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To Treat or Not To Treat? Bioethics and the Handicapped Newborn

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human situations can so interact that affirmations about God become "conditions of possibility" in people. This enables "foundational" preaching, i.e., preaching which at basic levels connects faith and life for today's pluralistic and secularized hearers. It is, admittedly, not a new homiletic (it is essentially thematic) but his concern is to undergird and deepen homiletical practice theologically so that the "unnoticed presence of the transcendent dimension—at least as a question—[is exposed] in every aspect of human life" (16).

The homilies are on the lections for the 34 Sundays "in ordinary time" which, in Roman Catholic usage, means Sundays which do not fall within any of the great liturgical seasons. The scholar wins out over the pastor, however. It is rewarding to see contemporary biblical exegesis shared frankly (including Hebrew and Greek words and their nuances), to encounter an agile theological mind opening insights and making connections, and to observe a steady hand picking a theme (usually from the Gospel) and tracking it out with the help of First and Second Lessons without forcing or bending. Still, these homilies appeal finally to the mind, and human experience as well as doctrine are conceptualized. Preachers will find these homilies helpful as expositional and interpretative aids to the "ordinary time" lections, Cycle B.

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To Treat or Not To Treat? Bioethics and the Handicapped Newborn

Richard C. Sparks

New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988

Richard C. Sparks addresses a very difficult and yet contemporary dilemma for bioethics. The singular thrust of his text is focussed on the ethical question, "On what basis is it moral to forego or cease further treatment of a handicapped newborn?"

Even though the content of this book is purposely intended for a specific readership, the author does make a meaningful contribution to the study of bioethics. This resource will likely be of greatest benefit for those who grapple with the thorny ethical questions revolving around the treatment decisions of handicapped newborns: bioethicists, students of bioethics, and neonatal medical clinicians. It may also prove useful to hospital chaplains and pastors helping people make such decisions.

This text is not intended to be the definitive word on the subject, but is to be used "as an analytical tool, a helpful framework to foster civil discourse and clarifying argument among advocates of opposing ethical viewpoints. This goal the author accomplishes, making significant contribution

in the structure and the process incorporated in the ordering of his text. Sparks enables the reader to probe into the issue.

He posits a spectrum between two hypothetical moral positions: "at the far right ... of the spectrum would be absolute vitalism ... and at the far left ... of the spectrum would be the unbridled libertarian approach to nontreatment decisions [of] absolute autonomy" Between these hypothetical absolutes, one can subsume four standards or "types" which encompass the moral spectrum as it relates to treatment decisions regarding handicapped infants. These four types are: 1) a medical indications policy; 2) a means-related approach to ordinary/extraordinary means; 3) the projected quality of the patient's life; and 4) a socially-weighted benefit/burden calculus. By applying the "operative components" of burden, benefit, patient's best interest, and social factors, Sparks is able to analyze any distinctions that are made among these four typologies.

The book is structured so that each chapter is somewhat of a "self-contained unit" and is numbered so that the reader can align each type to the appropriate chapter. Moving from "right" to "left" along the moral spectrum, Sparks thus provides an ordered framework for investigation. In the concluding chapter the author sets forth his own position which he maintains is "a multi-leveled interpretation of the patient's well-being or personal best interest. This is helpful in acknowledging a phenomenological approach to the issue.

For the most part the strengths of Sparks' text outweigh any deficiencies, but two difficulties emerged for this reviewer. First, Sparks introduced some novel terminology (e.g. "transbiological") which he does not explicitly define for the reader, instead trusting that the reader will be able to discern the meaning. One can never be certain whether one has connected with the author's own meaning for the word! Second, the text had a cumbersome and tedious feel to this reviewer which made it difficult to read through and digest its content.

Still, the strengths of the book overcome these minor weaknesses. It provides a good review and critique of the arguments for the four ethical standards under consideration. This is a useful tool because these arguments do not apply only to treatment decisions for handicapped newborns, but also to issues of bioethics in general. The text is also useful because it does not intend to give a conclusive position on the issue but to provide a helpful outline which invites the reader to engage in an evaluative, analytical decision-making process about treatment decisions. In this regard the text is invaluable.

The author's own attempt to maintain a position based on "the quality of the newborn's life in terms of physiological, psychological, social and spiritual potential" reflects his concern that the decision to accept or forego treatment ("To treat or not to treat?") "should always remain a patient-centered, life-respecting question." Emphatically, this does not predetermine the "way" to resolving this issue, but surely opens the door for one's own personal investigation and study.

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