



*The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* returns to its regular open-issue format following our Spring and Summer sequence on the recent Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas personae*.

The current issue brings a wide range of topics to the attention of our readers. Included are a comprehensive discussion of the determination of death, questions raised about the medical value of Gardasil, a critique of the moral action theory of a noted Catholic theologian, an examination of exceptions to providing tube feeding, a description of how recent changes in brain death criteria have departed from Church understanding, a defense of potential uses of artificial womb technology, and a philosophical exposition on personalism and human dignity. Four of our contributors to this issue are physicians.

The distinguished Harvard transplant surgeon Francis Delmonico, MD, opens with a brief but exacting consideration of the principal issues surrounding the medical determination of death. “The Concept of Death and Deceased Organ Donation” will serve as an important reference point for future discussions in this area. Delmonico defends the neurological criteria against its detractors, discusses the meaning of permanency, and discusses various philosophical and moral problems associated with this unified method of determining death.

Timothy Collins, MD, asks, “Is Gardasil Good Medicine?” After a description of the nature of the human papillomavirus, he considers the limited medical information available about the effectiveness of the Gardasil vaccine. Of particular concern is the lack of information about its safety, especially for children under the age of fifteen. Dr. Collins does not oppose the use of the vaccine, but he does oppose universal mandates. He also notes how the profit motive may have influenced the marketing of the product by its manufacturer.

Martin Rhonheimer’s recently published *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics* continues to provoke strong reactions. Vital conflicts are medical situations in which it appears necessary to take one life in order to save another. Fr. Benedict Guevin, OSB, challenges Rhonheimer’s analysis of these cases in “Vital Conflicts

and Virtue Ethics.” Guevin contends that the deliberate killing of an innocent cannot be excluded from the province of justice and that the distinction Rhonheimer draws between means and ends conceals an important shift in the traditional language.

Our fourth essayist, Patrick Guinan, MD, continues our journal’s discussions of tube feeding in “Is Assisted Nutrition and Hydration Always Mandated?” The reactions to the Vatican’s August 2007 “Responsum” concerning ANH for patients in a persistent vegetative state have been varied, and some commentators have interpreted the document more strictly than others. Dr. Guinan approaches the issue clinically and argues that, in some cases, tube feeding is not medically indicated because it does more harm than good.

Australian ethicist Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, in “Secularism and Loss of Consensus about the Diagnosis of Death,” offers an insightful analysis of how recent changes in the understanding of brain death have broken the unity that existed between the Catholic Church and the medical profession on this controversial subject. This breach was instigated by D. Alan Shewmon, a persistent critic of the neurological criteria, whose arguments effectively undermined the more conservative approach accepted by the Church. Questions about the persistence of “integration” after diagnoses of brain death have led some secular bodies to adopt criteria that do not require the irreversible loss of all brain function for the diagnosis of death—criteria that can be more broadly and amorphously applied than those the Church allows. This view is gaining influence in the English-speaking world and putting renewed strains on Catholic support for the neurological criteria.

David Reiber’s “The Morality of Artificial Womb Technology” takes up an issue that has not been discussed in our pages since Christopher Kaczor’s 2005 article “Could Artificial Wombs End the Abortion Debate?” Although artificial wombs do not yet exist, they are clearly on the horizon. Reiber gives us a thoughtful look at why they are likely to have several important and clearly moral uses. Although the Catholic Church has condemned the construction and use of artificial wombs as a replacement for the natural place for human conception, growth, and development within the uterus, the prospect of saving early-stage fetuses and embryos that would otherwise die is compelling indeed.

Our most philosophical entry is “The Loss of Dignity at the End of Life,” by Ashley Fernandes, MD. Dr. Fernandes returns to the personalist anthropology of Karol Wojtyła and Gabriel Marcel to illuminate the idea of incommunicability that stands at the center of human dignity. He sees this as an enduring value that reveals why euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide are wrong. Fernandes takes note of recent attacks on dignity by secular authors such as Steven Pinker. These critics do not realize that dignity is an inherent rather than attributed property of the person. The author reviews John F. Crosby’s critique of the Kantian notion of dignity as abstract reason, and contrasts this with dignity as present in the immediacy of lived experience. This actor-oriented approach leads to a concept of dignity as an ongoing response to a call.

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