In “The Face of the Other,” Rev. Paul Check, executive director of Courage International, addresses homosexuality from within the mind and heart of the Church. He emphasizes the dignity of the person and the virtue of chastity. Using personal narratives from individuals, drawn from a new film called *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, Check discusses the pastoral care of those who experience same-sex attraction. He contrasts two narratives at work in society: one says that man is made for pleasure and the other that man is made for fulfillment. Chastity in the first narrative means “restraint,” while in the second it means “freedom and peace.”

In “Can We Be Pro-life and Pro-contraception?,” Lloyd Scott follows the link between the use of contraception and the rise of abortion. The two are clearly connected, thus raising the question of whether those within the pro-life movement who support contraceptive use are undermining their cause. There are many reasons why contraception fails, but they are all connected to the philosophical view that sexual activity can occur safely without the possibility of pregnancy. The solution is not the proper use of contraception—which has been advanced for many years without result—but sexual restraint. Contraception itself is a major part of the problem that leads to staggering numbers of abortions each year.

“Deplantation of the Placenta in Maternal–Fetal Vital Conflicts” is by participants in a 2013 colloquium who were also signatories to the resulting consensus statement, “Medical Intervention in Cases of Maternal–Fetal Vital Conflicts,” which appeared in the Autumn 2014 issue. They write here in response to an essay in the Spring 2015 issue by Jay Bringman, MD, and Robert Shabanowitz, “The Placenta as a Fetal Organ.” The colloquium participants argue that Bringman and Shabanowitz do not succeed in refuting their analysis and that the critique fails to acknowledge that the consensus statement addresses the life-threatening danger to the mother that results from a weakened heart. The authors do not argue that early induction will treat the mother’s disease but only that it will alleviate the immediate crisis. They also contend that Bringman and Shabanowitz do not properly apply the principle of double effect in these extremely difficult cases.
John Di Camillo and Edward Furton, in “Early Induction and Double Effect,” take a mixed view of the debate between the colloquium authors on the one side and Bringman and Shabanowitz on the other. Di Camillo and Furton agree with the general conclusion of the colloquium authors, that early induction of labor in cases where the life of the mother and child are in danger is not intrinsically evil, but they appreciate the concerns of Bringman and Shabanowitz about the need for further clinical data, more clearly defined limits on the use of early induction, and further reflection before establishing policy.

Should patents be granted for discoveries involving the human genome? “Human Gene Patents and Human Dignity,” by Stephanie To, explores this question. Taking promising new research into β-thalassemia major as her example, she argues that patents on human genes are incompatible with the Catholic view of human dignity because they commodify the body. Several gene patents have recently been obtained in connection with this research. Generally, the courts have ruled that naturally occurring genes are not patentable. This accords with Catholic teaching. Whether this reasoning will prevail, and the commodification of human genetic material be avoided, depends on how society and the courts understand the idea of “naturally occurring.”

“Distinguishing Terminal Sedation from Euthanasia,” by Patrick Smith, criticizes an insufficiently nuanced approach to this distinction by Torbjörn Tännsjö. If palliative or terminal sedation falls into a moral category distinct from euthanasia, then there must be a clear difference between the two procedures. Tännsjö rejects active euthanasia but believes that we should tolerate a failure to act even when the intent is to kill the patient. This is, he says, morally acceptable and legally permissible. In other words, Tännsjö says the intention to bring about the death of a person by a failure to act is in some cases morally permissible. Smith points out that Tännsjö does not successfully maintain the distinction between act and omission. Tännsjö also does not successfully protect the principle of the sanctity of life, though he professes an interest in doing so, and his appeal to the principle of double effect fails to justify the practice of palliative sedation to unconsciousness. Smith shows that Tännsjö’s argument for palliative sedation is an argument for slow euthanasia.

“Practical Truth and Its First Principles in the Theory of Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis,” by Rev. Stephen Brock, continues our intermittent series of critiques of new natural law theory. Brock focuses on the difference between theoretical and practical knowledge. According to the new theorists, theoretical knowledge results from the conformity of the mind to reality, but practical knowledge is effectuated by the mind. The first tells us what “is” the case, while the second describes what “is to be” the case. The new theorists would say that, properly speaking, deriving an “ought” from an “is” is impossible. Immorality, therefore, does not result in the violation of an objective state of affairs but is a failure to follow reason’s inner direction. Brock offers important criticisms of this theory, showing for example that it underestimates the importance of the first principle of practical reason, that its description of “basic goods” cannot be separated from the larger goal of human fulfillment, and that the theoretical and practical orders stand in the same relation to truth.

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