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1. Introduction

Beyond Price collects my essays in bioethics, most of which are unified by a rejection of the prevailing egoistic voluntarism about ending one's own life and creating new ones — that is, about suicide and procreation.

Many now believe that it is not only permissible but virtuous to “take control” of one's death and to exercise that control when life is no longer “worth it”. Feature articles in the press celebrate the courage of people who commit suicide because the benefits of longevity no longer repay them for the burdens of old age. And society is happy to be relieved of responsibility for euthanasia by those who take the initiative to self-euthanize.

In three essays (“Against the Right to Die?”, “A Right of Self-Termination?”, and “Beyond Price”), I argue that having control over one's death is itself a burden, and that the calculation of benefits and burdens is in any case inadequate to guide a decision in which the value of the person is at stake. I ultimately arrive at the conclusion that the choice of death should be guided not by self-interest but by love — which, I believe, regards the intact rational capacity to make the choice as a reason for not making it, at least not yet.

Procreation is another site for the self-interested assertion of will, as infertile couples and single women create children by buying gametes from anonymous strangers. Although a large segment of our society denies that whether to abort a pregnancy is a private decision, there is oddly no party platform denying that it's a private decision whether to have a child. I say “oddly” because what makes the privacy of abortion so controversial — that is, disagreement as to whether there is another person involved — should make it uncontroversial that procreation is not private. There obviously is another person involved: the child.

No doubt, the living child is left out of account because it receives what the aborted fetus is denied, the so-called gift of life. I contend that life is not

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a gift, and that “giving” it to a child is wrong if the child will be severed from half of its ancestry. Defending this contention requires some careful reasoning about personal identity and nonexistence, which I undertake over the course of four essays (“Family History” and the three parts of “Persons in Prospect”).

These seven essays are informed by Kantian and Aristotelian thought, though they are hardly faithful to the theories of Kant or Aristotle. The operative Kantian thought is expressed in this volume’s title. The thought is that rational nature is “beyond price” in the sense that it must not be weighed against self-interest. I expand on this thought by arguing that rational nature merits not only Kantian respect but also love, which is continuous with respect, in my view. The Aristotelian thought is that a person’s good is that which it makes sense to want out of friendship-love for the person, and what it makes sense to want out of love is that the person fully express his or her capacities.

The subsequent three essays in the collection are about the harm of death. Over the twenty-odd years between the earliest paper in the collection (“Well-Being and Time”) and the latest (“Dying”), my attitude toward death has gradually changed. I no longer think that the question of how to feel about death has a single right answer. Although I don’t point it out in the essays themselves, Part III of “Persons in Prospect” provides the foundations for my conclusion in “Dying” that a single answer is unnecessary.

Although bioethics is usually classified under the heading of applied ethics, these essays are not “applied” in the usual sense. I don’t propose or defend any particular policies, much less legislation, on the issues that I discuss. Nor do I deal with the specifics of decision-making in particular cases. Although I argue that, other things being equal, children should know and be reared by their biological parents, I don’t go into the many possible degrees of knowledge, or the possible variations of child-rearing arrangements. In the case of assisted suicide, I even argue that philosophy cannot penetrate to the level of guiding particular decisions.

In writing about these topics, I aim rather to figure out how to think about them, not what to think at the level of practical application. My topic is not metaethics, it’s not applied ethics, and it’s not normative ethics, either — not, at least, if normative ethics is the comparative study of normative theories such as utilitarianism, Kant’s categorical imperative, and virtue ethics. I think of my topic as the foundations of applied ethics, the goal being

to better understand the underlying notions of personhood, parenthood, autonomy, well-being, and so on, with an eye to how those notions will apply to practice in general.

Insofar as my views have practical consequences, they have sometimes been described as conservative, in the political sense of the word. For what it's worth, my political sympathies are liberal. No doubt they influence my philosophical views, but philosophy sometimes leads me to conclusions that, however liberal in my eyes, are disdained by members of my political party. Those are the conclusions to which I prefer to devote my intellectual efforts, because they are more interesting to me than the ones on which I follow the party line. To that extent, I am a contrarian — not because I seek out perverse conclusions but rather because I find philosophy most interesting when it leads to conclusions that seem perverse, and I choose to write about what interests me. As Bertrand Russell said, “The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.”¹ Arguing for the obvious is not worthy of a philosopher's time.

The last essay in the collection is about life-writing — biography and autobiography — and it concludes with some autobiography of my own. I have the nagging sense that my mixing autobiography with philosophy, always self-indulgent, is sometimes unfair. I commit the fallacy of *argumentum ad misericordiam* by revealing unfortunate parts of my life history, as if soliciting philosophical agreement by appealing for personal sympathy. All I can say in my own defense is that I have included a lot of happy autobiography in my work, as in “Family History”, and that I actually regard all of my writing as autobiographical. Although I write about what it is like to be a human being, I am always aware of writing only about what it is like for me.

I have many debts to students and colleagues who commented on these papers and to institutions that invited me to present them. Those debts are acknowledged in the first footnote of each chapter (which also indicates whether I have made revisions beyond minor editorial emendations). I am indebted to my copyeditor, Katherine Duke, for transforming an unruly mob of documents into a well-behaved manuscript. And it has been a pleasure to work with Rupert Gatti, Alessandra Tosi, and Ben Fried on my second book with Open Book Publishers.

1 *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2010), p. 20.

