

# **A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO BIOETHICS**

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# MA Bioethics & Medical Law

## Overview



## A DEFINITION OF BIOETHICS

“The systematic study of the moral dimensions – including moral vision, decisions, conduct and policies – of the life sciences and health care, employing a variety of ethical methodologies in an interdisciplinary setting”

Reich W T 1995 *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* New York  
Simon and Schuster



## THE RISE OF BIOETHICS

Roots of modern bioethics arose in the 1960s in the writings of Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991) and Paul Ramsey (1913-1998)



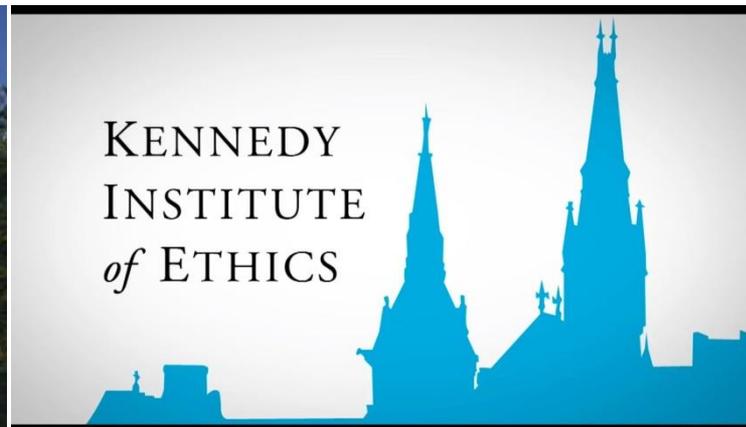
# THE RISE OF BIOETHICS

The term "bioethics" was coined in 1970 by Van Rensselaer Potter

Bioethics centres

1969 Hastings Centre

1971 Kennedy Institute

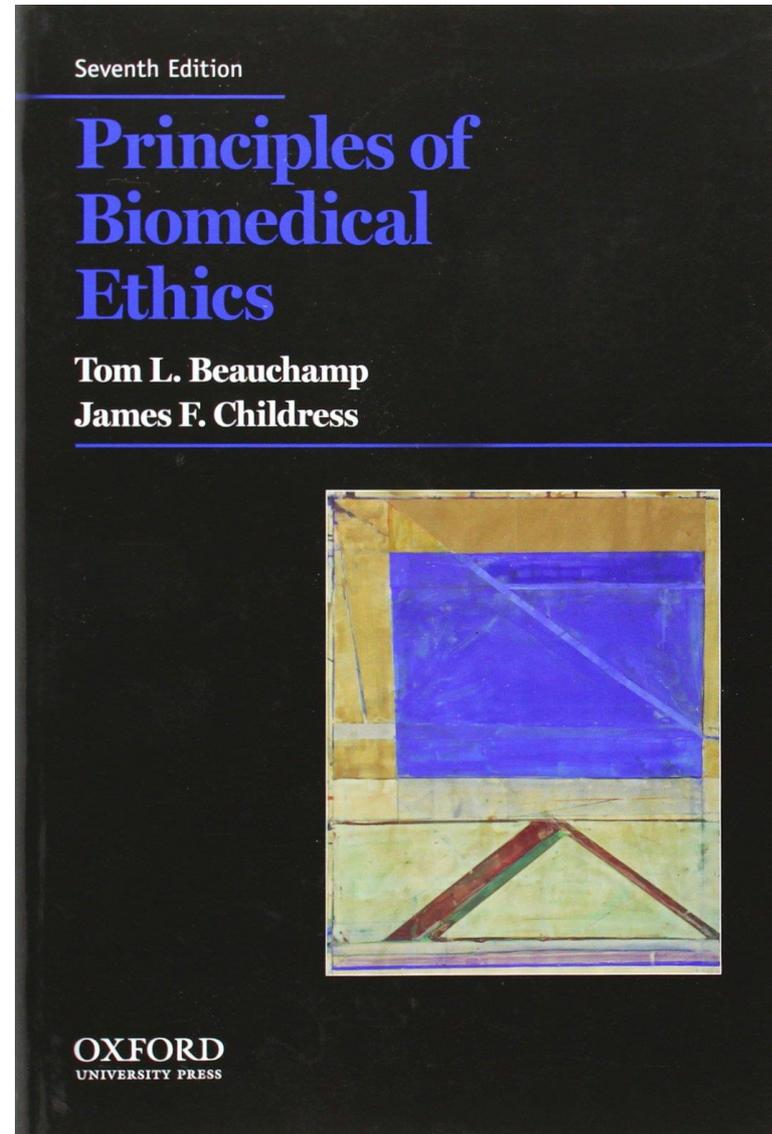


# THE RISE OF BIOETHICS

1978 1<sup>st</sup> Edition

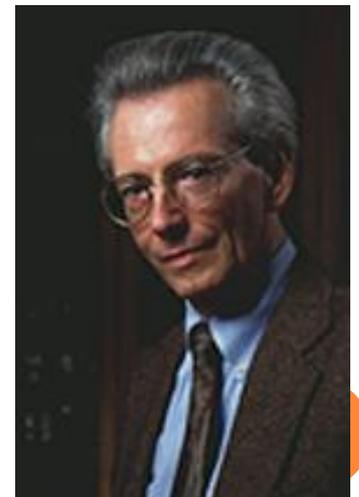
Beauchamp and Childress

The 'bible' of bioethics

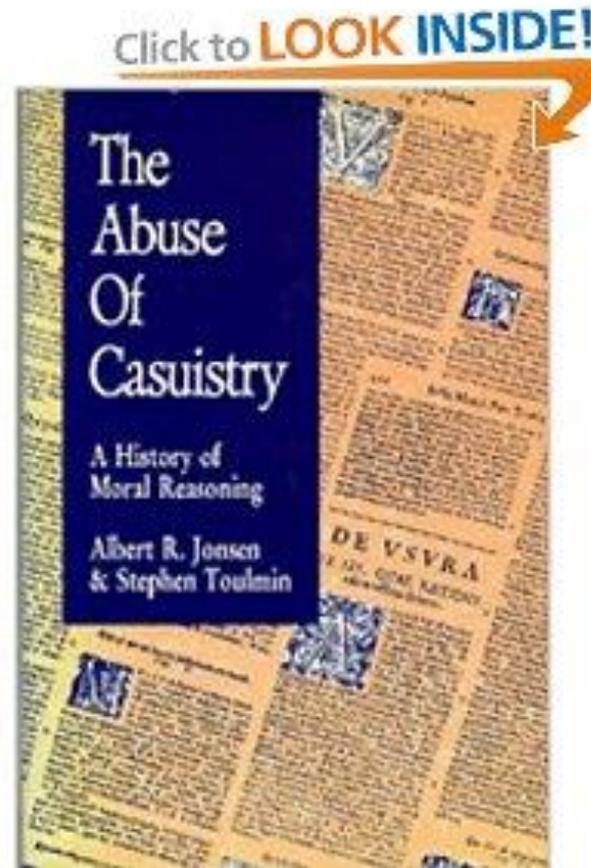
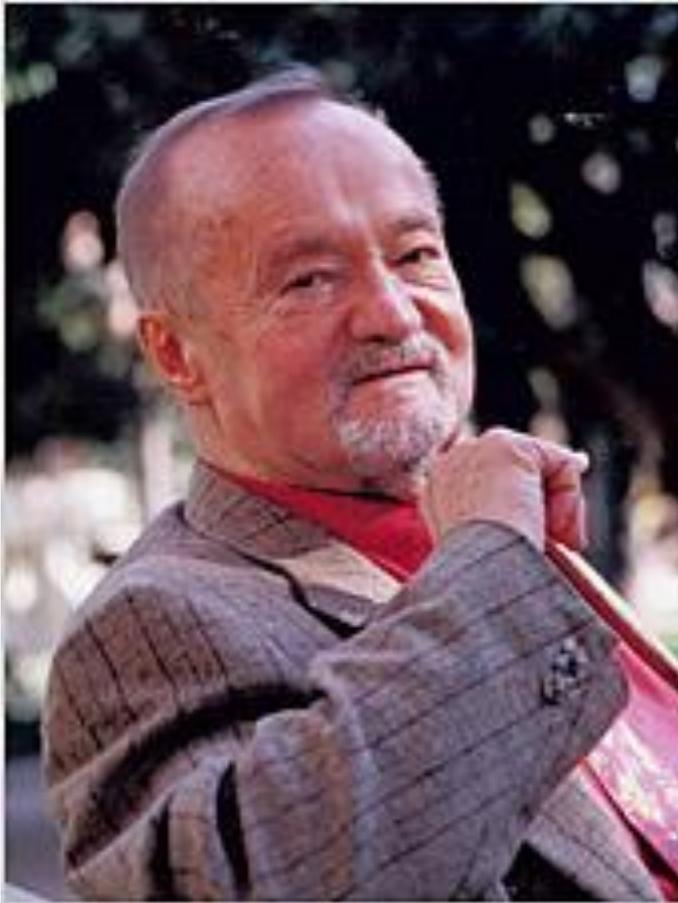


# PRINCIPLISM – THE GEORGETOWN MANTRA

- Autonomy
- Beneficence
- Non-  
maleficence
- Justice



# HOW MEDICINE SAVED THE LIFE OF ETHICS



# THE RISE OF BIOETHICS

- Journals

Journal of Medical Ethics

Bioethics

Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics

Hastings Center Report

American Journal of Bioethics

Ethics and the Environment

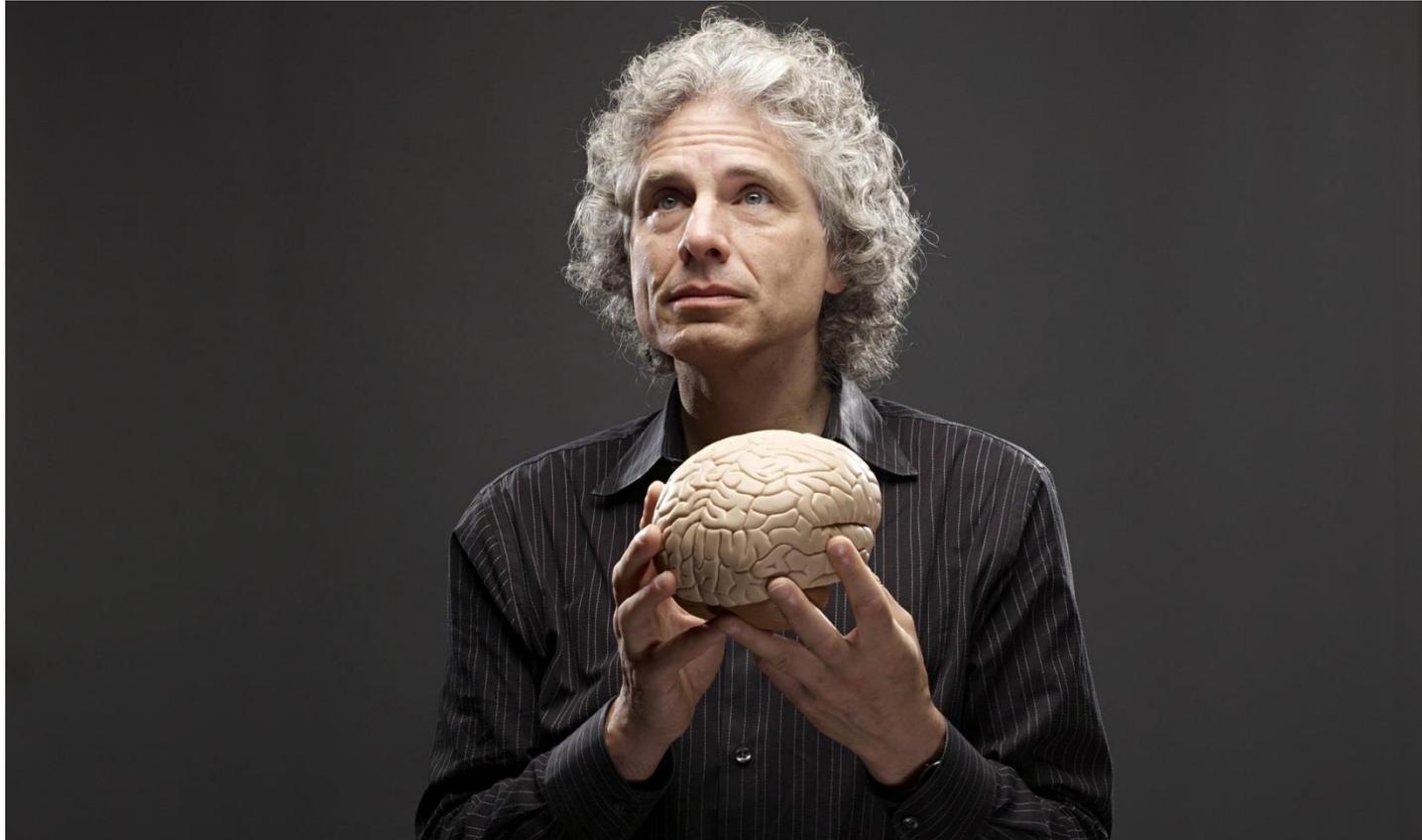
Journal of Public Health Ethics (new in 2008)

Journal of Animal Ethics (new in 2008)

Journal of Medicine and Philosophy (new in 2011)

The New Bioethics (new in 2012)

# BIOETHICS GET OUT OF THE WAY



<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2015/07/31/the-moral-imperative-for-bioethics/JmEkoyzlTAu9oQV76JrK9N/story.html>



# SCOPE OF BIOETHICS

## **Taking Life**

*abortion, euthanasia,  
infanticide*

## **Making Life**

*cryopreservation,  
IVF, cloning*

## **Faking Life**

*AI, cyborgs, transhumanism*



# TWO FORMS OF BIOETHICS

- **Descriptive** bioethics - the way people view life and their moral interactions and responsibilities
- **Prescriptive or normative** bioethics – establishing what is right or wrong on the basis what principles are most important.



# WHAT ARE THE FOUNDATIONS?



## DRAWING THE LINE SOMEWHERE

“There is no reason to suppose that there is such a thing as sexual morality. There is nothing wrong with sex of any kind including fetishism, bestiality, necrophilia, buggery, incest, paedophilia and the variety approved by missionaries”

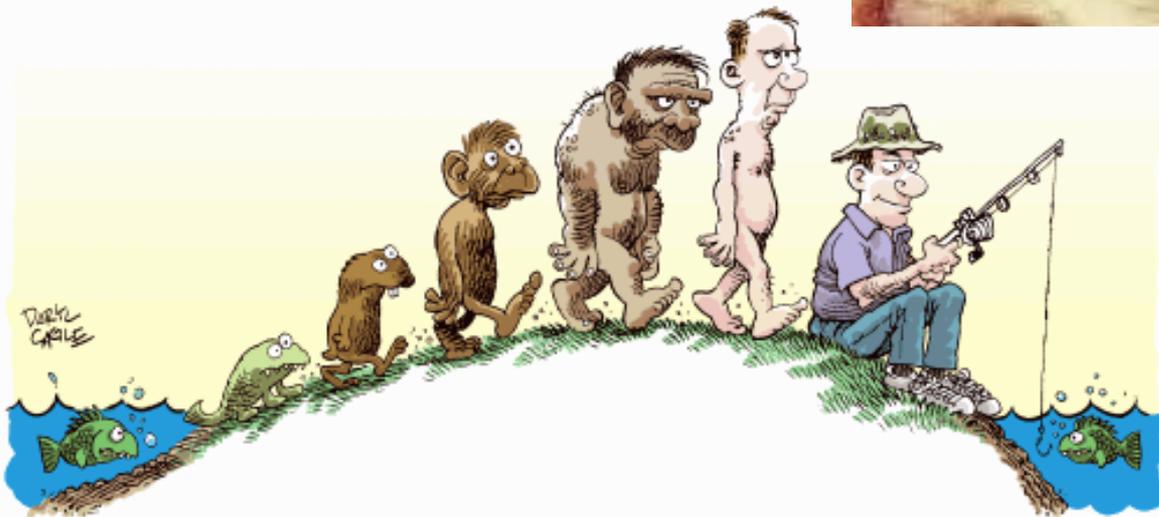
Harris J 1985 *The Value of Life*



# ANTHROPOLOGY DETERMINES ETHICS

“What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention”

Job 7v17



# WHAT IS MORAL DEPENDS ON WHO WE ARE

MARINA ET AUTRES FEMMES DONNÉES A CORTEZ



## ARE THEY HUMAN?

“Who were they? These people who were so radically other? What was their moral status? Were they animals or were they human, and if human what kind of human?”

Mumford J 2013 *Ethics at the Beginning of Life* Oxford:OUP



# ARE THEY WORTHY OF FULL HUMAN STATUS?

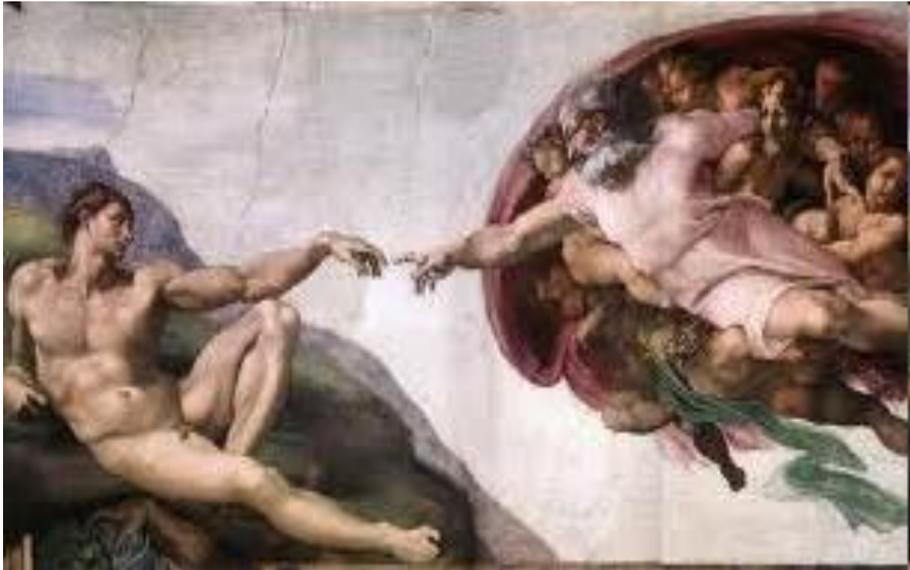


# PERSON

1. Are all persons human beings?
2. Are all human beings persons?



# PERSONS WHO ARE NOT HUMANS



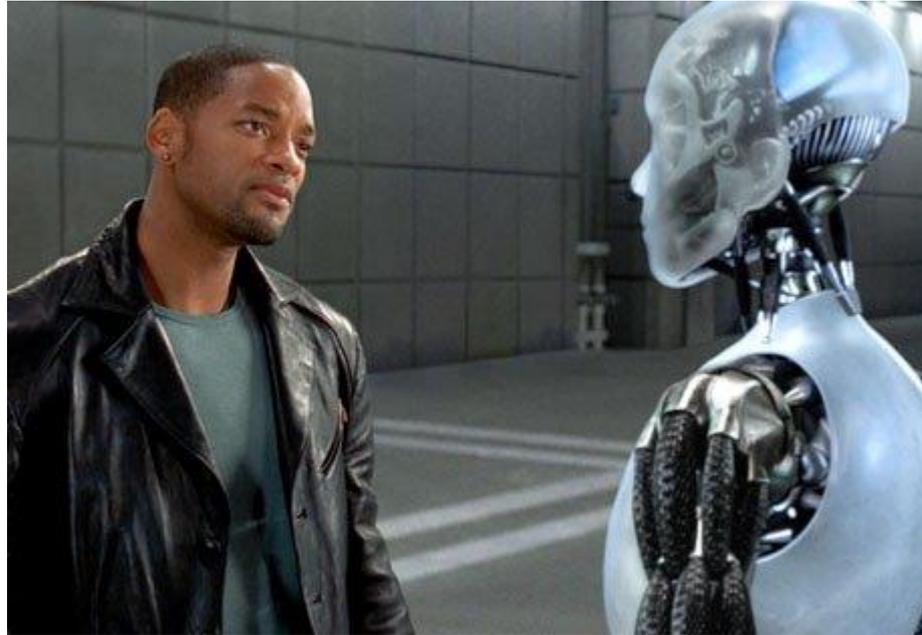
‘Person’ is a “matter of great perplexity” (Boethius *A Treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius II*)



AND.....



AND



“I believe that robots are persons because they share a significant trait with humans - .....!”

[philosophicalraptor.tumblr.com](http://philosophicalraptor.tumblr.com)



# JOHN LOCKE 1632-1704



## CRITERION FOR PERSONHOOD

Locke: ‘a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places, which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking’

*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.XXVII.9.



## OR CRITERIA?

- Lists? One characteristic?
- Dependence on qualities rather than the concrete, identifiable human being
- Arbitrary? Fluid threshold – some say embryos are not persons but infants are...?
- Asymmetrical?
- Illogical?
- A-historical: starts from Locke



# BOETHIUS AND PERSON

- *naturae rationabilis individua substantia*, ‘an individual substance of a rational nature’  
Boethius *A Treatise against Eutyches and Nestorius* III.5.
- Aristotle: human beings share nature;  
individual: accidental characteristics
- Aquinas – Individual not in the sense of one but the sense of distinct and unrepeatable



# ETHICAL SYSTEMS

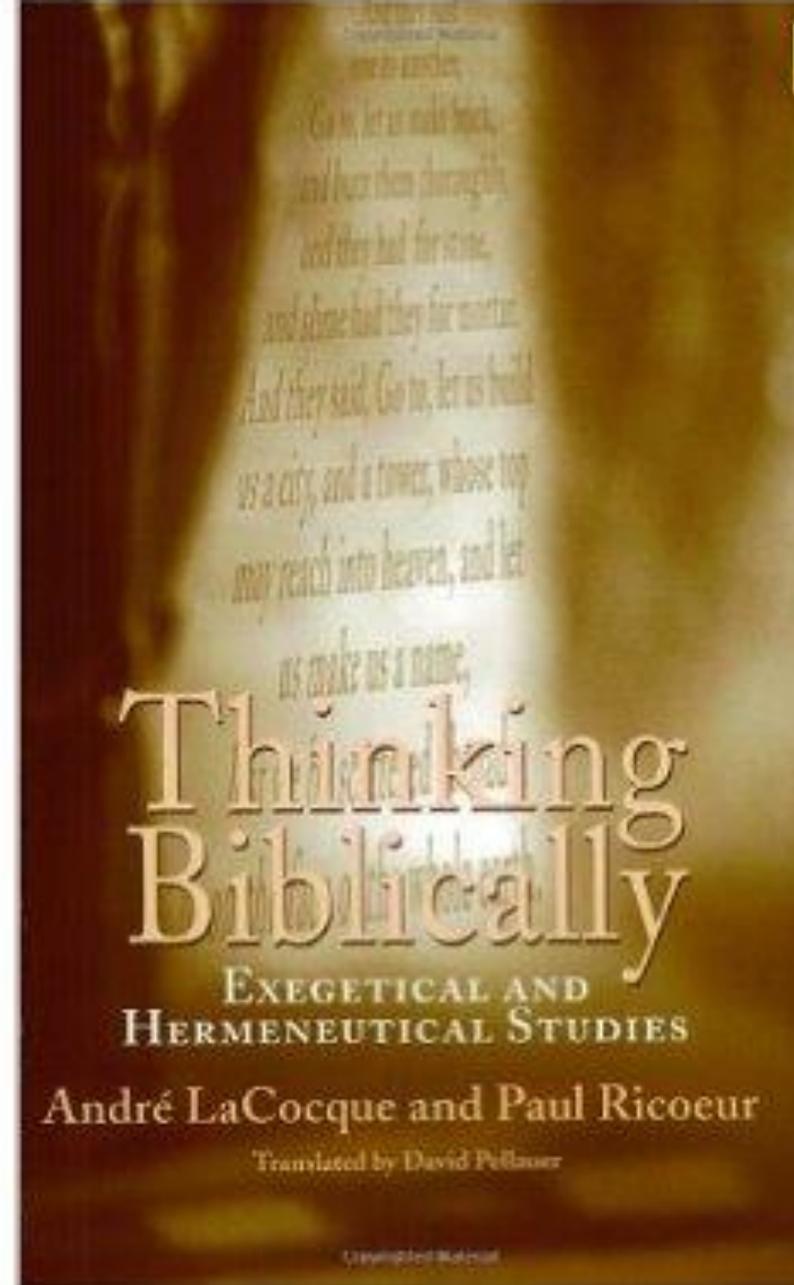
- Deontological (duty based)
- Consequentialist (utilitarianism is best known)
- Virtue ethics
- Principlism
- Faith-based

Incommensurability (Engelhardt)

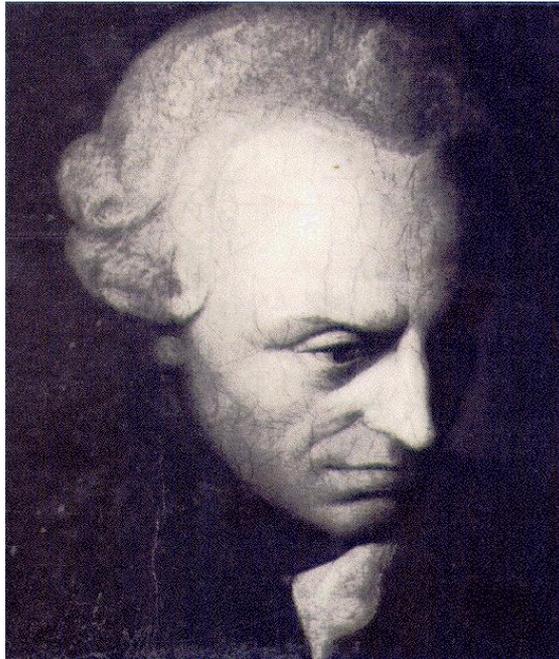


# THINKING BIBLICALLY

For each moral theory that we consider, think of what Biblical support or cautions apply



# DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS - WHAT IS THE RULE?



“Plato the  
divine and  
the  
astounding  
Kant”

Arthur Schopenhauer



# KANT'S EPITAPH

“Two things fill the heart with ever renewed and increasing awe and reverence, the more often and the more steadily we meditate upon them: the starry firmament above and the moral law within”



## ‘THE STARRY SKIES ABOVE...’

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his  
hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth  
speech;

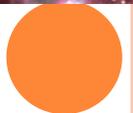
night after night they display  
knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech or language  
where their voice is not heard.

<sup>4</sup> Their voice goes out into all the  
earth,

their words to the ends of the world.

*(Psalm 19:1-4)*



## ‘THE MORAL LAW WITHIN ME...’

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

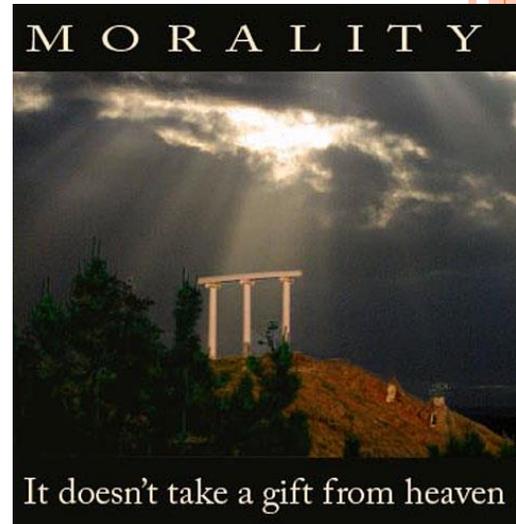
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

The ordinances of the LORD are sure  
and altogether righteous.



*(Psalm 19:7-9)*



# CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

A categorical imperative simply tells us what we ought to do, not on condition that we will do something else but unconditionally,

There is therefore only a single categorical imperative and it is this: act only according to the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it will become a universal law G 4.421

Conditional imperatives give rise to a regress. Unconditional imperatives are laws in themselves



IS THIS WHAT HE WAS REALLY TRYING TO SAY?

‘Treat others as you would like to be treated’  
*(Channel 4, No 1 of the New Ten Commandments)*

‘Do to others what you would have them do to you’  
*(Matthew 7:12)*



# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL DECISIONS

- Deontological – *Obedient to biblical law*

‘If you love me, keep my commandments...’

John 14v15

‘Do to others what you would have them do to you,  
for this sums up the law and the prophets’

Matt 7v12



# CONSEQUENTIALIST- WHAT IS THE RESULT?



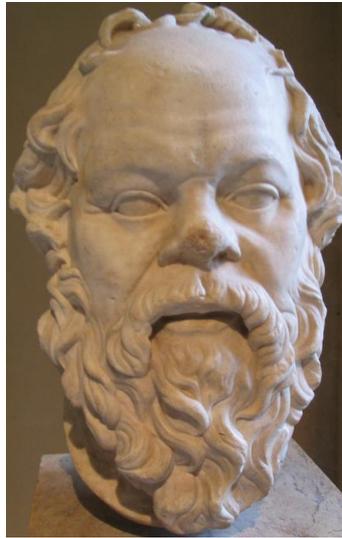
# THE RULE OF UTILITY

“That action is best which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers”



# MILL'S UTILITARIANISM

- Qualitative rather than quantitative
- Higher and lower pleasures
- “I'd rather be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied”



## MILL'S UTILITARIANISM

*'In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility'*



# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL DECISIONS

- Consequentialist – *Measured by biblical wisdom*

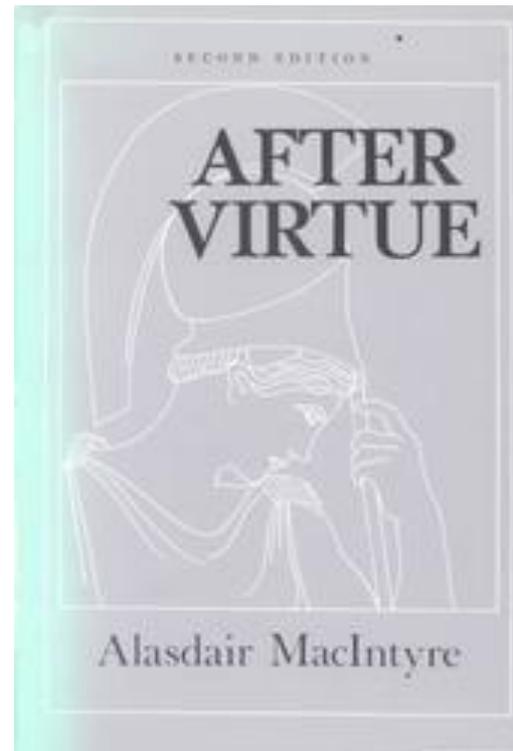
‘Wisdom is justified by its deeds...’ Lk7v35

‘Thus by their fruit you shall recognise them.’

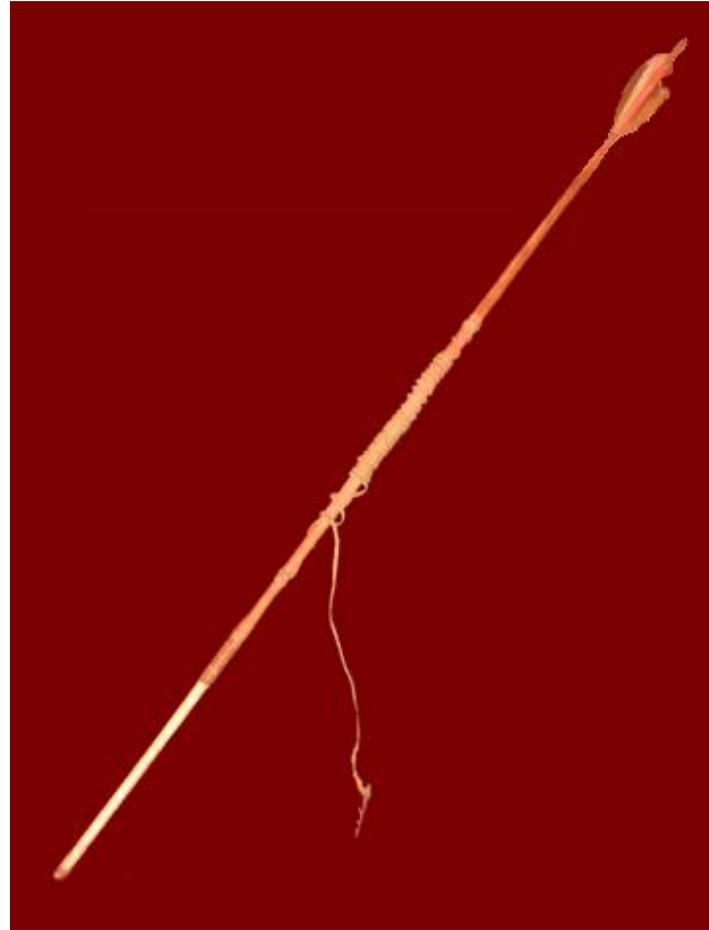
Matt7v23



# VIRTUE ETHICS – WHAT IS THE MOTIVE?



# VIRTUE ETHICS AND TELOS



# ARISTOTELIAN PURPOSE

- What is the purpose (*telos*) of humanity?



K70.2 Eros & Eudaimonia

*Eudaimonia* Flourishing

*“Human happiness is the activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue” (arete)*



# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL DECISIONS

- Virtue Ethics – *Motivated by biblical love*

‘If I have a faith that can move mountains and have not love, I am nothing’ I Cor 13v2

‘Speaking the truth in love, we will grow up..’  
Eph 5v14



# WHAT MAKES US HUMAN ACCORDING TO GENESIS 1-3 AND JOHN 1 ?

Consciousness

Conscience

Free Will

Choice

Spirit (anima, animus?)

Rationality

Feelings

Emotions

Abstraction

Thinking

Discernment

Modesty

'Nous'

Social context

Relationship

Fragility

Vulnerability

Compassion



# WHAT DOES GEN 1 -3, JOHN 1 TEACH US ABOUT HUMAN NATURE?

- Formed from dust
- Material
- Weakness
- Need each other
- Social
- Free will
- Moral choices
- Desire
- Inquisitive
- Rebellious
- Deceiving
- Blame
- Conscience
- Transcendent
- Blind spots
- Emotion
- Altruistic (or not!)
- Seekers of wisdom



# IN DEFENCE OF ECTOGENESIS – DR ANNA SMAJDOR

“Pregnancy is a condition that causes pain and suffering and that affects only women. The fact that men do not have to go through pregnancy to have a genetically related child, whereas women do, is a natural inequality.”

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”  
Gen2v23

“Male and female he created them” Gen 1v 27

“I will make your pain in childbearing very severe” Gen  
3v16



# PAIN AND SUFFERING IN PREGNANCY

- 'Women are disadvantaged through brute luck.'
- Underlying assumption is that pregnancy is an injustice rather than a privilege unique to women
- Emphasis is on technological substitution for pregnancy to make women equal to men in their bodily autonomy
- No recognition whatsoever that pain can serve any purpose and its eradication is an accepted given



## BIRTH PAINS IN SCRIPTURE

“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.” John 16v21

“ All these are the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and killed, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name....” Matt 24v9



## BIRTH PAINS IN SCRIPTURE

“Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale?” Jer 30v6

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”  
Gal 4v19



# BIRTH PAINS IN SCRIPTURE

- “The word became flesh and dwelt among us”  
John 1v14
- “So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God”. Luke 1v 36
- “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” Romans 8 22-23

