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Brief Remarks on Engelhardt's After God

This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1696846> since 2019-04-08T14:53:35Z

Published version:

DOI:10.1093/jmp/jhy029

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A short critique of Engelhardt's *After God*

1. An outlook at the book.

Engelhardt's *After God* is a thick (454 pages) and wonderful book, which gives a comprehensive perspective on the deepest and hardest issues in moral philosophy and bioethics of our times. It should be clear that "bioethics" indicates not the simple analysis of a list of issues such as whether abortion (or euthanasia, etc.) is to be prohibited or permitted: bioethical issues are taken as the battlefield of a great divide in morality itself. In this sense, bioethics is the frontline of the moral change that is going on in our time. As Engelhardt writes, "the conflicts of the contemporary culture wars are not just disputes about particular normative issues. They are more importantly conflicts regarding the character and force of morality itself" (247). Better than anything else, bioethics makes clear the implicit philosophy of our life-world, which in the West it is nowadays taken for granted. **It is important to know why it is so.**

The book is the reframing of a series of lectures that Engelhardt gave in Italy in 2014, where he had been travelling for about a month. So he resorts to some biographical notes, Engelhardt remembers his first journey to Italy in 1954, while the original parts of the book have been written 60 years later, in 2014, during a journey through Italy. The remark is that that world has disappeared, and that Engelhardt focuses his attention on the major changes we are living with an unprecedented speed.

The book is a monument of culture and sharpness, keeping together hundreds of titles in all major languages. It is worth reading because it is an intelligent critique to contemporary moral philosophy in favor of a kind of traditionalism. I admire the style and also the force of the arguments, but still I disagree on the main points and here I want to clear where.

2. The great change in morality and bioethics.

It is true that the world changed very quickly. As Engelhardt remarks, in 1954 when he arrived for the first time in Italy "The moral and metaphysical texture of the then-dominant life-world was radically different [from now]. There was a pronounced folk piety" (57). In contrast, and most significantly, in 2014 "the dominant culture of Italy, indeed of the West, is now profoundly secular. It is framed as if God did not exist [... and] makes no claim to be anchored in the transcendent order of things. Or to put matters more starkly, the dominant secular culture positively eschews any grounding in the transcendent. Indeed, there is no public reflection on, much less a recognition of, the importance of the transcendent. The dominant culture is without foundations" (58). A major consequence is that the life-world of 1954 "was a world where even within the public square one could still speak of sin" (59).

"it is clear that we are in a new age" even if "the contours and implications of this new state of affairs are far from clear. A distinctly new dominant culture is in place" (63). In order to give an idea of what is new, only some numbers: One is that the number of atheist increased significantly, to the point that the Cambridge Companion of Atheism reports that in the world there are about 950.000 millions of atheists, people declaring that they do not believe in any transcendent god. This means that David Hume's thesis was flatly wrong in assuming that atheism was destined to remain for small elites. For the first time in history we have to acknowledge that atheism is a spontaneous mass phenomenon.

A recent report published in 2017 (referring to 2016) states that 60.1% says to be Roman Catholic. The amount of all the other religious groups (jews, muslims, other Christians, buddists, ecc.) is about 6.5%; while 33.4% says that is not religious at all. In a sense, Italy is still a country of Roman Catholics, but they are in rapid decrease: **in 2000 the Catholics were**

79.2% and in about 15 years they lost 19.1% which has gone mainly to non-belivers or atheists. In 2000 they were 18.8% while now they reached 33.4%: this means that only a tiny fractions of Roman Catholics migrates towards other forms of Christianity or other religions, but that they become atheists, which is the faster growing "religion". A practical result of this situation is that in Italy in the last 5 years 55 parishes have been cancelled for non attendance: about one each month.

On the other hand, we have to consider that "Enough cultural residue remains from Western Christendom and the Enlightenment that many people, bioethicists included, do not yet see how starkly different life is once it is lived after God, after metaphysics, and after foundations" (45). In this situation it is crucial to reflect on how life will be in order to act accordingly. Engelhardt notes that "Even though Christendom has fallen and lies in ruins, Christianity still has its partisans living in its rubble, struggling to maintain the integrity of Christian subcultures. They are loyal to norms embedded in the will of God. In the ruins of Christendom, traditional Christians will continue to wage cultural guerilla wars of resistance against the dominant secular culture and the secular fundamentalist states that this secular culture supports" (45). It is not simply a kind of guerilla-resistance to slow the dominance of secular culture: it could be an example to start a reversal. It may occur that culture are transformed in a short time, as happened with the fall of Berlin's wall and the Brexit, which challenges the same persistence of the European Union.

3. consequence of the new situation for morality.

Apart from statistical numbers, there is another reason supporting the current situation, i.e. the fact that the Western way of thinking is eschewing religion. This is far more important, than the bare numbers. It is that our basic attitude is directed to avoid any transcendent or religious analysis. In this sense Engelhardt's remark is certainly true: "Never before has there been a large-scale, politically established culture that explicitly acted as if God did not exist, as if all were without ultimate meaning. No culture like this existed before the 20th century" (p. 28). This situation is rooted in the fact that in our scientific outlook leads us to avoid (or not to think to) god. We experience it very often in our life: if we feel sick, we ask a doctor and we are confident in science. We do not think in religious or metaphysical terms: our world view is structured in such a way that we look at the world in a secularized perspective. We may resort to religion only if science is giving up.

The synergy between the two lines (numbers of atheists and frame of thinking) leads to two major consequences. The first is that in the West at least there is a loss in the meaning of life. As Engelhardt writes, "The now-dominant culture eschews any point of transcendent orientation. Officially, all is approached as if there were no ultimate significance. All is to be regarded as if ultimately coming from nowhere, going nowhere, and for no enduring purpose. Within the now-dominant secular culture, one is to approach morality, bioethics, law, public policy, and ordinary life guided by an atheistic, or at least an agnostic, methodological postulate. That is, one acts according to the postulate that God does not exist. The public forum, as well as discourse within the public space, has been relocated fully within the horizon of the finite and the immanent, so that all mention of the transcendent is ruled out of order. A new fabric of public cultural reality now dominates. The recognition of sin has been erased from the public square. Any recognition of God has been erased. This volume explores this radically new cultural territory and its implications for morality, bioethics, and political authority" (28).

The second consequences is a deep change in the structure of morality itself. As Engelhardt repeats **"247: the conflicts of the contemporary culture wars are not just disputes about particular normative issues. They are more importantly conflicts regarding the character and force of morality itself.** In particular, the cardinal conflicts turn on the

dominant secular culture's demoralization and deflation of traditional morality and bioethics, where demoralization has now become integral to a secular social-democratic political agenda". Again, "The cardinal difference between then and now turns not just on a difference regarding certain norms, but much more on a change in the very nature of public morality. It turns not just on the force and meaning of norms, but on the contemporary requirement that the public square must be free of any mention of God. As a consequence, public moral discourse had a very different character (59): **THIS IS WRONG. The difference is not in the content of norms, but in the quality of the prohibition.**

The final resort of this situation is that in this new world, we are We are in new and strange territory. Until the 20th century, there had never been a culture fully without God, without some transcendent anchor. Many persons have lived as if there were no God, but no large-scale culture has ever affirmed ultimate meaninglessness (435). In this new reality we can ask: "27 What can one make of one's own life and any "obligation" to obey the law when all is viewed as ultimately meaningless?" one has to realize that "All personal relationships are radically recast within a discourse of immanence. Nothing any longer has ultimate meaning. What this portends for the societies of the future is far from clear" (435). In particular it is debatable whether morality can persist: this is the question of Engelhardt's book: "this volume asks if this new culture's morality, bioethics, and political structure are stable and sustainable. Do we face a major crisis in the secular culture with important implications for how we can understand bioethics? **Can the project of morality with bioethics continue without foundations, while prescindng from ultimate meaning? Is society sustainable when set fully within the horizon of the finite and the immanent?"** (32).

Engelhardt does not give a precise and definitive answer, but "The question remains, how long can such a secular *modus vivendi* be maintained? **Is a society after God sustainable? [...] can the social-democratic *modus vivendi* after God continue? At the very least, the future is opaque** 432.

Two are the major points on which Engelhardt focuses his attention. After god, everything loses meaning and we are forced to realize that human existence is a nonsense. This awareness not only changes in a radical way our relationships, but has also a more relevant implication: it deflates our morality, that loses its role in human life. The final consequence is that humankind can perish.

4. An answer to the objections.

The first remark is that without god, every thing is meaningless. This is our reality where "All is to be regarded as if ultimately coming from nowhere, going nowhere, and for no enduring purpose" (28). If there is no mention of the transcendent, which is the only point able to provide stability, then the whole social fabric has to be reconsidered, and morality is deeply transformed.

Let's consider now the first part of the thesis. Why

This is an old argument that Engelhardt refresh with an intense rhetoric. Is it true, however, that after god humankind is fooling around with no point and no sense? Which is the source of meaning. Certainly it is not in the bare matter. It stems from a kind of intelligence capable of abstraction and self-awareness. So far, the only kind of intelligence we have is human intelligence. It is notorious that in the Western tradition non-human animals are reckoned unable of abstraction, and this is not the place of examining issues of artificial intelligence, even if the point could be very useful to understand how meanings work.

According to our philosophical tradition, human intelligence in some sense has something divine or even derives from divine intelligence, which is more powerful than ours. So the meaning of life and the meaning of the world derives from the fact that the universe was created and the creator impressed in the things project which is the meaning of life. Now, it is debated whether there is such a meaning, and how it can be discovered or detected. These are difficult issues which cannot be examined here. Certainly secularization is the great process that leads to exempt such a meaning. And science seems to support the idea that there is no intelligent project in the world, of a blind watchmaker.

Be as it is, there is a further problem, which is that the meaning of life must be in armony with the meaning impressed by the creator. This is problematic and has to do

by the Creator. In this sense, a person can find one's own meaning of life only if he/she is in armony with the project of god.

First of all a remark on the future of humankind. Our commonsens leads us to think that if humanity will continue as it occurred in the past. According to this view, in order to survive we have to do nothing but let's things go as always. However, now we know that this is wrong: any species is limited, and even our humankind is destined to die out.

This means that we have to change and not to keep our roots.

The problem is that Western morality in the Middle Ages “(apart from the *via moderna*, especially with William of Ockham) in general embraced the rationalistic horn of Euthyphro's dilemma, holding that God affirmed the good, the right, and the virtuous because they are so and are independent of Him (230). In this perspective “morality and eventually even bioethics for Roman Catholicism emerged in the West as a third thing between God and man” (230), and this project continued in the Enlightenment and further. The result is that nowadays we debate about “Christian values” and their proper place in the European Union constitution, assuming that the language of values provides “a *lingua franca* available without a recognition of the God Who lives and commands” (70). In reality, “The language of values reduces religion to its cultural significance [... and] reflects the secularization of religion in the West. Traditional Christians and Jews, for example, do not have “values” but a God Who commands (“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”—Matthew 28:20).” (70).

Fino qui.

“With this collapse of Roman Catholicism, the public space of the West has been redefined. Within this secular public space, as we have seen, secular bioethics has been demoralized and deflated, leading to the question of what this will mean for Roman Catholic and more specific Western Christian bioethics” (322).

God is important for reasons other than worship. God provides a meaning and final perspective outside of, and independent of, particular, transient, socio-historically conditioned communities and their narratives. Indeed, without a God's-eye perspective, there

is in principle no vantage point from which to consider one morality to be canonical, that is, as anything more than one among a plurality of socio-historically conditioned moral vantage points. (71). "morality and eventually even bioethics for Roman Catholicism emerged in the West as a third thing between God and man. Morality, at least for modernity and the Enlightenment, became what it had been for most Greek philosophers, namely, a fabric of norms that were supposedly derivable from and justified by philosophy apart from a recognition of God. The Western Middle Ages (apart from the *via moderna*, especially with William of Ockham) in general embraced the rationalistic horn of Euthyphro's dilemma, holding that God affirmed the good, the right, and the virtuous because they are so and are independent of Him (230)

The reason for such a situation is the failure of the great project launched by Roman Catholicism, with its rationalism. That program failed at first with the Reformation and the splitting of Western Christianity. Protestants accept a form of secularism and they are in the lead of the greater failure, represented by the Enlightenment project. We have now to recognize that this project failed as well, and that even the human rights perspective is at most a form of ethnocentric view. "The recognition of the failure of the Western moral-philosophical project is a cultural event as momentous as the Renaissance and the Reformation. The aspiration had been to provide the modern secular state with a secular moral authority secured by reason through philosophical arguments that could be recognized by all persons as conclusive. The secular state would then enjoy a canonical moral authority, as well as a canonical account of secular constitutionalism. The faith in moral philosophy that lies at the roots of Roman Catholicism also lies at the roots of contemporary secularism (44)

"Enough cultural residue remains from Western Christendom and the Enlightenment that many people, bioethicists included, do not yet see how starkly different life is once it is lived after God, after metaphysics, and after foundations. The demoralization and deflation of morality and bioethics, as well as the delegitimization of political authority // deprived of a God's-eye perspective, are only beginning adequately to be recognized. This volume explores the collapse of the moral-philosophical illusion and its consequences for bioethics. Most significant is the severance of morality, bioethics, and state authority from any hint of ultimate meaning. Because the contemporary dominant secular culture is after God, secular moral reflection must approach everything as if it came from nowhere, were going nowhere, and existed for no ultimate purpose. The point is not simply that in a godless universe there is no necessary retribution for immense, unrepented- for acts of evil. More fundamentally, all in the end is simply ultimately meaningless. At various levels, many already appreciate some of the implications of the absence of foundations for the now-dominant secular culture. As Judd Owen observes²³: "Today, belief in the comprehensive philosophic teaching of the Enlightenment appears to lie in ruins, and few hope that any other comprehensive philosophy could successfully replace it. This despair is, to a considerable extent, due to a radical critique of reason as such" (Owen 2001, p. 1). The full and consummate force of this surdness is still adequately to be gauged and acknowledged. This volume takes a step in that direction. It explores the geography and implications of this quite new moral, bioethical, and political terrain in all its God-forsakenness. Even though Christendom has fallen and lies in ruins, Christianity still has its partisans living in its rubble, struggling to maintain the integrity of Christian subcultures. They are loyal to norms embedded in the will of God. In the ruins of Christendom, traditional Christians will continue to wage cultural guerilla wars of resistance against the dominant secular culture and the secular fundamentalist states that this secular culture supports (Engelhardt 2010a, 2010b). The issues of bioethics are central to the battles in these culture wars (Hunter 1991)." (45).

This situation is a very difficult one, because it is not sure that society itself will survive. Engelhardt never makes it explicit but there are several allusions since he asks it insistently. It is as if society will collapse: “this volume asks if this new culture’s morality, bioethics, and political structure are stable and sustainable. Do we face a major crisis in the secular culture with important implications for how we can understand bioethics? Can the project of morality with bioethics continue without foundations, while prescinding from ultimate meaning? Is society sustainable when set fully within the horizon of the finite and the immanent? This book ends with this puzzle” (32).

Instead of focusing on single issues of bioethics, Engelhardt considers the whole, i.e. the direction of moral philosophy and bioethics, the latter field considered as the ethical flower of such culture. The point can be stated like this: the
Hume was wrong.
But it is not the quantity, it is the quality of thinking because

I agree that morality changed structure. But this is because the terms “moral” and its synonymous “ethical” have two meanings: one is the old one connected to a religion, which is a private conviction which cannot be presented in the public arena. The other is the new one which is assimilated to a sort of etiquette of sound living. Assume that someone tells you that he/she cannot come to the meeting because of health problems: the privacy-rule is so strong that none would dare to ask about the kind of troubles, unless he/she is a very close friend. This is the new morality, which is connected to the moral duty of avoiding situations which might cause discomfort.

Chapter two: demoralization and deflation of morality

In 1954 “The moral and metaphysical texture of the then-dominant life-world was radically different. There was a pronounced folk piety” (57).

Most significantly for this volume, the dominant culture of Italy, indeed of the West, is now profoundly secular. It is framed as if God did not exist. It is not just that the public space is robustly after Christendom. In addition, the dominant secular culture makes no claim to be anchored in the transcendent order of things. Or to put matters more starkly, the dominant secular culture positively eschews any grounding in the transcendent. Indeed, there is no public reflection on, much less a recognition of, the importance of the transcendent. The dominant culture is without foundations” (58).

Europe and Italy have a public // life-world that is different in kind from Italy and Europe of 1954. In that June of 1954 I had entered into a way of life about both to be undone and to be radically marginalized. The public moral assumptions were substantively other than the Europe of the first decade of the third millennium. It was a world where even within the public square one could still speak of sin (58-59)

Using the metaphor of paradigms, we have to say that “Our experience of reality is shaped by our commitments regarding the deep ontology of things, the character of being, how one knows reality, who the expert knowers are, and, in the case of morality and bioethics, what the cardinal goods are, and in what ranking. These commitments provide the framework of our life-worlds. With regard to the place of God and Christianity in the dominant culture, there has been a change in taken-for-granted ontology, moral epistemology, sociology of moral experts (in 1954 it had included theo- logians), and axiology. There has been a transformation

of the public cultural understanding regarding that about which one should feel guilt, shame, and/or embarrassment. This foundational recasting had been developing for more than two centuries, and in the last half-century it came thoroughgoingly to define public discourse. The very life-world of Western Europe and the Americas has changed. The texture and character of the two life-worlds (1954 and the present) are literally worlds apart.

The then-dominant traditional morality claimed a metaphysical anchor in natural law, in being as it is in itself. The now-dominant culture in contrast asserts moral claims based on moral intuitions that are held to be self-evident, at least within its narrative, which intuitions are claimed to be as good as the revelations of God. The secular moral narrative is ultimately foundationless (60).

The dominant secular culture, as a result, is clearing away not just the remnants of Christendom, but of any public recognition of God.¹⁰ Given the background circumstance that European culture for a millennium and a half has been defined by Christendom, this secularization involves a dramatic rearticulation of public discourse and public institutions. **Modernity had attempted to preserve Christian morality without Christianity and without Christ, but usually with some form of deism.** There is now a fully post-Christian, post-deist laicist age whose increasingly secular fundamentalist, post-Christian culture is aggressively after God (62).

Although it is clear that we are in a new age, the contours and implications of this new state of affairs are far from clear. A distinctly new dominant culture is in place. There are substantive points of conflict between the now-dominant secular culture and the culture of Christendom it displaced ... In this new context, Richard Rorty could but regard devout traditional Christians as crazy (Rorty 1991, pp. 187, 190f). (63)

The established public morality bearing on sexual relations, pair bonding, reproduction, and the meaning of marriage was thus altered, with implications far beyond sexual relations. The geography of moral authority changed. In particular, the traditional authority of fathers and husbands was brought into question. How men and women tended to relate to each other changed as well (153)

“if men have easy access to sex, men will not be as motivated to marry, much less remain bonded to one woman. The ethos of sexual liberation instructed and encouraged young women to adopt a different approach to sexual intercourse, changing the strategies that once encouraged stable monogamy. Casual sexual relations were valorized as authentic expressions of a young woman’s freedom from arbitrary parental authority and outworn cultural norms. With the advent of cheap and effective contraception, along with the availability of abortion, combined with a cultural endorsement of sexual self-fulfillment and self-realization, and in the face of the sexual passions of youth, college sexual life-styles, indeed sexual life-styles in general, were transformed. 154

A culture emerged that marginalized the disciplinary, authoritative father who preserved the virginity of his daughters. Sexual urges that have always been notoriously difficult to discipline and contain found an affirmation in this newly dominant secular ethos of sexual self-realization, self-satisfaction, self-fulfillment, and self-expression. 156.

Muslim countries have not been secularized in the ways that have transformed Western Europe and the Americas. In short, while there has been secularization, it has been trivial in comparison with what has occurred in the West. Over the last half-century, there has even

been a desecularization of the dominant culture within the Muslim cultural sphere. This Muslim counter-example to the seemingly inexorable march of secularization is rooted in a number of factors (232).

247: the conflicts of the contemporary culture wars are not just disputes about particular normative issues. They are more importantly conflicts regarding the character and force of morality itself. In particular, the cardinal conflicts turn on the dominant secular culture's demoralization and deflation of traditional morality and bioethics, where demoralization has now become integral to a secular social-democratic political agenda. Against this background, refusals to provide medical services that support lifestyles that the secular culture has accepted underscore not just an alternative moral or // bioethical vision, or simply a rejection of the demoralization of traditional morality demanded by the dominant secular culture. They are in addition reactionary political acts that threaten to remoralize the public space. They refuse to accept the definitive judgment of the state regarding health care policy. 247-48.

"The common morality is a social institution with a code of learnable norms. Like languages and political constitutions, the common morality exists before we are instructed in its relevant rules and // regulations. As we develop beyond infancy, we learn moral rules along with other social rules, such as laws. Later in life, we learn to distinguish general social rules held in common by members of society from particular social rules fashioned for and binding on the members of special groups, such as the members of a profession (Beauchamp & Childress 1994, p. 6). In Engelhardt 276-77

The political construal of secular morality and bioethics allows one better to appreciate the success of clinical ethics, despite intractable moral pluralism, despite intractable moral disagreements. Clinical bioethics succeeds by making reference not to a canonical morality or to a political agenda, but to that ethics currently established at law and in public policy. The success of clinical bioethics lies in the circumstance that the ethics about which secular clinical ethicists are experts is that ethics that is *actually* established in a polity through law and public policy. Despite intractable moral pluralism, clinical ethicists can nevertheless be experts about those mores and/or norms established at law and in public policy. Clinical ethicists are not anthropological or sociological experts able to establish which norms are widely held, nor are they able to show, were they to know those norms, what would morally follow from such an anthropological or sociological fact of the matter of the norms being widely held. Clinical ethicists would need canonical, secular, sound rational arguments that do not exist. It is about these norms that there are disputes in most large-scale societies, which lie at the roots of political controversies (283).

Roman Catholicism, in that it is the largest and by far the most organized of the Christianities. Moreover, it is the origin of secular bioethics (297)

Roman Catholicism had experienced a truly astonishing rupture from its pre-Vatican II past, leading to a recasting of the self-identity of the world's largest Christian denomination. There had been a wide-ranging paradigm change. Many Roman Catholics were astonished by the speed, drama, and depth of the changes, not to mention their consequences for the integrity of Roman Catholicism. One might think of a 1971 somewhat polemical volume by John Eppstein, *Has the Catholic Church Gone Mad?* (Eppstein 1971), which was published with a *nihil obstat* and an *imprimatur*, no less. The way in which ordinary Roman Catholic life, and in particular the life of priests and religious, was experienced, was radically changed. One had entered into a new and unfamiliar life-world. There had been a secularization and a recasting of moorings

whose implications were at the time largely unclear.

Rapid changes in norms of Christian piety, liturgy, spirituality, demography, and the nature of scholarship in the 19th and 20th centuries led in Western Christianity to an equally dramatic salience of widespread foundational theological uncertainties, producing pervasive religious identity crises and changes in the dominant Christian ethos, which had been integral to the dominant Western ethos before its secularization. The dominant Western culture, which had been Christian, became robustly post-Christian. 306

The dramatic cultural shift following Vatican II involved a foundational desacralization of core elements of Western culture that were transformed both by the absence of once substantive bonds with the past and by the presence of a new, post-traditional Roman Catholicism. An important sense of holiness disappeared. For example, there was no longer the asperges of the congregation with holy water that prior to Vatican II and its changes had preceded High Mass on Sunday in many parishes. Age-old pieties ranging from fish on Friday, remnants of the Lenten fast, and Masses in Latin, to the priest facing east disappeared, creating a significant cultural vacuum. The result was that the life-world of Roman Catholicism was starkly altered, a life-world that had maintained many important connections with the religious life of the Middle Ages and // even elements from the first millennium. The Reformation had finally come to Roman Catholicism. In addition, the desacralization of the largest Christian denomination in the West constituted a new post-traditional presence in substitution for what had been a sustaining force. The culture was thus affected by both the removal of important historical connections and the emergence of a significantly different religious body (306-7)

On the 29th of June, 1972, Pope Paul VI made the following candid but nevertheless astonishing statement: "It was believed that after the Council there would be a day of sunshine in the history of the Church. There came instead a day of clouds, storm and darkness, of search and uncertainty. Through some fissure the smoke of Satan has entered the Temple of God."¹⁴ Vatican II and Pope Paul VI had succeeded in letting loose forces that for centuries had been building up in Roman Catholicism (Hull 2010, p. 216–229). Vatican II and the new Pauline Mass acted as a catalyst that set off a chain reaction. " 'Auto-demolition' was Pope Paul VI's description of the suicidal movement ravaging the Roman Church in the 1970s" (Hull 2010, p. 188). On July 31, 1975, Pope Paul VI abruptly removed Bugnini from his authority over liturgical reform.¹⁵ Paradoxically, although Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI recognized individual problems associated with Vatican II and its aftermath, they lacked the courage forthrightly to acknowledge that Vatican II had radically undermined Roman Catholicism. However, it must be acknowledged that then-Cardinal Ratzinger saw the connection between the change in the Liturgy and the crisis in Roman Catholicism: "I am convinced that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing is to a large extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy" (Ratzinger 1998, p. 148). 312

The collapse of the old paradigm, as well as the genesis of the new field of bioethics with its new paradigm of morality and scholarship, can only be appreciated against the background of Vatican II, along with the ecclesial and intellectual crises it engendered, leading to a change in the paradigm for the discipline of medical ethics. 319

The bioethics born of Roman Catholicism was grounded in fully secular moral commitments and premises. The modern secular phenomenon of bioethics, while still drawing on a faith in reason from Roman Catholicism, recast its sense of moral rationality in order to adapt and to fill the scholarly ecological niche in Roman Catholicism that had once been filled by the

Another way to put the matter is that the new Pauline liturgy created a new religious space within which traditional morality and dogma did not fit. The loss of congregants and vocations with and after Vatican II was a function of a change of life-world, an abandonment of a paradigm for life that left many Roman Catholics without a bond to the new Roman Catholicism. The rupture has been deep and abrupt. The post-Vatican II recasting of the life-world of Roman Catholicism did not produce a new Pentecost, as had been promised. The reforms satisfied the personal emotional and intellectual needs of the reformers, but not that of enough of the ordinary congregants, leading to a profound disconnection, which was followed by a loss of laity and vocations. According to any objective criteria, the post-Vatican II changes were highly counter-productive. The demographic decline has been dramatic (Jones 2003). With this collapse of Roman Catholicism, the public space of the West has been redefined. Within this secular public space, as we have seen, secular bioethics has been demoralized and deflated, leading to the question of what this will mean for Roman Catholic and more specific Western Christian bioethics. Will Roman Catholic bioethics also be demoralized and thus set within a “weak” moral theology? 322

John Paul II made the wrong diagnosis and offered the wrong therapy. He failed to stem the loss of congregants.

That a post-modern turn is underway in Roman Catholicism is supported by the pope’s recent statements and interviews, as well as by his Apostolic Exhortation of November 24, 2013 (Francis 2013). In the reflections that follow, Pope Francis is interpreted not as a bumbling or incautious speaker, or as an uninformed author. As his successful ecclesiastical career demonstrates, Pope Francis is an experienced and intelligent man who has an agenda developed over a lifetime. In this essay, he is interpreted as speaking and writing to support a considered set of goals that has wide-ranging implications for morality, bioethics, and health care policy. There is no reason to assume that he is making things up on the spot. In this chapter, Pope Francis is approached as a person who knows what he is doing. Like Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, he is committed to a media papacy, although with an Argentine populist overlay. He seeks to proceed in a pastoral mode, but without dogmatic emphasis on the constraints of the traditional morality and bioethics regarding sexuality, reproduction, and end-of-life decision-making. This pastoral turn through which no doctrine is officially set aside or changed, but through which some doctrines are ignored and then forgotten, will reframe the geography of Roman Catholic moral theological commitments (e.g., allowing Roman Catholics to receive communion after divorce and remarriage, but without the necessary annulment). 338

Pope Francis is attempting to be a peacemaker for the culture wars. Of course, a crucial demographic question is whether cultural accommodation instead of fundamentalist commitments attract and keep communicants. If Pope Francis succeeds in imposing a new and comprehensive theological paradigm on Roman Catholicism, is it likely to attract believers and produce vocations? 340

he is a pope at home in the non-judgmental sexual and reproductive moral discourse of the contemporary West. He can take a further step to a new bioethics. Again, the changes he seeks to effect are primarily pursued indirectly, through a change in tone and focus in order subtly but surely to redirect the energies of Roman Catholicism 346

A soft revolution is being softly or subtly introduced, a revolution that is nevertheless

profound. The most plausible interpretation of Pope Francis's interviews and of *Evangelii Gaudium* is that Pope Francis has taken an important step towards a "weak" or "ambiguous" theology and bioethics 349.

Thomas Aquinas, and the Council of Trent had fashioned a radically new paradigm and life-world even before the impact of modernism and then Vatican II. *Aggiornamento* played a further and powerful transforming role through which post-Enlightenment early-modern commitments entered into Roman Catholicism. These post-traditional Christians born of Vatican II will not experience what it is like to turn to the East led by the priest, looking to a window behind the altar as the sun rises, just as the priest intones a cardinal battle cry in the culture wars that separates traditional Christianity from the 360

Through its very size, Roman Catholicism dominates news about Christianity. The difficulties, indeed chaos, troubling Roman Catholicism influence how many regard Christianity. The problems stem in part from Roman Catholicism's doctrinal disorientation, much of which places Roman Catholicism at odds with traditional Christianity. It is no longer clear how Roman Catholicism regards the truth of Roman Catholicism, indeed of Christianity. Consider one conservative Roman Catholic's indictment of Pope John Paul II's behavior that proved a major scandal to traditional Christians. 362

Orthodox Christian morality and bioethics understand the right, // the good, and the virtuous in terms of the holy. Morality and bioethics are about approaching God, not about natural law apart from God or about canons of morality and bioethics disclosable and justifiable through a secular moral-philosophical rationality (as if such had ever been possible). Instead, the Orthodox Christian bioethical focus remains within an unbroken theological experience of proper action, which recognizes that sexual activity and reproduction are permitted only within the marriage of a man and a woman, that the use of donor gametes is prohibited in having a child, that the killing of zygotes, embryos, or fetuses is forbidden, and that a family- and salvation-oriented understanding of consent to treatment is endorsed (i.e., strict truth-telling is not always obligatory). There is as well an openness to germline genetic engineering, as long as this does not set aside the differences between men and women, or the marks of being human (Delkeskamp-Hayes 2012). There is also a robust understanding of the obligations of charity, which include providing health care to those in need. 365-66.

Here it is enough to indicate that Orthodox Christian bioethics is not grounded in a particular view of moral rationality. For example, the prohibition of zygote and embryo destruction will not depend on a doctrine of ensoulment, truth-telling to patients will not be required out of an absolute prohibition against lying or from an absolute respect required by forbearance rights, and there will not be the affirmation of a social-democratic redistribution of resources towards the realization of social justice in health care allocation 366

The Church could in the future acknowledge the leading city of the world as the capitol of Texas (perhaps Santa Fe, once the original boundaries of Texas are restored), as the fourth Rome after old Rome, Constantinople, and Moscow.⁴⁹ The Orthodox Church rejects the Roman Catholic ecclesiological and epistemological doctrine of (3) papal infallibility out of hand as having no root in the Church of the Apostles and the Fathers. The legates from the pope of Rome, for example, were examined for their Orthodoxy at the Council of Chalcedon. 370

The result is that Orthodox Christians experience reality, morality, and bioethics in categories that have not been available for Western Christians for 1200 years. 374

Again, all is adrift without an anchor in being or conclusive sound rational argument. After rationality, there is animality. What Hegel recognized in the early 19th century laid the basis for Alexander Kojève (1902–1968) and Francis Fukuyama recasting Hegel so as to talk about an end of history found in humans embracing their animality. The world after God leads to a world after humanism, and, as we have also seen, after morality. 421

We surely have not yet experienced the full social and political consequences of the secularization of the dominant culture and the large-scale collapse of the mainline Western Christianities, along with the loss for the dominant secular culture of any anchor in reality beyond the merely socio-historically conditioned. We have not yet frankly confronted, much less experienced, what it is to live in societies fully purged of an ultimate point of orientation, having lost any hint of ultimate meaning. 422

The question remains, how long can such a secular *modus vivendi* be maintained? Is a society after God sustainable? Will a mass of unemployed and underemployed youth, often with college degrees and social-democratic passions along with access to social media, tweet their way to a succession of “democratic springs” producing repeated unrest and more unemployment (Parker 2014)?²⁴ Fukuyama recognizes that this state of affairs may wake the sleeping dog (Fukuyama 2013).²⁵ One faces the question: can the social-democratic *modus vivendi* after God continue? At the very least, the future is opaque. 432.

After God, after the demoralization and deflation of morality, as well as after the delegitimization of the state, what more striking example of the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:22–15) can there be than the emergence of Hegel’ notion of Absolute Spirit. By ignoring the presence of God, and by then entering into the collective solipsism of a narrative that floats free of any ultimate anchor within the horizon of the finite

Can such a society framed by a culture after God sustain a fabric of law and order when moral authority is reduced to the mere force of the law, when one feels obliged to act “rightly”, support “the good”, or be “virtuous” only when someone else is looking? ²⁷ What can one make of one’s own life and any “obligation” to obey the law when all is viewed as ultimately meaningless? All personal relationships are radically recast within a discourse of immanence. Nothing any longer has ultimate meaning. What this portends for the societies of the future is far from clear.

We are in new and strange territory. Until the 20th century, there had never been a culture fully without God, without some transcendent anchor. Many persons have lived as if there were no God, but no large-scale culture has ever affirmed ultimate meaninglessness. Most hoped in some way to scry a deeper meaning, to find orientation from beyond the horizon of the finite and the immanent. The pattern of what-is-for-us was regarded as in some way tied to what-is-in-and-for-itself. 435

The dominant secular culture with its morality and its bioethics in contrast has located itself fully within the horizon of the finite and the immanent. Its members live within a life-world at odds with that of Orthodox Christians. Secularists and traditional Christians are moral strangers to each other. Yet, moral strangers can be affective friends. In our broken culture, persons are often married to moral strangers. They often have children who are moral strangers to them. Some are even moral strangers to themselves, holding deeply incompatible moral visions. The gulf separating the parties cannot be set aside through an appeal to secular moral rationality, secular rational game theory, and/or secular resolutions to prisoners’ dilemmas that function, if at all, only for those who live fully within the horizon of

the finite and the immanent, as well as affirm the same ranking of cardinal human values. On a range of issues, Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Jews, and Muslims will rather die than compromise their obligations to God. 437.