of intersubjective rapport in an other who is dying. The clinicians and family who were present during the last thirty-six hours of my father-in-law's life—hours during which he was terminally unconscious—were able to feel his struggle and empathize with it. They were able to feel through sympathy the effort he was making. They knew he was fighting for his life even while they also felt that the fight was futile and that peace was preferable. From a purely descriptive point of view, this man was a functioning intentional system. His lungs and respiratory system sought the air that they needed for sustenance and he struggled to take in breaths. Given that consciousness had been lost, it would not be appropriate to speak here of subjectivity as a struggle for existence and being, but there was such a struggle, and this made it evident that, as an intentional system, this man was still alive. Moreover, the love and concern that was extended toward him by his family and the hospital staff led to their projecting the qualities of subjectivity onto him. And so he was said to be

"fighting" for life and "struggling" for breath. These ways of speaking were metaphorical but deeply important ways of seeking to continue to hold the dying man in the moral web of the family and community who loved him. They were attributions to him of rich levels of intentionality.

Many PVS patients appear to display intentionality in this way. They struggle when breathing becomes difficult and respond in different and appropriate ways to stimuli and irritants. Insofar as this is so, they can often be related to in the mode of intersubjectivity by those who are sensitive to their struggle. In contrast, one of the tests for death mandated by the Harvard committee was that there must be total unreceptivity and unresponsitivity to any stimuli. In my terms, this would mean that there was no basis for the discernment of intentionality and no possibility for the attribution of subjectivity on the part of any other person. So it would appear that the Harvard committee would have to say that PVS patients who display responsitivity are not dead. Be that as it may, my central point is that any patient who displays some degree of intentionality is alive.

Of course, we need to be careful here. Whether we see a patient as displaying some degree of intentionality is a matter of interpretation. Some would see the "struggle for breath" that my father-in-law displayed as a reflex reaction to the inability of the coughing reflex to clear the throat of mucus and moisture. Instead of interpreting it as an expression of an innate struggle for existence, this interpretation sees it as a physiological reaction and nothing more. My interpretation that it is a struggle for existence is certainly not based on any attribution to the patient of conscious intentions. Instead, it is an interpretation of the systemic functioning of that still living organism as purposive. The issue is more difficult in the case of PVS patients. It may well be that the responsiveness that is reported in such cases is nothing more than the kind of reflex reaction that can also be shown by a severed frog's leg when attached to charged electrodes. We would not think of the frog's leg as alive just because it twitched when the switch was thrown, and we might be just as unwilling to think of the PVS patient as alive just because the body flinches when pinched, or blinks in the light, or even struggles when the breath is interrupted by an external agency.[34] It will be a matter of interpretation as to whether these responses warrant calling that patient an intentional system. Insofar as sensitivity and intuition are involved, there will not be a secure criterion for such interpretations. Perhaps it is only objective criteria such as those of the Harvard Committee or those proposed by Gervais that should be appealed to here. But my aim is not to revise the criteria for declaring death, but to understand what it is that is being declared.

The swatted mosquito is understood to be dead because it ceases to be an intentional system or to display any intentionality. This, I now suggest, is the basis of our understanding the death of the mosquito as a paradigm case. That consciousness and self-consciousness are not the crucial elements in our understanding of death is shown by our never having assumed that the mosquito was conscious in this way. But we do understand the mosquito as an intentional system, and in the case of more sophisticated animals we have some intuitive grasp of their existence as involving an inner dimension of subjectivity. Because most of us cannot have an intersubjective rapport with a mosquito, we can use this paradigm case to define death only as the irreversible end of intentionality. In cases of intentional systems in which it is also possible to have an intersubjective rapport and an intuition of the subjectivity that the intentionality subserves, we might also understand death as the irreversible end of that subjectivity. But in

either case the core definition is that death is the irreversible cessation of intentional systemic functioning. So long as there is intentionality, responsiveness, or the possibility of intersubjective responses with others, there is life.

It follows that I can offer a new definition of death that captures more adequately what is central to our paradigm case. This definition will not be given in terms that specify criteria for when death should be declared. Such specifications tell us what the causes of death are or when it has taken place, but they do not tell us what death is. I define death as the end of intentionality. A dead thing, a corpse, is no longer an intentional system. It is no longer a homeostatic system pursuing its own goals. This definition is descriptive and objective, and it captures the intuitions that lie behind the non-technical concept of death and that therefore remain relevant to the bioethical problems that I have mentioned. Breathing by itself is a system process but not an intentional one. It follows that a breathing warm body to which we attribute no 'struggle' for breath is dead and may be treated accordingly. This means that those who would want to harvest organs from such bodies do not have to argue that they should be allowed to take vital organs from a living body, albeit one that is dying.

But there is a deeper implication of the definition of death suggested by my analysis. If defining death as the end of intentionality is a relatively descriptive and objective interpretation of what happens when an organism dies, then this implication gives the inner and phenomenological interpretation of what that means for creatures capable of self-consciousness. For such creatures, the definition says that death is the end of subjectivity. This implication is not only deeper; it is also more difficult to understand. Subjectivity is hard to understand. It is the impetus toward self-consciously living and owning a life that mature persons express and that leads them to seek to sustain their own lives and enhance their forms of existence. We can recognize it in ourselves and can gain an intuitive grasp of what it is through phenomenological reflection. But we cannot perceive it in others as an object of observation. The most that we can perceive is their intentionality, their being intentional systems. My apprehension of the subjectivity of another is based upon fellow feeling, rapport, and communication. I do not judge the other to be a subject; I relate to the other as a subject. If subjectivity cannot be directly apprehended, it cannot be made an objective phenomenon. It is the depth and ungraspable mystery of the other. I feel it when I relate to another, but I cannot definitively say when it is present or not. Accordingly, I cannot definitively say when subjectivity ceases to be in another, either. If the death of a mature person is the cessation of subjectivity, then such a death cannot be discerned except in the mode of intersubjective rapport. Nurses and others report that, as they attend the dying, they can sense a subtle change when death occurs. Alongside the obvious criteria of the cessation of breathing and heartbeat, there is a coming to rest, a cessation of struggle. We describe a person who has died as being "at peace" because their subjectivity, their internal fight for existence, has ceased. Their living is over. I can feel that the other has died, but I cannot, at first, know it.

We would not want to build criteria for the declaration of death or for the making of bioethical decisions upon such a basis. There have been cases where a patient was kept on artificial life support systems well after irreversible coma and unresponsitivity set in on the grounds that the mother declared herself in psychic communication with that patient. I do not want my account to encourage such aberrations. Nevertheless, insofar as I set myself the goal of uncovering the everyday unsophisticated and non-technical understanding of human death that is

fundamental to our bioethical discourses, I believe I have captured this when I say that death is the end of intentionality and therefore, in the case of human beings that had enjoyed it, of subjectivity.

One advantage of this definition of death is that it applies to all living organisms. All living things are intentional systems that struggle for their existence. Whether we consider a mosquito, a flower, a tiger, or a cell, we can discern the behavior of an intentional system. If death is a univocal concept irrespective of what kind of living organism we apply it to, then it had better be defined in terms that apply to all living things. The phrase "intentional system" is such a term. It applies to all living things, albeit that in the case of relatively mature human beings it takes that self-conscious form of intentionality that is subjectivity.

A further advantage of this definition is that it captures what McMahan, Bernat, Gervais, Lizza, and others had wanted to say when they argued in their different ways that persons can die or that personhood could be lost even while the body lives on. In saying that persons do not literally die, Bernat was intending to say that subjectivity does not literally die. Subjectivity is a function of complex organisms. It is their interiority. Those organisms can die, and when they do the subjectivity in question ceases to exist in the existential sense. Death is indeed a biological phenomenon. I would say that, insofar as persons are complex organisms and subjects of complex predications, persons could be literally said to die. But what the concept of death means in this, as in every other context, is that the organism ceases to be an intentional system. In the human case, this also implies that subjectivity comes to an end.

But it might be objected that I have done nothing more than redescribe the bioethical problems in different terms. After all, just as with consciousness or personhood, subjectivity can come to an end before the organism ceases to be an intentional system. This is arguably what has happened to the PVS patient. By suggesting that the end of intentionality is the crucial defining characteristic of death, I have opted for a whole brain criterion for death. Even when all possibility of subjectivity has been lost, the organism is alive while it continues to function as an intentional system. While I have defeated dualism and preserved the univocal concept of death by defining it as the end of intentionality, I have not resolved the bioethical issues I have discussed. By adopting the strategy of explicating the changes that take place during the dying process by saying that fewer intentional and progressively more merely biological descriptions apply to the organism, I still have not helped to define a specific moment when it ceases to be a person and becomes a mere organism. When do our moral responsibilities toward it alter? But it has been the burden of my argument that philosophical theory cannot define such a moment of transition from one moral status to another. This is a matter for ethical decision in an interpersonal context.

Indeed, it is a further advantage of my definition that it captures the intersubjective nature of death. Death is not only a change occurring in the organism of the other; it is a loss to the loved ones. It is indeed felt as a departure and a passing away. The views that Fingarette critiques have a point to them. For those left behind, death is the irreversible cessation of any vital form of intersubjective rapport with the deceased other. The end of their subjectivity is not just a condition that the deceased undergo. It is a change in the subjectivity of the loved ones as well. In the state of intersubjective rapport that they used to enjoy with the deceased, there is now a gap and an emptiness. Memory and love will linger, but they will not be supported by any new intersubjective rapport. The meaning

of the concept of human death is not to be given in a purely objective, descriptive form. It has an experienced subjective dimension. Death does not just happen to the deceased, it happens also to those who are left behind. Death is a phenomenon within the field of intersubjectivity. It is the departure from that field of the subjectivity of the other.

It should not surprise us that the precise moment of death cannot be discerned. If human death involves the end of subjectivity and subjectivity is itself a mysterious quality of the other that cannot be objectively discerned, then death too is an indiscernible mystery. We can discern when the vital functions cease or when the brain is irreparably damaged with some degree of objectivity, and we can discern with experienced judgment when all intentional functions cease and the negentropic system ceases to maintain itself, but the end of subjectivity is a mysterious passing away.

Seeing death as an intersubjective phenomenon as well as an individual biological one has some implications for how we think about end-of-life decisions. If the intersubjective rapport of loved ones can keep the dying person within the loving realm of the living for a time even after that person has ceased to enjoy subjectivity, then that sustaining love can also accept and hasten the death of a person whose continuing as an intentional system can only be pointless or produce suffering. If we can interpret the strained breathing of the dying as a struggle for life, we can also interpret it as a seeking of release. Love trumps any dogmatically based obligation to keep a human organism alive. Even in cases where the dying person still enjoys subjectivity, if such a person requests a hastening of his or her passing, the response should be expressive of the intersubjective rapport and love that have sustained that person in life. The quest for release can be as precious as the struggle for life.

Eight

ACCEPTING DEATH

> In judging another man's life, I always inquire how he behaved at the last; and one of the principal aims of my life is to conduct myself well when it ends—peacefully, I mean, and with a calm mind.
>
> Montaigne[1]

1. Why Pursue an Acceptance of Death?

In a recent and important book Daniel Callahan argues that new forms of ethical dilemma in relation to death are arising in hospitals and clinics in industrialized nations like the United States.[2] Because medical technology is able to extend our lives and cure many of the illnesses that beset us, we have it in our power to extend our lives to the point where life can become intolerable because of the incapacities that age brings. Because there are cures or alleviations available for many of the diseases and injuries that people suffer throughout their lives, but especially in old age, people are living longer and reaching conditions of decrepitude that would have been quite unusual in former times. This, in turn, leads us to want to continue to use the resources of medicine in order to solve the resulting problems, with ever more adventurous interventions to stave off the inevitable decay of the body and to cure the maladies to which it becomes increasingly vulnerable. Not content with palliative care, many people seek a cure even when the quality and length of life that such a cure would bring would be quite minimal. Indeed, so great is our faith in medicine that when all other clinical interventions have failed we still want to turn to medicine to provide the ultimate relief: physician-assisted suicide.

While I do not want to discuss Callahan's arguments in relation to physician-assisted suicide, it is of interest to note his analysis of the social and cultural forces that have led to the emergence of these kinds of demands for total medical management of the later years of life and of death. The problem arises, says Callahan, because we are fixated upon controlling nature and on exercising choice in all aspects of our existence, including the very continuation of our lives. Our culture's stress on rights has led us to feel that we are entitled to make such demands of the medical profession and of fate itself. We see autonomy in terms of self-control, and we think we exercise it in choosing the time and nature of our deaths. In opposition to this, Callahan argues that it will often be more appropriate to be somewhat more accepting in the face of death, instead of taking it as a task of medicine to fight off death at any price. It used to be that we knew when to give up or when it was time for medicine to leave off and for nature to take over. But now it is as if nature is not to be given any role at all.

Today we exercise what Callahan calls "technological brinkmanship." We push the possibilities of cure as far as we dare even if it means negatively affecting the quality of life of the patient. The natural processes that lead to death are not given their due and their causal influence is constantly checked. All

control must be in our hands. It appears that there is no longer a clear point at which it can be definitively accepted that a person is dying: no clear point where nothing more can be done. In the past, to say of persons that they were dying implied that an inevitable natural process had begun and that the loved ones and clinical workers should allow this process to run its course with reverence and caring attendance. To say that a person was dying was to say that medical interventions would now be futile and should cease. We no longer make that admission so readily today: and not just because the point at which such a dying process begins is so hard to define. Instead, it is because there is always something more that can be done, some treatment that can be tried. And so the patient is seldom left to die in peace in the company of caring loved ones.

A curious reversal has occurred. Because we consider that some medical procedure, however severe and untested, is always still available, we cannot allow ourselves to give up. We cannot in good conscience leave the patient alone. Even if we are relatives of the patient instead of health workers, we urge that something more be attempted. We cannot let go of the person we love without feeling that everything available has been tried. Is it professional caring on the part of the clinical workers and love on the part of the relatives that lead to this insistence upon technological brinkmanship? Perhaps it is. But perhaps it is the need to escape guilt. We think that because possibly helpful technologies are available, we would be responsible for the death if we did not use them. Any decision to cease treatment on the grounds that the patient is dying and beyond help will be seen as the cause of death. We think that, because something could have been done, our not doing it makes us responsible for the death. But the cause of death is the underlying malady, not the cessation of treatment. It is the disease or the aging process itself that is responsible for the death, not the person who decides to cease treatment when treatment would be futile. Allowing the dying process to reach its conclusion without burdensome interventions should not occasion guilt.

Callahan sees the doctrine of the sanctity of life as a way of articulating society's proscription of killing human beings except in clearly defined circumstances. In this sense the doctrine is important and valid. However, he observes that it has come to imply that everything must be done to preserve life: even technological brinkmanship. As a result, the quality of life for those who are close to death has been jeopardized. The moral rule against killing has been wedded to scientific progress and become a moral demand that we do everything in our power to lengthen life. Instead, we should learn acceptance and be prepared to let go sooner so that burdensome medical interventions and such extreme cases as those that lead to thoughts of physician-assisted suicide would not arise.

When turning to the question of how such attitudinal and cultural changes might emerge, Callahan argues that we should shape ourselves into the sort of person who would not be tempted by technological brinkmanship. This means that we should adopt an attitude in life that accepts our mortality and sees death as inevitable and acceptable under certain conditions. If death comes in the fullness of our years and is not the result of accident or violence, then there is no reason to flee from it. Our attitude to death throughout our lives should be one of acceptance. We should live our lives positively, but when death comes we should not rail against it.

Nevertheless, Callahan does regard death as frequently an evil and admits that this places us in a quandary. Mortality brings with it the evils of illness and

disability while medicine gives us great power to overcome these. The health professions allow us to control and find relief from these aspects of our mortality. They also allow us to delay death and to escape it on numerous occasions. Yet they cannot overcome death itself. Death must finally overcome us. We rightly seek the help of medicine in relieving our sufferings throughout life, yet we must also have the wisdom to call it off when we approach death in its inevitability. This requires clinical judgment as to when medical interventions would be futile, but more generally, it also requires that death must be understood as something that need not be fought against unconditionally. Medicine has led us to see death as a threat that can always be countered. But it is also a terminus to life that must be accepted.

This chapter explores possible moral sources for such an acceptance and suggests some conceptual means whereby such an attitude to death might be understood. It will do so by reviewing a number of views of philosophers from antiquity to the present grouped under three headings: those who advocate an attitude of indifference, those who reject death and rail against it, and those who suggest that death should be accepted and even welcomed. Although some of the philosophers discussed wrote a great many years ago, they have had an impact upon our cultural traditions such that their ideas often still count as the common sense of the ordinary person in the street. As a result, reflecting on their ideas is a useful means of exploring the conflicting and complex attitudes to death and dying that obtain in societies such as ours. These attitudes are the moral sources of our ethical stances in relation to death and dying.

2. Indifference

The first attitude to death that I want to discuss suggests that death simply does not matter. It is the end of life, of subjectivity, and thus of all experience, and so it need not concern us. We would only trouble ourselves to think about it and the best way to live our lives is to ignore the death that will inevitably end them. The most famous argument for treating death with indifference was put forward by the Greek Stoic philosopher, Epicurus (341–270 BC). It is worth quoting at length.

> Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in not living, so that the man speaks idly who says that he fears death not because it will be painful when it comes, but because it is painful in anticipation. For that which gives no trouble when it comes, is but an empty pain in anticipation. So death, the most terrifying of all ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist death is not with us, but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living, or the dead, since the former it is not, and the latter are no more.[3]

Philosophers have debated this argument ever since it was formulated. The essential point in it is that insofar as we cannot experience anything after we die, the state of being dead need not hold any terrors for us. There is no point in

fearing death since there is no unpleasant experience involved in being dead. Of course, we may fear dying. There can be unpleasant experiences involved in the processes that lead to death, especially if that death is caused by malady, injury, or senescence. But death itself is the end of such and any experiences and so cannot rationally be an object of fear for us.

Another feature of the argument that is less frequently noted is that it urges us to adopt an attitude to death during life. Not only does it argue that it is irrational to fear death, it also argues that we should make "the mortality of life enjoyable." By seeing that death is a matter of indifference we can go on to enjoy the life that we have unclouded by fear. Instead of fearing its end or regretting its shortness, we should embrace life and take pleasure in it. So ignore death and get on with life. The issue of how we should live our lives in the face of death is as important in the philosophical literature on death as is the question of what our attitude to death itself should be.

We will return to Epicurus' argument presently.[4] But first it will be of interest to note an attitude to death that the historian Philippe Ariès describes as being predominant in European culture in the Middle Ages.[5] During this period and until the last century death was a frequent occurrence in people's lives. Children died young and frequently, the average life span of adults was much less than it is today, and there was relatively little effective medicine to deal with the many maladies and injuries that people suffered. Moreover, most people died at home. Accordingly, death was a phenomenon that people encountered frequently. Cemeteries were in the midst of towns and most families lived with the memory of a recently deceased loved one. Death was "tame," as Ariès puts it. It was present in people's lives and it was not felt as an intrusion into the scheme of things. In such a social context it would be easy for people to adopt an attitude of indifference to death or to see it as an inevitable part of life that need not hold any special terrors. The fact of the matter, however, is that these were also times of growing superstitions and fears about death. Zygmunt Bauman has argued that the tameness of death that Ariès speaks of is more a resignation in the face of an inevitable evil than the acceptance of something seen as neutral or even benign. People in earlier times felt they could do nothing about death and so accepted it with equanimity. But they feared it, and as soon as science had progressed to the point where something could be done about it, tremendous energy was expended in seeking to reduce its predations.[6] The conclusion that I draw from these historical and sociological discussions is that even if the Epicurean argument could be convincing, it would only convince a small number of people. As a general attitude, death is feared. Seeing death as a matter of indifference has never been a majority view in our cultural tradition.

As we direct our attention to modern times looking for examples of the attitude of indifference to death, one author who comes to mind is Albert Camus. In Camus's often discussed novel, *The Outsider*, the central character, Meursault, finds himself in prison facing death by execution. He has offended the standards of his society. While it was the killing of an Arab that occasioned his trial, his condemnation is based upon his refusal to pretend to feel the emotions that are deemed normative within his society: emotions such as grief for the death of his mother, love of his mistress, and remorse for the murder that he was led to commit by circumstances.

Even when a priest comes to visit him in his cell, Meursault refuses the consolations of faith and forgiveness. When the priest promises to pray for him, Meursault responds in a fury. He will not be accepted into that community of

self-deceivers who mouth comforting platitudes and faiths in order to find comfort despite their absurd existence. So far as Meursault is concerned, all that matters is that the sun should shine, that the sea be cool, and that he should enjoy moments of pleasure with his mistress and his friends. Whether his friends are moral or not, whether he loves anyone or not, whether he is ambitious or not, whether there is a God who ensures that justice will be realized, are all seen as so many fictions and deceptions. Everything simply is what it is, without hierarchy or value. No comfort should be drawn from abstractions, lies, or metaphysical doctrines. Death is like a dark wind that blows down from our futures and levels all values. A simple life in tune with the natural rhythms and pleasures that life can offer is all that matters, and by that standard Meursault considers himself to have lived well and happily. His impending death can be accepted as an inescapable part of that natural pattern: not to be railed against and not to be hidden from. He must die at some stage, so why is now any worse than later? Death is simply a matter of indifference. Meursault can feel himself happy because he refuses the false comforts of a transcendental or supernatural faith and relishes just those pleasures that personal life can bring.[7] This is the deeper import of Epicurus' argument that I have already noted. It is not just that fearing death is irrational; it is also that fearing death is inconsistent with enjoying life as it is. And a further feature of both Meursault's position and that of Epicurus is that we should not flee from the fear of death by adopting comforting metaphysical beliefs such as a belief in life after death.

3. Rejection

It is arguable that the rejection of death is the default position on death. That is to say, for most people today, the idea of death is the idea of something strange, foreign, unknown, undignified, threatening, evil, and external to life. It is something that we do not like to think about and that we regard with fear and loathing. One of the most frequently seen cultural responses to this fear is religion. It has been argued that it was humanity's growing awareness of death that gave rise to religious beliefs and practices at the very beginnings of human existence.[8] The first hominid creatures who buried their dead were aware of an uncanny presence around corpses and did not just leave them out as carrion for wild animals to consume. They felt a need to deal with the corpses of their fellows with reverence and awe and, although we cannot know what the exact nature of their thoughts were, it appears clear that such occasions took them into a realm of thinking that was beyond the everyday and that marked the beginnings of a spirituality that is still a deep current in many cultures. It has since become one of the central functions of religious belief, no matter what the religious tradition of which it is an expression, to offer an account of death that would make it meaningful as a part of life and to promise an overcoming of death that would provide consolation for the stresses and pains of life.

I do not propose to review these religious responses to death here,[9] but it is interesting to consider whether they are not all in their own ways a denial of death. The structure of the typical religious comprehension of death is that death is seen as a gateway to another and more perfect form of existence. Most religions are Platonic in form. That is to say, like Plato, they posit two orders of reality. First, there is this familiar world that is a "vale of tears" marked by personal suffering and hardship and, understood at a more metaphysical level, the

realm of change and impermanence. On this earth, things fall apart and deteriorate and organisms die. Nothing stays the same and nothing is quite as it should be. Plants, animals, and persons are mortal. They are natural products that are subject to all the laws of nature, including the second law of thermodynamics. They will die and return to dust, or to states of greater probability. The contrasting realm in the Platonic world-view is that of permanence, changelessness, and perfection. In this realm, everything is as it should be. In this realm reside Goodness, Truth, and Beauty in their idealized forms. Everything is perfect, immutable, and, if living, immortal. The gods reside here, as do the souls of those who have been good and wise during their worldly lives. In the context of such Platonic systems of thought, death is rejected and denied through not being seen as final. It is seen, instead, as a transition from imperfect worldly existence to a perfect heavenly one.

This is a deeply ambivalent position. While this is a denial of the reality of death (and this is why I discuss it under the heading of views that reject death), it is also a form of acceptance of death. To those who see themselves as good it provides the consolation that comes from the promise of eternal life: a consolation that permits them to accept the inevitable transition to that life.

This ambivalence is well illustrated by one of the most famous and enduring discussions of death in the philosophical literature of the Western tradition: namely, Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo*.[10] Like the final scenes in Camus's *The Outsider*, this dialogue takes place in a prison. Socrates is awaiting his death after his condemnation by the court on the charge of corrupting the youth of Athens with heterodox ideas. (Indeed, it may be supposed that Camus created a situation for Meursault's reflections that was a direct echo of the scene that Plato drew, so as to highlight the depth of the rejection of Plato's vision that Meursault represents.) Socrates is surrounded by a small group of friends who are grieving at his imminent execution. But he reassures them with a number of intellectual arguments designed to show that the soul is immortal. For the ancient Greeks, the concept of the soul referred to the principle of life that every living body contained. It was the basis of those vital functions that mark off a living thing from a dead or inert one. Being a principle of life, it was inconceivable for Socrates that such a principle could die. It was, as it were, a force that repudiated death. With this and other arguments, Socrates assures his friends that he is about to undergo a transition into a kind of living in which he will commune with the deepest thinkers of the past and with the gods, and in which he will enjoy great blessedness. When his friends fail to be entirely convinced, Socrates does add that whether or not this story is true, it is a fine source of comfort and should be believed at least on that account. As he puts it toward the end of the dialogue:

> Of course, no reasonable man ought to insist that the facts are exactly as I have described them . . . We should use such accounts to inspire ourselves with confidence; and that is why I have already drawn out my tale so long.[11]

Subsequent scholars have concerned themselves rather more with the cogency of Socrates' arguments for the immortality of the soul than with this significant qualification. In my view, this qualification indicates that Socrates or Plato was capable of more Nietzschean irony than is usually admitted. Perhaps we should apply Socrates' suggestion that his is a belief that we may adopt to comfort us but that we cannot demonstrate to be true to other Platonic and religious beliefs about death as a transition to a higher form of life.

The story of Socrates has had an immense impact on subsequent Western thought. It rejects the reality of death and finds comfort in conceiving death as a transition from this life into another form of non-natural existence. Through the fathers of the early Christian church and especially through St Augustine, this idea has structured the eschatology of Christianity. That many other world religions tell similar stories only shows, I think, how deep a resonance it strikes in the human heart. We all want to be immortal and are prepared to believe any story that will promise us that blessed state despite the overwhelming evidence of our senses and of logic that death is indeed the end of our existence as subjective and intentional beings. Given this desire, we create intellectual and supernatural beliefs that will give us a theoretical basis for the faith that we crave. We can only hold Platonic views of death by entering the realm of metaphysical speculation.

Many contemporary thinkers refuse to engage upon such speculation, and reflect upon death in naturalistic terms instead. But the question does not change. The fundamental question is whether death is an evil that should be rejected from our conception of life. As I noted above, Daniel Callahan argues that death is a generic evil.[12] One reason for this is the grief that it causes in others. The loss to loved ones and to the community is an evil, in that it typically causes grief and hardship. Perhaps the technological imperative to defeat death that Callahan has identified is motivated by love of others whom we do not want to have die as much as by fear of our own deaths. But this dodges the question we have been exploring. The loss to me of another person whom I love is of a different order from the meaning of my own death to me. Questions about whether death is an evil need to distinguish between the impact that the death has on others and the impact that the anticipated death has on the person who will die. Although discourses about bereavement and how to cope with the loss of loved ones are important, most often in philosophy the question is discussed from the second perspective.

Callahan says that death is especially an evil when its timing and circumstances are wrong. This view implies that there is a natural trajectory to a life and when this is foreshortened we have what Callahan calls a "biological evil." Moreover, there is a natural process of dying, and when this is lengthened by pain, suffering, or futile medical intervention we have, again, a biological evil. The notion of a biological evil depends on a teleological conception of nature. There is a natural life span and a natural process of dying, and anything that disturbs or frustrates these, whether it be premature death or an elongated process of dying, is an evil. Callahan goes on to add that death is a "moral" evil when the circumstances that make it a biological evil are brought about culpably. Murder would be the clearest example of this, though deaths that result from negligence would also be included. And, of course, futile medical interventions into the dying process would also count as moral evils on this view. What is clear from these suggestions is that the death that Callahan regards as evil is premature death or protracted dying. As part of his argument for not fighting against death at all costs, he suggests that a death that occurs peacefully after a full and fruitful life is not an evil. Provided these conditions were met, we could put Callahan into that group of thinkers who accept death. It is not death itself that is to be rejected but those circumstances that render it a biological or moral evil.

However, there are many thinkers who argue that death is an evil no matter what the circumstances. Some religious thinkers[13] argue that death is always an evil or an indignity because it is the result of sin. Following the biblical story,

they would suggest that death was brought into the world as a punishment from God. Before man's sinfulness emerged, human beings had been immortal. While I do not want to explore such myths as to whether they could be true, it will be interesting to reflect on whether the idealized picture of human beings as immortal that they encapsulate actually represents a desirable condition for human beings to be in. I will return to that question presently. A further aspect of this religious position is that, in accepting death, Jesus has taken on the most extreme indignity that it is the lot of humanity to bear. Not only did he suffer the indignity of criminal prosecution and torture, but also that of public execution. The salvation of humanity required that the Son of God undergo the most extreme humiliation that is humanly possible. The epitome of such humiliation is death. Even for a humanity that has been saved from its sinfulness, death is still seen as an evil.

In answer to the suggestion that death is always an evil and an indignity, Leon Kass offers several arguments for saying that death can have dignity in itself.[14] First, he suggests that great persons who have achieved much in life can die with dignity because of what they have achieved. This is a variation of the argument that says that a full and rich life lived into the twilight years can be ended without a feeling of loss, evil, or indignity. It might be replied, however, that whether we have lived a life of achievement or gone through life in a humbler mode with but little to show for it, it might always be desirable for life to be longer. Even the person who has achieved much could well wish for more vigorous years so that they could achieve more. And the humble person might wish for more years so that they could achieve something of note. Why should the average life span be what it is? Why not an extra ten years or an extra twenty? Why not a hundred more, provided the body could remain vigorous? A death after a well-lived life may have dignity, but we might still think that it had come too soon.

Another argument that Kass offers for the view that death can have dignity is that martyrdom or heroism gives dignity to those who die. Persons who give up their lives for others or who die in the course of heroic deeds or on behalf of some noble cause would appear to be dying with dignity. Such deaths are not obviously an evil or a humiliation. Again, however, I might answer that it had been better if it had not been necessary to give up my life to save the other or to promote that cause. If such goods could be attained by less terminal means, it would have been better if they had been so attained. Giving up my life for them is a high price and one that is not preferable to a less costly strategy. Death could still be regarded as an evil in such scenarios even as we accord dignity to those who give up their lives in them. Even if such a reason for death grants dignity to the death, it does not necessarily negate the idea that death is usually an evil.

Kass's third argument suggests that an immortal life could not be lived with passion. This is his repudiation of the idea that immortality would be a good in itself. If we knew that we were immortal, we would not have any sense of urgency in doing what we do. We could always put off to tomorrow what we did not feel like doing today since there would be an infinity of tomorrows. Mortality is a spur to excellence. There are some quite profound points inherent in this argument and I want to return to them later. But for the moment I will challenge the argument by saying that it assumes that most things are not inherently worth doing. It envisages that people would want to put off to tomorrow what they could do today. However, it appears to me quite possible for a person to enjoy doing what he or she is doing because of its inherent pleasures and to want to do

such things forever. I play the guitar and have been trying to achieve excellence in it for thirty years. But I do not do it because of what I might achieve tomorrow or the next day. I do it because I enjoy it today. And I would be quite happy (all other things being equal) to enjoy doing it for an infinity of todays. Indeed, when I then inevitably become quite good at it, I may return to the trumpet, which I gave up after three relatively fruitless years of practice, and master that too. In an endless lifetime even a person of modest talent like me can become a virtuoso. The key point is that I enjoy playing music on a day-to-day basis. Provided that condition is met, I could be enthusiastic for an infinite lifetime. Why should I ever get bored with all the challenges that life offers? Think of the books I could read, the papers I could write, the places I could visit, and the people I could get to know. In the face of all these possibilities death is not a relief from boredom, but a threat to possibilities. Of course, the activities I have mentioned are all leisure activities available to those who have means at their disposal. An infinite lifetime of work in a Peruvian tin mine does not appear so attractive. If the normal activities of people are not inherently enjoyable, then immortality might indeed be a curse.

Finally, Kass argues that death is necessary for the renewal of life, both biologically and culturally. Biologically, death is necessary in order to provide fuel for younger life. This is not only true because animals and plants feed off each other, but also because, in a world of finite resources, older creatures have to make way for the younger so that those resources are not depleted. Of course, creation might have been so arranged that there would be no new births after an optimum population was reached, but in that case we would be talking about a form a life quite different from our own. Such a world would contain little change and innovation. From a personal perspective it would be hard to imagine a world of immortal adults and no children. Such a world would inevitably stagnate. This is most obvious at the cultural level since, once the adults had become set in their ways, they would continue in those ways forever. It might then indeed be true that an immortal world would become intolerably boring.

Returning to the biological level, a biologically stagnant world would have to be genetically different from our own since it is the genetic variations that come from sexual reproduction that provide the raw material for adaptation to the changing environment. An immortal world would either degenerate to an unacceptable degree or it would have to be totally stagnant. Either scenario is too unpleasant to contemplate. Death is indeed a necessary part of the natural life cycle.

Against these points, however, it might be said that this does not provide the individual with any comfort. The question is not, "Is death an evil in the general scheme of things?" We may well agree at an intellectual level with the proposition that death is biologically necessary. But the question is, "Is my death an evil to me?" I did not, after all, choose to be born, so I ought not now to be asked to accept death as contributing to evolutionary and cultural goods. My death could be an evil to me even if I could see that it is a necessary part of the way the world works. I am not driven by the argument to take comfort from this objective view of how nature and culture need me to die. Call me selfish, but I still do not want to die.

One of the clearest statements of why death is an evil in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy is that of Thomas Nagel.[15] Nagel is responding to the Epicurean argument that there is no point in regretting the life that you no longer have once you have died because, insofar as you have died, you cannot

regret not having a life any more. It is not rational to fear death because what happens after death cannot be a harm to you. You no longer exist to experience it as a harm. Against this, Nagel argues that, while it is true that, when you die, you no longer exist to suffer the harm or feel the regret that would be occasioned by your life having come to an end, it can still make sense to say that you are harmed by death. It robs you of a life that you would have had had you not died. It is like a harm that you suffer that you do not know about and cannot experience. Suppose that others tell denigrating lies about you without your knowing. Even though you do not experience the harm, the harm is still real. So similarly, when you are dead you cannot experience the harm of not being alive, but it is nevertheless a real harm.

Nagel's basic argument is elegant and simple. The first premise is that life is a good. While it may be true that individual persons in dire circumstances might think that their lives are not a good, the premise claims that for most people typically, life is a good. A person suffering an intense and painful illness may not think so, but it can be assumed that he would if he were not ill. The next premise is that death robs a person of the life that that person would have had if she had not died. This strikes me as obviously true. It follows that death robs people of a good and that therefore it is an evil.

There have been a number of replies to Nagel's argument. The first questions whether it can be so readily assumed that life is a good. There are pessimists in the tradition of Schopenhauer who would deny this and would say with some of the Stoics that to die early is a good and not to have been born at all is even better. I am not sure whether we can decide such an issue rationally. Apart from cases where people who are suffering intensely might seek a relief through death, it appears to me obvious that life is a good. But I am not sure what I could say to someone for whom that is not obvious. I, for one, am prepared to accept Nagel's premise without further discussion.

A second objection suggests that not to have life is not an evil. The reason offered for this proposition is that before we were born we did not have life and that was not an evil. We do not regret the time we did not have before we were born. We might sometimes playfully say that we wished we had been born at an earlier time, but there is something illogical about wishing to have a longer life by having been born earlier. The logical reason for the claim that being born earlier than you were would not be a good for you is that, if you were born earlier than you were, you would not be you. You would be someone else. Therefore it is as nothing to the person you are that "you" might have been born earlier than you were. Having more life by being born earlier is not a good for *you*. Therefore having more life than you actually have is not a good for you. It is then concluded that having more life by dying later is not a good for you either. This argument sounds a little tricky, but it can be made clear. It interprets Nagel as saying that the longer we live; the better it is for us. But this is not always true, since being born earlier (which would mean that we lived longer given that we die when we die) is not better for us. So Nagel's first premise is wrong.

We can defend Nagel's position by arguing that "time-before-birth" is not symmetrical with "time-after-death." It is true that they are both periods during which I am not alive. But the life I would have had had I been born earlier is not a life that I can now anticipate and plan for, or even enjoy in memory. My past is not something that I can look forward to, want to have take place, or relive in any way. The life I would have had if I had not died when I did is, however, a life that I can (and probably did) anticipate, plan for, and look forward to. My future is

something that I can anticipate enjoying. Insofar as death has robbed me of that enjoyment, it is a harm to me. Moreover, insofar as I die when I die, I could always have died later, even if only a little later. And so it always robs me of some duration of life that I could have had. As I mentioned earlier, even if I die after a long and fruitful life of happiness and achievement, I could always hope to live a little longer and so be frustrated of that hope when death occurs. It is obvious that young persons who are killed in senseless accidents or through avoidable disease suffer a harm because the life that they could have had has been denied them. But Nagel's point applies to everyone. Every death robs its victim of ongoing life, however brief it might yet be, and so is an evil.

Let us turn, now, to an exploration of what the fear of death as an evil might mean. As a sociological and psychological generalization it has been argued by Ernest Becker that the rejection and denial of death is a distinctive characteristic of modern Western society.[16] Using a broadly psychoanalytic framework to argue that the fear of death is a repressed undercurrent in our conscious lives, Becker begins by arguing that acts of heroism, achievement, and self-affirmation are expressions or sublimations of this fear. The effort that people put into their lives, whether it be their careers, their families, or any of their major commitments, is nothing more than a means whereby those people can hide from themselves the awful truth: namely, that it will all come to nothing on the day of their deaths. There is a constant shadow hanging over our lives cast by the inevitability of our deaths but we busy ourselves with our worldly projects in order to avoid becoming aware of this. In order to give this thesis the depth in psychological theory that it requires, Becker explores the psychodynamics of the young child and reinterprets the Oedipus complex and other structures of childhood experience in terms of the fear of annihilation and of the chaos of an unstructured world. He argues that a child has an inchoate memory of the darkness of non-existence. Urged by this barely conscious memory it seeks to gain control over its own life and to be the cause of its own being. The character that it comes to develop is a veneer that serves to hide from it the abyss that it had glimpsed in early childhood and that still haunts its unconscious as an adult.

Becker differs from Freud in that he rejects the notion of instincts. It is not sexual instinct that elicits the repression out of which character is built. It is the glimpse of reality as chaos and death and of the enigma that is humanity: namely that his mind soars with the angels while his body defecates. Moreover, Becker rejects the view that childhood is a time of innocent pleasure and creativity and that it is parental and social pressure to conformity and rule following that represses this innocence. It is not so much parental repression (though parents do contribute in a symbolic way) that creates character, it is the internal need of the child itself to create order out of the chaos that it feels itself so close to. The child needs to structure a character so as to guard against the death and chaos that is felt to threaten it. As Becker puts it:

> Anxiety is the result of the perception of the truth of one's condition. What does it mean to be a *self-conscious animal*? The idea is ludicrous, if it is not monstrous. It means to know that one is food for worms. This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self expression—and with all this yet to die.[17]

What is striking about this thesis is the way in which it echoes Levinas's notion of the *there is* that I described in chapter five. For Levinas, too, personal existence is framed by a shadow of darkness. This is not so much the anticipation of death and the fear of a future non-existence, as the inchoate and unconscious trace of past non-existence. I am haunted not just by a fear of future annihilation but also by an unconscious trace of past non-being. It is because of this trace that I am anxiously driven to self-affirmation and being. The way in which Levinas's phenomenological thesis differs from Becker's psychoanalytic thesis is that he draws ethical implications from it differently from the way in which Becker does. Insofar as life is a gift conveyed by others—a gift that has plucked us out of the chaos of non-being—we bear an ethical responsibility to others. It is in exercising this responsibility that we achieve goodness. In Becker, by contrast, the project of self-affirmation that the flight from non-being inspires leads to an attachment to powerful others who will support me in my project of being the cause of my own destiny. But this is a contradictory position. I want to be my own cause, and yet I want to depend upon powerful others. My asserting myself will therefore be felt as a presumption, and this gives rise to guilt. So I attach myself to a god-like other in order to seek acceptance and forgiveness. On the one hand there is self-assertiveness, and yet on the other there is self-abnegation in favor of the other with whom I identify. Becker suggests that this is the origin of morality. The other on whom I depend can be a god or it can take the symbolic form of morality. The abnegation will be the source of my moral goodness, while my hubris will be the basis of guilt. It is this contradictoriness, as well as the inevitability of death, that renders the whole psychoanalytic project of self-affirmation an empty, existential heroics.

> The *causa-sui* project is a pretence that one is invulnerable because protected by the power of others and of culture, that one is important in nature and can do something about the world. But in back of the *causa-sui* project whispers the voice of a possible truth: that personal life may not be more than a meaningless interlude in a vicious drama of flesh and bones that we call evolution; that the Creator may not care any more for the destiny of man or the self-perpetuation of individual men than He seems to have cared for the dinosaurs or the Tasmanians. The whisper is the same one that slips incongruously out of the Bible in the voice of Ecclesiastes: that all is vanity, vanity of vanities.[18]

It would appear that the rejection of death as an evil can often imply a rejection of life as meaningless. Death may be an evil not only because it is the end of my life, but also because it negates the value of that life. Life is worth living, but it terminates in death. Moreover, death is always premature because it always robs me of life that I might have had. Therefore death negates the value of my life projects and my life narrative. It always comes before those projects and that narrative can be fulfilled. Therefore death infects my whole life with meaninglessness. So life is not worth living. This is a contradiction that makes life absurd. Insofar as any of our projects and values can be cut short and negated by death at any time, the meaningfulness of our lives is at risk from the very thought of death. It would be important, therefore, to banish every thought of death lest it undermines our zest for life. Perhaps it is best to not only banish the thought of death, but to commit ourselves fully and unreflectively to life so as to make the most of it. This was Meursault's policy.

There is one phenomenological feature of death that makes this policy possible or even necessitates it. This is that death literally cannot be thought. We cannot imagine what it is like to be dead. For us, death is the end of subjectivity and thus the end of experience. It has no phenomenological content whatsoever. We can, perhaps, consider what it might be like. It might be like being deeply asleep, for example. Deep and dreamless sleep is certainly a state of non-consciousness. But, as we noted in the previous chapter, sleep is a restful state of which the joy consists in the refreshment with which we wake up. There is no such joy in endless sleep. We can also read stories of people who were quite close to death or in a coma and who survived.[19] Such stories often include images of the person moving through dark tunnels or reviewing their whole life. About this I would comment that the experience is not of death but of dying. Even if the exact moment of death cannot be identified, it is clear from the fact that they survived that these people did not reach it. So their reports are not reports of death, but of the states preliminary to it. Death itself is beyond experience.

So the only way to think of death is to think of our lives coming to an end. We think of an absence of experience. We think of joys, adventures, undertakings, and hardships, and of their coming to an end. If desire and conation were the drivers of life, then death is their cessation. We cannot but think of these things negatively. There is nothing positive in such a conception. But it is not a conception of what death is. It is a conception of what life is not when it ceases. This cessation or negation can be regretted in anticipation, but the state into which we will pass is one of non-existence and non-subjectivity. This state cannot be thought.

Jean-Paul Sartre drew from this Epicurean point the implication that death was wholly "other." It was the ultimate negation of life. It was external to life. Having drawn a distinction between that mode of being that enjoyed subjectivity and strove for its own existence—being-for-itself—and that mode of being that is fully formed by its social environment, defined by its own essence, thing-like and "factitious"—being-in-itself—Sartre came to see death as belonging to the second. It was a sheer fact. A sheer thingness. An objectivity that could only be apprehended as the insurmountable enemy of self-affirming subjectivity. If the laws of nature and other objectivities in our environing world were things or "facticities" that posed themselves as realities that will not yield to our self-constituting and possessive gaze, then death is the most intractable of these facticities. If we are to enjoy radical freedom and allow ourselves to gaze upon the world as upon an infinite field of possibilities, then death has to be banished from that gaze. "Since death is always beyond my subjectivity, there is no place for it in my subjectivity."[20] Accordingly, death must not only be rejected, but all thought of it can only infect life with a threat of negation. We should ignore death, get on, and live.

Levinas's position is similar but more complex. For him death is something in the face of which we can only be passive. At the end of the day there is nothing we can do when death comes. Whatever heroic methods we use to stave it off, it will triumph in the end. When death comes the subject "finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and in some way passive."[21] An important point for Levinas is that our being active beings means that we are oriented toward our futures. We are constantly planning and seeking to achieve outcomes that lie ahead of us in time. Our future is, for us, a dynamic and attractive ideality that draws us toward it. Our subjectivity is marked by a feeling of mastery in relation to that future. The future is a field of possibilities and challenges for us, and it is

this that gives the narrative of our lives its direction and impetus. But death, which lies inevitably in our future, cannot be grasped as a possibility in this way. "What is important about the approach of death is that at a certain moment we are no longer *able to be able*. It is exactly thus that the subject loses its very mastery as a subject."[22] And this loss of mastery is anticipated now by a subjectivity for whom mastery of future possibilities is precisely one of the features that marks it off as a subject. So subjectivity is itself infected throughout its life by a contradiction to itself. The passivity of our death-future negates the active, motivational self-constituting power of our life-future. Death is "absolutely other" because it cannot be assimilated into my way of being, which is that of an active and self-determining relationship with my future. Levinas goes on to draw ethical implications from this by arguing that this confrontation with the negation that is death leads us to ethical solidarity with other persons, but I do not here want to explore that further thought. The point I want to highlight is that Levinas gives us yet another formulation for the thought that death is something strange, foreign, unknown, undignified, external to life, evil, and threatening.

4. Acceptance

There are many thinkers, both religious and secular, who argue that death must be accepted, not only as an inevitable end of life, but also as a horizon to life that would make that life meaningful. It is not just that the inevitability of death makes any obstinate attitude of non-acceptance irrational; it is also that we should meditate upon our own deaths so as to give a dimension of depth and meaning to our lives.

But before surveying a number of explorations of this idea, I want to return briefly to Callahan's argument. He had identified circumstances in which death is a biological or moral evil: namely when it was premature, prolonged, or caused by the evil acts of others. So when is death not a biological or moral evil? Under what conditions would death be acceptable to Callahan? We had noted that, for him, a death that occurs after a long and fruitful life would be acceptable. If you had lived well and long, achieved what you had hoped for, fulfilled your aspirations, and contributed to and enjoyed loving relationships, then death can be welcomed as a suitable closure to a good life. But if the acceptability of death depends in this way on the happiness that has been achieved in life, it follows that we cannot consider what our attitude to death should be until we are clear on what makes a life good and happy. We cannot judge a death to be acceptable if we cannot judge the quality of the life of which it is the end. Because there are many theories as to what makes a life good and happy, we would need to embark on the almost impossible task of specifying in general terms what a satisfactory and meaningful life structure would be for everyone in enough detail to allow us to say that a death at the end of such a life would not be a biological or moral evil.

In a reply to Callahan, Stanley Hauerwas[23] argues that Callahan requires a community discourse that would identify the values in the light of which the individualist pursuit of control and cure could be replaced by a new attitude of acceptance. We could only agree on when death might be acceptable if, as a society, we could agree on what was a good life. Individuals will continue to seek technological brinkmanship to stave off their deaths so long as they lack the community consensus on when life is good, and therefore when death is

acceptable, that would allow them to let go. But where are this discourse and this consensus to come from? We live in a liberal society in which public policy discourse and other cultural debates are premised on pluralism in religious beliefs, political ideologies, and conceptions of the good life. Public policy may never assume a social consensus on basic values. In a liberal and pluralist culture such as ours there will not be agreement on what constitutes a good life, and thus no agreement either on when death, as the end of such a good life, would be acceptable. The acceptance of death that Callahan is urging would not just be an individual and personal attitude. It would have to be a shared community outlook in which individuals can find their own stance and that can be translated into public policy and into agreed practices in hospitals and clinics. Accordingly, it would have to be based upon a widely shared community consensus. Similarly, changes in policies around end-of-life decisions must be grounded in public debate and a shared vision of the good life. So, Hauerwas argues, what we need is a communal sense of a "natural life span." We need a community consensus on what is a good, natural, and fulfilled life. But, we might ask, when are a "life's possibilities accomplished?"[24] When, for example, can we be satisfied that there is nothing left for us to do, or when is the wisdom of an old person no longer needed? Our individualist culture makes these decisions hard to make. Liberalism teaches us that we have the right to do what we want within natural and social limits. It is never required of us that we make way for the next generation. The modern Western notion of living a good and fulfilled life does not come with the further notion of a fitting end for such a life.

For his part, Hauerwas would want to return to MacIntyre's notion of the narrative conception of having a life that I discussed in chapter six. On this conception, a satisfactory life is one that has a meaningful narrative structure such that that structure includes a fitting end. Can there be a narrative conception of life, such that death can be seen as that fitting end? As MacIntyre had argued, a narrative conception points to community practices and expectations into which an individual can fit her life and to which she can contribute, or not, depending on the stage of life she has reached. Illness and death must be seen as part of such a larger pattern if we are not to take it as something we must reject. As Hauerwas puts it:

> The appeal to narrative at least has the advantage of reminding us that our lives and our deaths are not occasional bits of unconnected behavior but part of a larger pattern; recognizing this gives purpose to our lives. When such a pattern is thought to be missing, death and illness cannot help but seem pointless and meaningless. As a result, illness and death can be seen only as something to deny.[25]

Although there would be many ways of filling out this conception of a narrative structure to life, any attempt to do so in concrete terms would fall foul of the liberal requirement that conceptions of the good life are a matter for individual or local community decision. Not everyone needs to accept that a career with an upward trajectory, a family, and a home in the suburbs is definitive of the good life, just as not everyone needs to accept that a life lived in a monastery dedicated to the greater glory of God is a perfect form of life. The only point that can be made in general terms is that MacIntyre's conception of a narrative structure to a life is based upon Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*, often translated as "happiness" or "fulfillment." Like Ricoeur, we could use an

Aristotelian framework by positing what the *telos* or goal of personal life is and then saying that we are ready to die when that goal has been reached: that is, when we are *eudaimon* or happy. When all four of the aspects of our being identified by Aristotle are fulfilled, we will have achieved the fullness of our being and of our time. We should then be ready to leave. We reach a stage of our lives where we can take care of unfinished business, say goodbye, and prepare ourselves to die. The person who rails against death is a person who is not yet fulfilled or happy. Being ready for death is a virtue that arises from our seeing our lives as having attained their goals.

But all of this still depends upon our being able to say what the goal or *telos* of human life is. It requires an account of human excellence to ground the account of a fitting end. There is no consensus on this in a modern pluralist society. Second, this approach suggests that the problem of death is a problem that mature and virtuous persons need only confront as they are nearing the ends of their lives. It assumes that the narrative trajectory of a life and the biological reality of it will correspond. But malady or injury may strike at any time and death may come upon us in an untimely and unexpected way. What of the young cancer-ridden dying mother with three children less than ten years old? What of the middle-aged man who has just been promoted to a sought-after position when he is fatally struck by a car? There is no narrative closure in their lives. It is not available to them to leave the settling of accounts and concluding of business to a later stage in the twilight of their years.

It seems then that, apart from its contingency, the main problem with the narrative conception of life, with its corollary of a fitting and appropriate death, is that there is no social consensus on what a satisfactory life would be and hence on what conditions would make for a fitting death. It would appear that the modern individual (as opposed to those persons who derive their identities and life values from membership of their communities) is bereft of cultural guidance in facing death. Second, it leaves the question of when death is appropriate to be settled at the end of a life's trajectory, although death can come at any time. For many people death is not presented as a fitting or non-fitting end of a life, but as an intrusion and interruption to the story of that life. Further, as I argued earlier, even after a full and happy life—indeed especially after a full and happy life—it would be quite reasonable to want to live longer. Moreover, there is a fundamentally odd perspective involved in the conception of death as an end to life's narrative.[26] For whom is such a conception satisfactory or even possible? Certainly not for the deceased, since he or she is dead. The deceased has lived a full and happy life and it is now over. What is the value of this fitting conclusion to them? Nothing. It is only appropriate and reasonable for others to make this judgment of fittingness. It is friends and family who may walk away from the funeral and say that this death was a fitting end to a full life. The narrative form with its appropriate end is imputed by others instead of by the deceased. Before his death, the dying person may indeed judge that his life has been a happy one, but there is no direct implication from this judgment *for him* to the further view that death is now acceptable. While it does happen that dying persons find it easier to accept their deaths because their lives have been happy, there is no logical necessity for drawing this conclusion, and the structure inherent in the narrative conception of a life does not make it necessary either.

The desire to stave off death is a direct expression of the will-to-live that Schweitzer had imputed to all living things and of the will-to-power that Nietzsche had identified as a basic motivational structure in all living things. As

we saw in chapter five, life is appropriation and self-affirmation. Death, on the other hand is the very negation of such a vital impetus. So why should it be accepted? It cannot be avoided, but why not live as if it can? Let death come when it may, but live life without concern for it. Against such a policy of rejection there can be at least two answers. First, many thinkers of the past have urged that death should be accepted not only at the end of life, or as a possible intrusion at any time, but also that it should be embraced and meditated upon as a constant presence in our lives. I will return to those views presently. Second, it can be denied that death is nothing more than a negation of the zest for life. This is the view that suggests that subjectivity actually desires death or, at least, that it would be rational for it to do so.

The view that death is desirable goes back at least as far as Socrates. His argument that the soul is immortal was calculated not only to provide consolation to his friends and encouragement for himself, but also to show that death could be a desirable condition. Of course this could be immediately answered with the Epicurean point that death is not a condition that we can be in and that, therefore, it cannot be desirable. But the further aspects of Platonism make the proposition more plausible. A key factor in Platonism is that worldly existence is unsatisfactory. This worldly realm is marked by change, mutability, corruption, suffering, injustice, and mortality. It follows that even if death were the end of all personal existence and experience, it could be attractive as the sheer end of worldly sufferings. If worldly existence were a vale of tears and an endless pursuit of troublesome needs, then escape from such a condition could be acceptable or even desirable. Leaving aside Socrates' belief in an attractive afterlife, his argument also suggests that death could be attractive just for being an escape from the imperfections of earthly life.

It was this thought that inspired many of the Stoic philosophers and Schopenhauer, amongst others.[27] For them life was nothing more than a constant pursuit of fulfillment of desires. Our very consciousness takes the form of desire and our lives are nothing more than the pursuit of what we desire. But desire is not an expression of the fullness of life (as it was for Aristotle). It is the expression of our lack and inadequacy. We desire things in order to fill the void of our own being. As a result, when we attain our goals we simply desire more and different things. Whether it be things we need or mere luxuries, we are constantly driven and taken out of ourselves by desires that can never be laid to rest no matter what satisfactions are available to us. Moreover, desire pulls us toward the things of this world instead of allowing our souls to rise to the eternal goods that our spiritual existence craves. And the things of this world are unworthy of us. The only escape from this constant striving and disappointment is death. So death is to be welcomed as the cessation of the struggle that life inevitably constitutes for us. Oblivion is the only escape. In many Eastern religions, the pursuit of *nirvana* or some such state of bliss is the pursuit of the end of desire in this way, albeit that it can be attained in life. Suffering is the inevitable consequence of desire, and the only complete escape from it is literal death or the death of our striving in a state of mystical, desireless peace.

Sigmund Freud suggested that this desire for death is an instinct that we all have: the death instinct. Whereas he had begun by thinking that the pleasure principle faced only external repression from civilization in general and from the power of parents in particular, he came to see that there was an internal and instinctive drive within each individual that countered *eros* or the instinct for pleasure and life. This drive was that of *thanatos* or the death instinct. As Freud

puts it, "The aim of all life is death."[28] Desire is accompanied by a desire for the end of desire, for peace and equilibrium. Along with the striving for enhancement and excitation that marks life, there is a longing for quietude and release. This longing is repressed on behalf of the needs of culture and civilization so that we contribute to society and fulfil our lives. But, at base, these achievements and life-enhancements are but a detour in our movement toward the death that we unconsciously crave. This adds a darker dimension to Schopenhauer's view. Not only is desire unsatisfiable because it represents a lack in our very being, but also because our deepest desire is for death and this desire is forbidden us by the cultures in which we live. Suicide and death are everywhere condemned as evils. The very vehemence with which cultures condemn suicide demonstrates how beguiling a temptation it is. The only instinctive power strong enough to counter *thanatos* is *eros*, the sexual instinct, and personal life becomes a constant balancing of these two fundamental drives. As with all of Freud's theses, it is difficult to know how we could establish this one as true. But its importance may not lie in its empirical truth. It may lie in its being an expression of implicit feelings that we can all be aware of if we reflect honestly on our own experience. The key idea is that death can be thought of as attractive, not just as a relief from the intense burdens of disease, injury, or decrepitude, but at any time when the everyday stresses and even joys of being alive are reflected upon.

The best way to overcome these ways of thinking is to overcome the Platonic and religious world-view. We must celebrate this life in a world of change and uncertainty instead of denigrating it as Plato did. The philosopher who most clearly and vehemently sought to reverse this order of values was Nietzsche. He celebrated life not only in theoretical terms but even from the position of his own sickness, loneliness, and despair. It was this earthly existence, the travails of which he knew better than most, that was the basis of all value. Instead of a supernatural realm of perfection to which we might seek to escape and from which the values of this life derive, Nietzsche advocated acceptance of the idea that this earthly existence might repeat itself indefinitely, and our lives along with it. This "eternal recurrence" was the ultimate test of the virtuous person's ability to say "yes" to life. If we could accept the possibility that this entire worldly existence could repeat itself over and over, then we could indeed affirm the worth of physical and material life. And we would seek no escape. A philosophy that celebrates action and striving in the world over contemplation and peace cannot but accept mutability, uncertainty, and change. If death is an unwelcome but inevitable accompaniment of such a mutable condition, so be it. Death must be accepted as a part of life.

This leads us to the second answer to the tendency toward the rejection of death that our zest for life might lead us toward. This is to embrace death as part of life or as a horizon of life. We have seen that seeking an acceptable conclusion to a happy life is not something we can put off to our twilight years. We need to be ready for death at any time in our lives. So instead of ignoring it or living as if it were not a real threat to all our projects, we should find a place for it in our everyday thinking. The irony is that it is already present in our everyday lives as a kind of accompaniment in the shadows. Whatever we may be engaged in and whatever we might be focusing on in our everyday lives, there is always a dark presence beyond the reality in which we have our being. There is always a horizon to our world. Behind the appearances with which we are dealing as our present reality, there is, as it were, an encompassing darkness. Beyond the time of

our existence and the future we can envisage, there is for us now a further future that we can neither accommodate nor avoid. This future is death.

This idea has been present in the ideas of many humanistic and religious thinkers throughout the ages. Catholics tell the story of a saint who was playing cards with some friends when one of them asked him what he would do if he knew that he would die in the next five minutes. To the surprise of his friends, the saint replied that he would go on playing cards. His point was that if we have made our peace with God or are ready for death in whatever other way we might conceive of such a readiness, then there would be no need to rush off to the confessional or to conclude our lives appropriately should we learn that we had only a few minutes left. In such an attitude, there is an acceptance of death as a constantly present horizon in our lives.

The modern secular philosopher who has most fully developed this idea is Martin Heidegger. Heidegger is opposed to the Platonic Western tradition, as exemplified by Socrates and carried on in Christianity, in which death is variously seen as the separation of body and soul, the beginning of a new kind of existence, an example of worldly mutability and corruption (present also in animals and plants), and the limit point of a person's life present only in an objective future. He would also oppose Levinas's view that death is the other: that is, a radically ungraspable unknown and unknowable intrusion into a life from its "outside." For Heidegger, death creates the totality, the unity, and the uniqueness of each person's existence. Accordingly, death is not an end or limit to life, but an aspect of life that is present throughout life. It is not only in the future, but is a present aspect of life now. Phenomenological reflection discloses that a central feature of subjectivity or personal existence is that it is lived with awareness of our past, our present, and our future. We know, at least in the mode of theoretical knowledge, that we will die. But it is not this objective knowledge that structures our subjective existence as a finite being. Instead, it is a deeper awareness of death as the limit of our finitude. Death makes our existence finite. When we envisage our end we read back from that future a trajectory of time that can take on a narrative form. This gives us a sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, our own lives. I will try to explain this without using Heidegger's rich but somewhat opaque terminology.[29]

In the normal run of our everyday lives our focus is upon what we are doing and the goals that we are pursuing in doing it. In this way our world and reality are primarily marked by an orientation toward the future and the possibilities that it holds for us. If we did not assume that the world holds possibilities for us we could not act in it in a purposeful way. But unlike our past, these future possibilities are not uniquely our own. Anyone with the requisite skills could do what I am doing. Someone else could do my job, or fill the position that I currently hold in my family. However unlikely it might actually be that it not be I who pursues these projects, there is nothing unique to me that makes it necessary that it be I that does these things or that created the situation that ensures that it is I who does them. Most of the things I do consist in my filling roles that are defined by society and that could be filled by others. They do not define me as uniquely the "I" that I am. There is only one thing in my future that only I can do and that no one else can do for me, and that is to die. I am the only one who can die my death. My being dead is not a role that anyone else can fill. Of course it is also true that I am the only one who can have my experiences. Subjectivity is unique. But the structures or social formations of those experiences are not unique. Insofar as they are socially and culturally structured, anyone in my

position would have similar experiences and engage in similar actions. The pressures of social conformity, role definition, and even conformity to cultural outlooks, threaten the individuality of us all. My death, on the other hand, is uniquely mine. It is a possibility that only I can realize. It defines me as the self that I am.

It may appear odd to call death a "possibility." What does this term connote? A possibility is not a lesser kind of being than actual or necessary being. We are not dealing with a classical metaphysics in which potentialities are distinguished from actualities. Instead, possibility is the openness that exists within being so as to orient it to its future. Possibility is the mode of being of subjective, personal existence in the sense that personal existence consists in being open to possibilities. But one of the possibilities of personal existence is death: that is, the very end (and thus impossibility) of being. This is a paradox. Being a mortal being involves the possibility of that being's own impossibility as a constant horizon of its being. This paradox or negation at the very heart of our mode of being is felt by us as dread. We are not anxious just because life is a struggle and death is a real threat. These are objectively verifiable facts. Our being anxious is a modality of our mode of being because of this negation within our comportment toward life. Our very subjectivity is riven.

Personal existence is the existence of a being for whom being is an issue. In this sentence, "being" should be read as a verb. That is, it is the movement from the past toward a future. Being is our moving through time. Instead of taking "being" as a noun theorized by such classical concepts as substance and accident, Heidegger wants to explore what it is like to be-in-time. But only the being of subjectivity (his term is *Dasein*) knows this from the inside, as it were, and is in a position to explore this through reflection. The first opening upon what being is is given by phenomenological thought. Subjectivity has a particular mode of being that involves the disclosure of what being means. Subjectivity *exists*. Our being is founded in contradiction and dread, and yet we are in a worldly situation with a worldly heritage and with world-defined aspirations and possibilities in the future. As a mode of being with needs, fears, and desires, personal existence is concerned about its situation and its future. It is against the horizon of non-being, non-objectified things-in-themselves, or of what Levinas came to call the *there is*—a horizon disclosed by dread—that reality discloses itself to us. Time is this horizon, since it is the finiteness of the time given to me in my particularity that gives me my lived world (as opposed to the general, objective, theoretical time span of the world of science). It is because I am finite and mortal that I see my world as a field of possibilities for meeting my needs and sustaining my life. It is because I suffer dread in response to my paradoxical subjectivity that I seize upon this world so as to make it my reality.

Subjectivity is defined by its possibilities as well as by its actuality. Just as an egg is what it is partly by virtue of what it can become, so my subjectivity is defined in part by my possibilities. I am constantly engaged in projects that have not yet come to fruition and so I am always in a state of becoming. I am always "not-yet" in some aspect of my being. This is what it means to say that my being is a movement toward future possibilities. But death is also among my possibilities even though it is not a state of becoming and will bring the "not-yet" aspect of my existence to an end. Instead, death is both the negation and the completion of my subjectivity. Personal existence is not just the series of events that occur between birth and death. And death is not just the final term of such a series. This is because the whole of that series is an *existence*. It is an intentional

projection into the future on the part of my subjectivity. It can be envisaged as a narrative. A narrative is not made up of discrete events. The incidents in a narrative are held together by a unity generated by the person whose narrative it is. The totality of a person's existence as subjectivity is of this narrative kind. A person envisages his or her future and lives toward it. To some degree, personal existence is always already what it will become. The envisaged future suffuses present existence and gives it meaning. But death suffuses existence in the same way. Although it is not a hoped for future, or a future that is worked toward, it is an inevitability that defines our existence as finite and that consequently defines our projects as urgent. In this way death conduces to the fulfillment of life.

Yet on the biological model death always prevents the fulfillment of personal life. It always cuts our lives short. On the conception of life as will-to-live or will-to-power, death is always a frustration of our vital trajectory. But this biological conception of death is inadequate because it places the end of existence outside of that existence. On this conception, death is an event that belongs to the unknowable reality that lies outside of our cognitive purview. And as a result, on this conception, our lives can only be lived as inherently limitless though subject to contingent external termination. In contrast, authentic personal existence is felt as limited. It is always already open to its end. We are always ready to die. Because we know that we are not immortal we cannot but accept death into our lives as a lived horizon. Such an acceptance is not just a bowing to the inevitable defeat of will-to-live by something exterior to that will or that subjectivity. It is the embrace of a termination that is already inherent in, and belongs to, that subjectivity. It belongs to it because it determines that subjectivity as the subjectivity of a finite being whose life thereby becomes a definable project for it.

Death is a determination of the mode of being of the personal existence of subjectivity. It confronts personal existence in the totality of its existence. It is a conditioning of that life as a whole. That we are mortal is known to us in a unique way. We do not experience the death of others in this way. In their case we know of death objectively, and perhaps with a feeling of grief. But in our own case we know it implicitly as the termination of all our projects and the negation of my mode of being. We know that all our projects are finite, fragile, and threatened. This is the way in which our existence would be different from that of beings who are immortal or who are unaware of their impending deaths. They would never feel that their projects were finite. They would feel that they could do anything and that anything anyone else could do they too could do given that there is infinite time. For mortals, the knowledge that we have a finite span of time means that whatever we take on is part of a small range of projects that we will be able to take on. So it defines us in our uniqueness. I am the one who is married to this person, has that career, has these children, and enjoys those hobbies. That is all I can do in one lifetime, so in a lifetime I gain unique identity. To refer to my earlier example, if I mastered the guitar, and then the trumpet, and then the piano, and so on indefinitely in an infinite life, who would I be? What possibilities would define me as unique? In an infinite time anyone could master these skills or develop these personal characteristics. I could only be unique if I were finite and mortal.

Moreover, death makes me unique because it is the one future possibility that only I can own and embrace as mine. As well, death cuts me off from others. In death I take my leave of them. In death I am alone. Death also confines me in this material world. All the claims of classical philosophy about the possibility of

transcending this world by contemplating supernatural realities, or aligning myself with God, or even just being apart from the world as a transcendental knower of what is in it, are negated by death. Instead of merging with the One, or being part of the All, in death I am alone, unique, and material. Metaphysics becomes meaningless. My subjectivity ends and I return to that darkness of material reality that I share with both inert and biological things.

Subjectivity feels a dread at this darkness throughout life. It is as if we are taking part in a psychological experiment where we are urged to walk out upon a glass surface from a sharp drop or cliff. Even though the glass supports us, we feel that we are threatened with falling. We live our lives on that glass sheet knowing and feeling that the abyss is beneath us. We try to escape from this by busying ourselves in a culturally structured world of everyday tasks and realities. Existential inauthenticity consists in making ourselves too busy to notice the dark abyss below, or in ascribing ultimate importance to worldly activities, or in taking death to be an event in the future that does not yet apply to us. Our death is certain but we do not know when. That we flee from this dread into inauthenticity shows that we have an implicit recognition of the death that inspires it. There is a substratum of anxiety that is appropriate to, and necessary for, the meaningfulness of our lives.

It may be asked whether the argument of Epicurus against the rationality of fearing death actually confronts this anxiety. It confronts the fear of death when that fear takes the form of our thinking that it might be unpleasant to be dead, and it banishes this fear as being irrational. But this merely supports the work of our culture in hiding death from us and in imposing inauthenticity on personal existence. It merely encourages us to hide death from ourselves in the way that modern institutions and cultural practices do. If the argument were to negate the deeper anxiety that is an implicit expression of our finite being insofar as it is finite, then it would extirpate an emotion that is crucial to our having a meaningful world and to our being authentic. We need to feel our finitude in order to be a unique self and in order to live life meaningfully. The role of reason in maintaining the life attitudes that are culturally acceptable at a given point in history and in establishing the values of everyday life as communicable to each other needs to be questioned here. Objective reason may dictate a rational consensus on what values should inform life and what moral norms should be followed, but it is only our individual and genuine reflection that transforms such values into constituents of our integrity and authenticity.

Heidegger is not proposing that we should morbidly ponder, meditate upon, brood about, or passively await, death as an inevitable event to come. Instead, we should see death as a present possibility—as a horizon of my present existence. We should certainly engage with life and its projects fully. Morbid brooding might lead to subjectivity coming to see itself as a traveller or a pilgrim on the earth instead of as belonging to it. If I see death as nothing more than a negation of my existence I may come to devalue that existence. I may come to think that inevitable death robs my life of any meaning. I might come to suspend engagement with the world and denigrate it in a Platonic manner. But death makes my life more meaningful instead of less. Given that I have a finite time and given that that time is always threatened, I should commit myself more fully to the projects that engage me instead of less. And yet my commitment to earthly existence should be accompanied by the irony that comes from knowing that death can end it at any time. Essayists such as Montaigne have advocated such an ironic stance, but have done so with the Epicurean intention of relieving the

anxiety that the awareness of death brings with it. Heidegger, on the other hand, wants us to live this anxiety as a quality of our subjectivity. It is a constitutive element in our authenticity. Without this anxiety I will only ever think of death as something that happens to others and to myself as an other.

Heidegger uses the word "conscience" to describe the call to authentic existence that our death occasions at every moment of our lives. Conscience is more than the call of concern that every mortal being must have for its own existence. It is an ethical notion and refers to the requirement to be authentic in the face of my own mortality: to accept it as my "ownmost" possibility and destiny. There is no hiding in being busy, in metaphysical doctrines or transcendent faiths, in arguments of reason, in social platitudes, or cultural anaesthesia. Subjectivity is thrown into an existence it did not choose by being born. So it is never master of its own being. And it cannot control its ending. Yet it has a responsibility to take up the challenge of being—to project itself into existence. The response to the call of conscience is "resoluteness." It is affirming myself even in anxiety, celebrating my situation in the world, acknowledging my ethical responsibilities to others, and accepting my inevitable death.

Like other writers who have been taken up in the existentialist tradition, Heidegger places great stress on the individual. The temporality or time frame in which he works is defined by the individual's past, present, and future. But subjective existence is not just stretched out on a time line between birth and death. It is situated in a larger time frame defined by the family and the relevant community. Every individual is part of a larger family or communal narrative. An individual's own being is a temporal or narrative being, but this narrative, in turn, is part of a family or community story. That an individual's life is defined by the possibilities and inevitabilities that the biological, historical, and cultural situation of that individual dictates (including that of death) does not deny the need for that individual to show resoluteness so as to establish personal authenticity in the face of all those "facticities." But it does give that authentic individual uniqueness a context. Along with death, subjectivity also has that further context as a horizon for its life. Heidegger would not deny this, but he does not stress it either. The main way in which he sees the social context of subjective existence is as a threat to its authenticity. For him, conformity to the cultural expectation of society is the antithesis of authenticity. But conformity is not the only possible relationship that we might have to our social context. I think a proper acknowledgment of that context can be an enhancement of our authenticity as well. For example, an acknowledgment of, and apology for, colonialist atrocities committed by their forebears in a settler society is a duty of authenticity for those who now live in such societies.

Our historicity or situatedness in a larger story than our own lives allows us to think beyond our physical lives as individuals and to include our stories into those of our communities. These stories will include ancestors, land, and cultural legacy. For the individual they are stories that continue beyond death and include the promise of a positive reputation and of maintaining traditions and projects through heirs and followers. (This point supports Nagel's claim that a person can be harmed after death. Damaging a dead person's reputation is a harm to the socially constructed, post-mortem narrative of that person's existence.) In this sense, even though death is the end of subjectivity and thus of my ownmost possibilities, it is not the end of my story, but the beginning of a new phase of it. In this phase I am no longer an existent, but I still have a role. This role too is a possibility to which I must comport myself in life. My annihilation may be

physical but it is not an end of the narrative centred on my life. Of course, on Heidegger's conception, this narrative is then no longer my "ownmost" since I am not able to shape it. So far as my phenomenological perspective is concerned, my death is my end. But in life I can project myself toward possibilities that belong to me even though they will only be realized after my death. Many people seek a metaphorical form of immortality such as their "place in history," their reputation, the future importance of their family, or the wealth that they bequeath to the next generation. Yet, even these possibilities are projects for us while we are alive. Like all of my life projects, they are unified into a totality that is that of *my* projects, *my* life, and *my* narrative, by the fact that it is *I* who will die. Therefore it is I, in my concern in the face of my death, who must be responsible for them.

5. Conclusion

What all this shows is that there can be virtue in the way that we face death. Throughout our lives there can be an authentic comportment toward death. Even in cases where sudden catastrophe causes instantaneous death, such a death can have, despite its cruelty and unexpectedness, a dignity deriving from the attitude to life of its victim. If we have lived well in the sense that we have lived authentically in face of the dread that mortality brings with it, then our death will be fitting and appropriate no matter how it frustrates the narrative trajectory of our lives. We are not just an expression of sheer will-to-live. We are subjectivity striving for authentic existence. This authenticity involves an acknowledgment of mortality, and this acknowledgment, in turn, implies an acceptance of death whenever and however it occurs. Death is acceptable and dignified for one who has lived with such authenticity and dignity.

In those cases where imminent death can be anticipated because the person knows that he or she is dying, there can be an acceptance of death that is more manifest in behavior. Philippe Ariès has described the quiet dignity with which heroes of medieval legends were described as accepting their deaths. A "tame death" consisted in a death that could be foreseen and that was preceded by the "profession of faith, the confession of sins, the pardon of the survivors, the pious disposition on their behalf, the commendation of one's soul to God, the choice of burial."[30] Although the context here is religious, the themes are universal. Knowing how and why we can say "yes" to life is having the kind of faith that also permits the acceptance of death. Reviewing our lives, acknowledging the faults and shortcomings, and rejoicing in the successes and the wisdom shown in it are an important preparation for death. Seeking the forgiveness of those we might have hurt and granting forgiveness to those we leave behind are essential parts of that concluding business and tying up of loose ends that prepares us for out parting. Leaving a will and disposing of other such matters is a courtesy to those who are left behind, and demonstrates that our intentions should still hold sway over others even when we have died. There appears to be no secular counterpart to commending our souls to God, except, perhaps the letting go of life willingly. The choice of burial, finally, is a part of that practical set of arrangements that is both important and potentially distracting to the important last moments that we live through.

While the focus in these last remarks has been upon the factors that contribute to the dignity of the last hours or minutes of a person's life in those

cases where the dying person has control over those last hours or minutes, the dignity that can be shown at such times stems from a lifetime of preparation. It has been my thesis that this preparation takes the form of an authentic attitude to our mortality and finitude. While not denying that such an authentic attitude can be grounded in religious faith, I have sought to articulate it in secular terms. Our very uniqueness and individuality as personal subjectivities is shaped by the way in which death is embraced as a part of life.

Sometimes a person on his deathbed can be likened to a mountain climber. Imagine that an inexperienced mountain climber has gotten into a situation on a cliff face where the person cannot proceed forward and cannot retrace his steps. Whether it is because of a failure in equipment or because of some other circumstance, the climber is stuck in such a way that he cannot but fall to his death. His sheer will-to-live or his conscious courage and determination may lead him to hang on grimly for some time. But eventually tiredness or cramp will force him to let go of the cliff face and fall. He knows this and that whatever happens he will die. Is there virtue in his hanging on grimly until he can do no more? Or is there virtue in his mentally preparing in the ways described above and then resignedly letting go? Which is the more dignified course of action for him? People will disagree on their answers to this question. Some will admire dogged courage and determination even when it is fated to be of no use. They will want the victim to "fight to the very end." Others will admire the ability to let go of the will-to-live and accept the inevitable. In such resignation lies dignity also.

For my part, I find myself in greater sympathy with the latter position. The courageous determination not to give up the struggle, the heroic gesture that says that where there is life there is hope and that everything must be done to sustain life, is admirable. I do not deny this. But there is a futility and a doggedness about it that bespeaks a certain ignorance. It is the ignorance of the one who does not see that death is a part of life. It is the ignorance of one who thinks that subjectivity is only ever self-affirmation and will-to-power. It is the ignorance of one who sees within him- or herself the only source of meaning. I prefer a form of subjectivity that acknowledges its dependence upon the world and upon others. This is a form of subjectivity that does not rely upon self-affirmation for its meaning. This is a form of subjectivity that acknowledges its place within larger realities such as society and the world of nature. It is part of a larger process and must on occasion fall into line with those processes. Its mortality and finitude will not be a curse to it. Such a subjectivity feels peace in the face of fate and acceptance in the face of death. Such a subjectivity can let go.

In the case of the mountain climber, such a subjectivity can literally let go. In the case of the dying patient, such a subjectivity can ask for the cessation of treatment. And it will not be just futile or heroic treatment that can be refused by such a person, but even simple life-sustaining treatment. With a lifetime of authentic acceptance of death, and with conscious time with loved ones for saying goodbye, there is no need for such a subjectivity to struggle on and no need for the loved ones to persist in requesting treatments. Technological brinkmanship would not be virtuous in the context of such a person's dying.

The dignity of authentic death does not depend on the conceptions of a good life that any particular culture might hold. Whereas I argued earlier that the notion of an acceptable death being the conclusion of a well-lived and happy life depended upon a community consensus on what would constitute a good life, and that such a consensus was not available in a modern pluralist society, I would

now argue that the notion of a dignified death arising from an authentic life has universal relevance. It does not appear to me to matter what the cultural consensus on the good life is, or what the religious and metaphysical faiths and doctrines of a society are, or what conceptions of personal virtue are present in a given community. Whatever be the content of those beliefs, the fundamental idea of an authentic death is the same. Dying people might express themselves differently in differing cultural contexts, but their dignity will consist in their being able to let go of life without a sense of defeat and without a sense of regret.

There is also virtue or the occasion for virtue in every person who attends the dying. For dying persons themselves there is the virtue of being ready for death and of letting go of life when the time comes. For the family and loved ones, there is the virtue of resignation in the face of the inevitable loss of one who is loved, and the virtue of love itself in sustaining the dying in their last moments and honoring their dying wishes. For the health care workers and clinicians involved in the case, there is the virtue of letting be what must be. Withholding futile treatment is but the most obvious expression of this. Withholding aggressive treatment in accordance with expressed or implied wishes is another. Respecting the wishes of the patient and of loved ones instead of seeking to exercise the power that attaches to professional skills and responsibilities is also important. The clinician has special authority and power in the clinical setting. This can be used to sustain those who are distressed. Advice on how long the dying person has left, advice on palliation and its effects, and information on the nature of the dying process, must all be conveyed in a way that is not just informative and sensitive, but also in ways that are supportive. Even when no further medical intervention is useful or called for—a moment when it might be thought medical responsibility ceases—clinicians still have the power to support the dying and the bereaved through their very presence.

Instead of stressing the sanctity of life and using that phrase to justify aggressive interventions, we should stress the dignity of death. Death is not an evil. It is a necessary horizon to life. There is virtue in accepting it when it is irrevocably upon us and when we can do nothing but let go. It is the responsibility of health care workers of all professions to enhance the possibility of such virtue.

The display of virtue on the part of the dying is a gift to the next generation. I have suggested that the narrative of a person's life does not cease with the end of their subjectivity in death. The legacy continues on in different forms. One legacy that the dying can bequeath to the next generation is the example of the dignity of their deaths. In the Western cultural tradition there are numerous examples in history and in literature of such noble and inspiring deaths. The most obvious is the death of Jesus. Whether we believe him to have been God incarnate, the chosen human prophet of God's salvific intervention into worldly existence, or merely an exemplary man, it is clear that the horrific manner of his death and his heroic acceptance of it—as narrated in the story of the garden of Gethsemane—have been an inspiration for countless thousands of Christians and even non-believers through the ages.

But the example with which I want to conclude this book is that of Socrates. It is arguable that the inspirational acceptance of death on the part of Socrates has had influence both in the humanistic traditions of the West through Plato, the Stoic philosophers, Montaigne, and even Nietzsche, but also on the Christian and religious traditions through St Augustine and others.

Central to Socrates' acceptance of death, as Plato tells the story, is his faith that there is a transcendent realm that constitutes an overarching reality for human existence and that contains the moral, epistemological, and aesthetic perfections that we seek in this life. The pursuit of goodness, truth, and beauty is a meaningful human quest because they are realities belonging to a supernatural order. However plausible or implausible we might find this metaphysical faith, it has had a tremendous moral and intellectual impact upon the Western cultural tradition, and it has been appropriated by some major religions. As I have noted, the central pillar of this whole vision is the distinction between this material world of earthly existence and the other-worldly realm of perfection for which our whole life is a craving. To many thinkers today this theory is seen as an inherently implausible suggestion if we are meant to regard it as more than metaphorical. One of the ironies in the story is that this implausibility struck Plato himself. Socrates says, "if my theory is really true, it is right to believe it; while, even if death is an extinction, at any rate, during this time before my death, I shall be less likely to distress my companions by giving way to self-pity."[31] If the theory is true, then our hopes in life will be fulfilled after our deaths. But if it happens to be false, no harm is done because we will have been encouraged to live life to the end. If the soul really does come to an end, then there is no regretting having lived with this erroneous and false encouragement. So it is better to live with belief in the theory, even though it might be false.

What Socrates is saying here is that in all of our attempts to understand what life is about, to understand the meaning of our living and to give ourselves a purpose and a hope in life, there will always be a need for some kind of faith that cannot be established with utter certainty by rational means. How then can it be established? One means, and a means used by Plato, will be poetic metaphor and rhetoric. The literary power of Plato's writing does much to render his vision convincing. But reason is rightfully suspicious of rhetoric. Belief must not be induced by beguiling language. The only means left to bequeath such an ennobling vision to later generations is that of an inspiring death. I would suggest that Socrates' acceptance of death was a martyrdom on behalf of the philosophical life: that is, a life dedicated to the pursuit of an intellectual grasp of truth, goodness, and beauty.[32] When all rational and rhetorical means for justifying this life and the metaphysical vision that underlay it were exhausted, the only means of persuasion left was that of an inspiring death. Rational, objective, universal, and impartial principles can be argued for up to a point, but the imparting of virtue and the changing of people's lives require more inspirational means. Socrates accepted death because he knew that only by that means would he inspire his followers to commit to the highest values that he knew.

While I am not suggesting that such grand philosophical issues are manifestly at stake in the deaths of ordinary folk in ordinary clinical situations or that such deaths are not still regrettable, my conclusion is that the dignified acceptance of death can be an inspirational gift to others. In this sense, no one needs to die alone. Death need not be a reality just for its victim. A deceased person's story can go on. The impact that our deaths have on others can be the final good that we leave upon this earth. In the absence of a rational community consensus on what makes life good and hence on when death can be appropriate, that impact may be the only basis for the acceptance of death shown by subsequent victims.

If you, as health care workers, are not to be caught up in a desperate and fruitless struggle against death, and if you are not to be ensnared in technological brinkmanship, then you had better be inspired by the acceptance of death that your patients so frequently show to you and to their families. And you had better help them reach such acceptance. Your patients are themselves a moral source.

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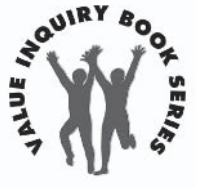

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