
"I am convinced that the value-free, value-neutral, value-avoiding model of science that we inherited from physics, chemistry, and astronomy," writes Abraham Maslow forcefully, "... is quite unsuitable for the scientific study of (human) life." Fr. Bernard Häring shares Maslow's conviction and wrote Ethics of Manipulation to suggest appropriate personalist values for delineating between proper use and dangerous abuse of manipulation in medicine, behavior control, and genetics.

The brief volume presents an introduction and first chapter outlining the broad theme of manipulation and common examples in education, advertising, and society at large. The second chapter offers theoretical criteria for manipulation by reviewing human values in terms of nature, person, freedom, sin, eschatology, stewardship, and the teleology of human evolution. The lengthy third and concluding chapter examines the present and potential uses of manipulation in medical practice, behavior modification, brain research, and genetics.

Fr. Häring affirms the now familiar theme that man is conscious of his own evolution and can take an active part in it. He suggests going beyond traditional moralists, including Paul Ramsey, who would use "therapy" as the only criterion for manipulative interference in human nature. "Under God," he asserts somewhat enigmatically, "man is providence for himself!" (p. 70). Thus Fr. Häring welcomes man's self-manipulation as long as this does not degrade him or diminish his own or his fellowmen's dignity and freedom. Identifying and evaluating such negative consequences may well involve mankind in perilous experiments of trial and error: a one-way street to chaos. However, in applying personalist values to current and future forms of bioethical manipulation in chapter three, Fr. Häring reflects a generally sensitive concern about the long-range consequences of manipulation. He also carefully critiques the whole B. F. Skinner model of behavior modification and the utopian ambitions of genetic engineering. He even disagrees with Paul Ramsey's recommendation against child-bearing by diabetic parents and women over thirty-five (p. 172).

Some readers will undoubtedly wish Fr. Häring's caution would preclude the non-therapeutic interventions into the reproductive process and the genetic manipulation of human intelligence which he approves. Perhaps human persons should be content with making only therapeutic interventions in their own nature since no corrective lenses will ever remedy the myopic vision of human foresight. Playing the role of divine providence with a merely human estimate of long-range consequences far exceeds sending a boy to do a man's job; it sends a creature to replace his Creator.

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Second Thoughts

According to Mr. Chas. H. Steib, Assistant Director of Government and Legal Services for the Catholic Hospital Association, "Death with Dignity" or "Right to Die" bills were considered by twenty states in 1976, and during the first five months of this year no fewer than twenty-one states saw the introduction of this type of legislation. The bills typically make use of some form of written declaration to carry out the wishes of the terminally ill person: but three states—Georgia, Kentucky, and New York—considered legislation that would employ a court petition for enforcing the patient's wishes regarding medical treatment. The state that has taken the most significant legislative action in the area is California. The so-called "Natural Death Act" was introduced February 13, 1976 by Assemblyman Barry Keene. The bill underwent amendment several times before it was signed by Gov. Jerry Brown. The law, which went into effect on January 1, 1977, is based upon a personal right to privacy of the terminally ill person. Mr. Steib reports that this piece of legislation has already undergone several unsuccessful attempts at amendment, and more amendments are predicted. Indeed, Assemblyman Keene's office and supporters of the California Act anticipate expanding the "Natural Death Act" in the future.

In a report sent to the U.S. Bishops and published in "Origins" (National Catholic News Service, Dec. 16, 1976, pp. 411-412), Msgr. James McHugh, director of the U.S. Bishops Committee for Pro-Life Activities, warned that "the active propaganda effort of the various euthanasia groups, as well as the rationale of the various sponsors of these bills, leaves little doubt that they are seen as a first step toward active euthanasia." Msgr. McHugh goes on to say that these bills are to be considered as neither necessary nor useful, but "should be actively opposed by church agencies, and should in no case be endorsed or promoted." Death with dignity legislation might be harmless in itself, but given the present context of American society in which the intrinsic value of human life is called so much into question, all such legislation must be viewed with great care.