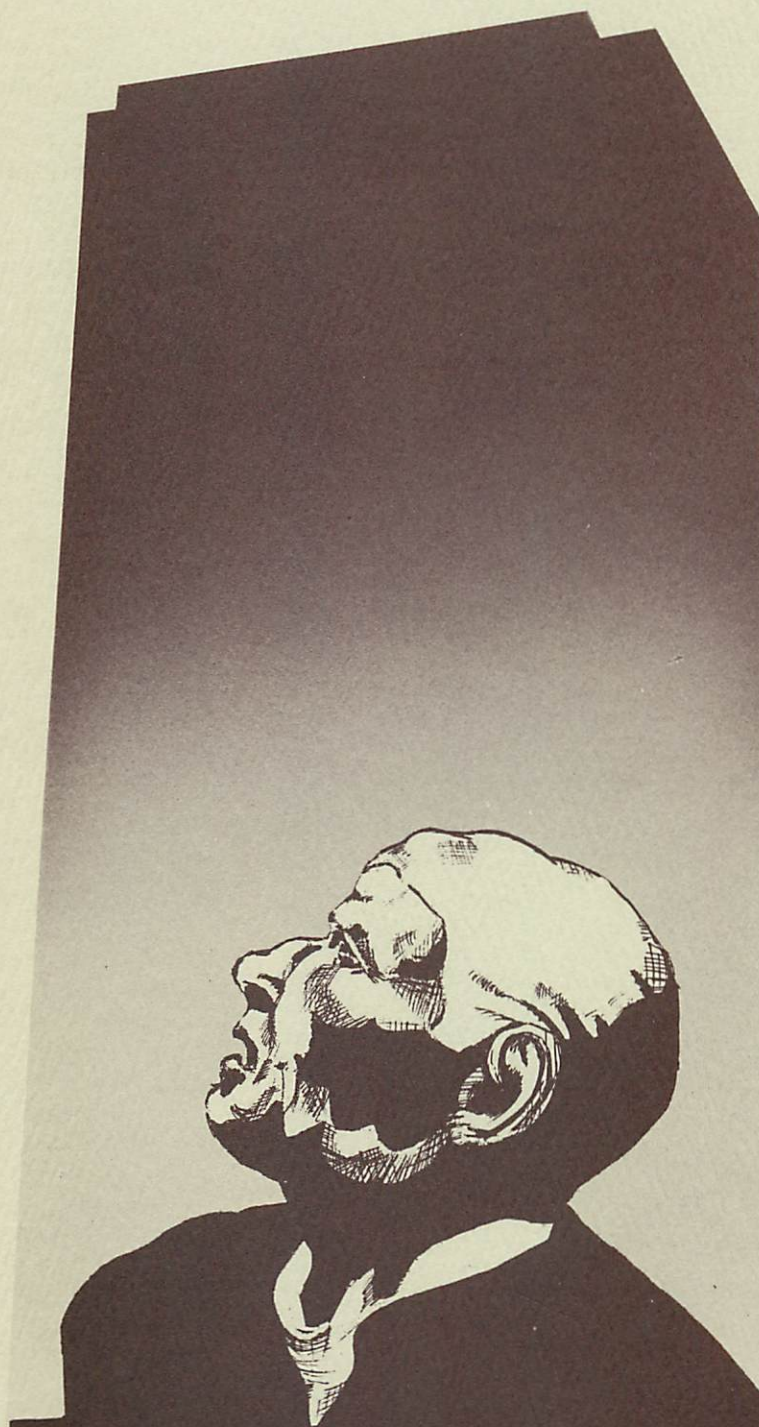


THE VALUE OF A LIFE: A SKETCH

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# Philosophy in Context

THE CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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# THE VALUE OF A LIFE: A SKETCH

Germain Grisez

This paper is concerned with one of the questions that underlies ethical discussion of issues such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, nuclear deterrence, and other acts or policies that attack or threaten the lives of one or more human beings. I shall not attempt to deal here with the ethical issues themselves, but only with the presupposed question: how and to what extent should we consider valuable the life of a human being?

The life with which we are concerned is *human life*. Plants and other animals also have life, but the present paper does not deal with the question of the value of such life. Some people might wish to argue that existing individual organisms which biologically are complete organisms of the human species might nevertheless lack *human life*, for example, in the early stages of embryonic development or in the last stages of organic functioning at death. I think such an argument arises from conceptual confusions. But this paper does not deal with this argument, although any complete treatment of the ethics of abortion and euthanasia obviously must deal with it. My concern here is with the value of the life of any individual or group of individuals which are in fact *human beings*, not with the conceptual/factual question of determining which individuals are human beings and which individuals are not.

The word "life" is ambiguous. In one sense, "life" means what medicine and safety precautions seek to preserve, what killers destroy, what death terminates. In another sense, "life" means the whole course of a person's existence; it is what philosophers seek the meaning of and what a biographer writes an account of. This paper is concerned with what is signified by "life" in the first sense rather than in the second, although I shall argue that the distinction is not as sharp as it appears to be.

This paper is a sketch, not a complete treatise. An adequate treatise would require an entire theory of value and an entire ethics, and I do not think either of those fields can be treated adequately without first treating most of the fundamental questions with which philosophers have concerned themselves. A sketch can clarify some points; it can outline the project of a complete treatise. Those who do not share the framework of assumptions in which the sketch proceeds will find themselves tempted to disregard the content of the sketch and to argue with the assumptions. This move is not illegitimate philosophically, but it does miss the real point of a philosophical sketch, which is to articulate and clarify a possible position, not to assert and defend an actual one. The only appropriate critique of a sketch is to point out areas of vagueness and to uncover internal incoherence, if any.

This sketch has four parts. First, I outline my general theory of value. Second, I offer some reflections on the concept of human life. Third, I articulate a possible

position on the value of a human life. Fourth, I suggest the further factors that might be necessary in order to use this position on the value of life as a principle for settling ethical questions in which human life is at stake.

## I.

My general theory of value is best outlined by reference to three other types of theory. The three I mention seem to me to divide all the previous attempts I know of to develop a theory of value, since the issue was first cast in this form during the nineteenth century. My theory would belong to none of these three types; it has aspects in common with all of them.

The three types of value theory I have in mind can be characterized as follows. First, there are theories that treat value as a genus, the members of which are real entities, each having its own peculiar value-character which is determined without reference either to empirical actualities or to human experience. Second, there are theories that treat value as a class of relational properties that are attributed to certain features of the empirical world in virtue of certain aspects of human experience bearing upon those features of the world. Third, there are theories that treat value as a class of aspects of language (or thought) when we speak (or think) not theoretically or descriptively but practically or prescriptively.

Theories of the first sort, which regard values as real entities independent of the empirical world and human experience, include various forms of platonism and neo-platonism and some modern theories such as the phenomenological theory of value proposed by Nicolai Hartmann. (Whether Plato was himself a believer in the a priori reality of ideas is a historical question that need not concern us here.)

Such theories regard values as a set of entities the reality of which is independent of whether or not they are actualized in existing instances. The realm of values is thus distinct from the empirical world, although values are thought of as somehow related to the world of existing things. Values can shape or guide or direct what goes on in the world of existing things, and in this way they can enter into the world. Yet values are not natural objects, and they do not exercise their normative influence as natural causal factors bring about their appropriate effects.

Actualities that are normatively influenced by values thus do not interact with values. The relationship is not mutual. The world of experience participates in values, and such participation may be considered essential to the very constitution of the empirical world as a real world. The values in themselves clamor to be realized, but whether this metaphysical exigency is satisfied or not,

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**Social justice . . . is only gradually unfolded  
through the course of history . . .**

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the values have and keep their own value character in themselves.

Theories of the first sort often are dismissed as pieces of metaphysical mystification by philosophers of positivistic temper, and such theories also are likely to seem mysterious to the perplexed person of "hard-headed" common sense, for whom "real" means (approximately) out-there-now-capable-of-having-impact-on-me. Yet the person of common sense thinks his own rights are real, especially when they are violated, and the positivistic philosopher has his own difficulties in dealing with the data that lead to the development of theories of this first type.

What are the data? I think those who propose theories of this first type generally rely upon three starting points for their arguments.

First is the distinction between "is" and "ought." Values have some sort of validity that actuality doesn't give them and that non-actualization doesn't take away from them.

Another factor is the inexhaustibility of values. Individual participations of the value are not merely instances of a universal; rather, the particulars actualize the value in diverse ways as well as to diverse degrees. New actualizations unfold unexpected dimensions of familiar values; yet the new clearly expands the old in a continuous process of development.

Social justice, for example, is only gradually unfolded through the course of history; the examples of justice done manifest a concrete whole which grows little by little. Aware of this open-endedness, those who seek justice realize that they cannot completely define beforehand the emergent requirements of justice.

A third factor that leads to the first type of value theory is the experience of the superiority or dignity of values. Many people experience values as realities that deserve respect, as windows to a reality that is greater than we ourselves are. One who is ignorant of or who ignores some value is diminished thereby; one who violates some value is judged thereby. This aspect of values is closely related to religious experience, to the sense that something in reality is not merely more powerful than we are, but that something in reality is more than human, and deserves human respect.

Criticisms of theories of this first sort maintain that the data can be explained without positing a separate metaphysical realm of values. The problems of making

sense of the relationship between the values in themselves and the world of experience often have been formulated, for example in questions such as: what is participation? and: what does it mean for unrealized values to "demand" their realization? There are also epistemological objections, such as why some people do not seem to intuit the same values that others do, if the values are supposed to be real objects of intellectual intuition, much as colors are real properties perceived by ordinary vision.

Theories of the second sort, which regard values as relational properties of certain features of the empirical world, give values a naturalistic foundation in the psychological dimensions of man (and perhaps of other animals, as well). Experience involves a polarity of attitude; attitudes are either pro or con. Values are not qualities or a priori realities; values are merely relational properties. That toward which there is a pro attitude is regarded as having a positive value; that toward which there is a con attitude is regarded as having a negative value.

Attitudes may be thought of as dispositions to behave in certain ways or as emotions. Thus, interest (making a difference to the organism) has been used to ground one theory of value of this sort, and enjoyment (felt satisfaction) has been used to ground another. The possible variations are endless.

The value theorist of the first type is likely to attack any value theory of this second type as a kind of relativism. Naturalism does imply that the organism is the measure of all things; a relational theory of value does deny that there are real values outside the world of experience. But those who hold a theory of the second sort are able to distinguish between the objective relationality of values and a subjectivist relativism that denies reality to values.

"Left side" and "right side" said of a street are relational properties. Neither side of a street is left or right unless someone is on the street, disposed to it in a certain way, and making distinctions between the two halves of the street on the basis of his own disposition. Yet there is nothing merely subjective or relativistic about keeping to the right as one goes along a street. And the objectivity of keeping to the right holds true even for an intoxicated driver who thinks he is keeping to the right when he is really driving on the left. Relational properties make the difference between safe trips and head-on collisions!

Theories of the second type have the advantage of avoiding all of the metaphysical mysteriousness of theories of the first type. If the origin of value is in dispositions of organisms, then the reality of value does not take one beyond the empirical world. But naturalistic theories are attacked precisely at this point. If they do not require principles beyond the empirical world, how can such theories account for the peculiar features of values? Facts are facts; what is the origin of the normativity of values?

Naturalistic theories of value try to answer this objection without denying the phenomena of value-

experience. We do sometimes regard things as valuable inasmuch as they are related to certain psychological states and dispositions. But does this solve the problem, or does it merely push it back? If we define value as any object of any interest, must we not allow a normative priority for an interest in fulfilling positive interests and harmonizing them? If we define value as what makes for enjoyment, must we not allow a normative priority for enjoyment over pain?

Both the first and second types of theories are objectivist, in the sense that both hold that values are real antecedents to human cognition. Thus theories of both these kinds hold that statements about values are true or false. Whether values are regarded as entities in themselves or as relational properties, they are considered to be objective realities presented to the knowing subject as content of theoretical knowledge and descriptive expression.

The third sort of theories of value reject the common objectivist features of the first two sorts. For theories of the third sort, values are not presented for the theoretical cognition of a knowing subject. Value expressions are neither true nor false. Not all language is declarative. Value expressions are not used to describe anything, but to express feelings, or to make commitments, or something of the sort.

Theories of the third sort are particularly strong in dealing with the normativity of value expressions. "Ought" need not be reduced to "is" if values are in no sense objectively given. Thus the mysterious idea of values clamoring for actualization and the difficulties about priority encountered by psychological theories can be handled.

The difficulty with theories of the third sort is that they do not square with the features of value experience that are emphasized most strongly by theories of the first sort. Indeed, if the non-cognitivist viewpoint is preserved consistently, it is not even easy to see how a theory of the third sort can integrate normativity with the psychological data of which theories of the second sort take advantage.

If, for example, the prescriptivity of value language is taken to be what characterizes it, this feature either is isolated from the data or it relates to them. If one holds that it relates to emotional reactions, to commitments, or to decisions of principle, then one must ask how these are different from other psychological facts. To say that normative language *expresses* such facts without actually *describing* them may be true, but the more a theory of the third type invokes such psychological data, the more it appears to be grounded in a theory of the second type.

Moreover, theories of the third type seem to be driven toward subjectivism and relativism in the vicious sense of those words. Normativity that one can make and unmake arbitrarily has no inter-subjective force at all. If some feature of normative language, such as universalizability, is taken as a way to transcend individual subjectivism, then either the individual is asked to ground his respect for and submission to values (even against subjective inclination) in a peculiar feature of a peculiar kind of

language, or else some value such as rational consistency is covertly endowed with a status not unlike the status given all values by theories of the first kind. But if there are any values of this sort, why only one?

A more adequate theory of value seems to me possible. In some respects it will be similar to each of the first three kinds of theories. But it will remain distinct from all three of them. Two basic distinctions are necessary in the theory I propose. There is a distinction between relative or qualified values, on the one hand, and, on the other, absolute or unqualified values. There is also a distinction between values which are objective and only potentially normative, on the one hand, and, on the other, inter-subjective and actually normative values.

First, a qualified or relative value is what is good for some definite entity. Naturalistic theories of value come near to clarifying what is involved in values of this sort,

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**Life, health, and safety; play and skill of all sorts; aesthetic experience in art and nature; knowledge of theoretical truth; inner harmony; authenticity in one's life; justice in friendship; and religion — all these seem to me to be possible objectives of human striving . . .**

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but such theories put too much emphasis on the psychological aspects of value experience. If we ask someone who holds an interest theory of value to explicate the foundation in the object of interest in virtue of which it does make a difference to the organism, he certainly would not wish to deny that for an organism of a given sort and with given dispositions, it should be possible to specify definite features of some objects which make them interesting.

Relative or qualified values thus can be viewed as involving both dispositions of the organism and of the object, dispositions in virtue of which there is a particularly good "fit" between the two.

This conception can be generalized, once the psychological aspects are eliminated, even to include non-organic entities. The reality of most things we know involves potentiality; there is no being in the world of our experience that is not a process of becoming. Potentiality is not to be reduced to present actuality plus relations imposed by thought or language. No, dispositional properties are as much a part of the reality of empirical entities as are any other characteristics they may have.

We cannot say that the fulfillment of every potentiality is a value. Some potentialities are for destruction. But we can say that if a given entity has potentialities which extend its reality by keeping it going in its process, then the realization of such potentialities will be a value *relative to that entity*.

Thus the nourishment a cancer cell needs to survive is

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Curiously, many who discuss ecology nevertheless talk as if there were absolute values in nature.

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a value for the cancer cell, and the expertise a thief needs to rise to the top of his craft is a value relative to the thief as thief. Health for any organism is a value, because health is simply a set of functions by which the organism is enabled to continue to function and to realize yet unrealized potentialities. Disease also realizes some organic potentiality, but this realization is of the sort that undercuts other potentialities, contracts the sphere of organic functioning, and ultimately terminates the being of the organism as such.

The distinction between relative or qualified values such as these, and absolute or unqualified ones depends upon making a metaphysical move from particular entities to a whole order of entities. If one cannot regard the totality of nature as a single system, then there are no absolute values in nature. If there are no contingencies in nature, there can be no distinction between constructive and destructive potentialities. Among contemporary metaphysical outlooks, only some types of evolutionary theory seem to regard nature as a system which can make out well or badly. Curiously, many who discuss ecology nevertheless talk as if there were absolute values in nature.

Without trying to settle the questions about absolute values in nature, I should like to suggest that there are other orders of reality that can be considered as systematic wholes. What I have in mind is nothing supernatural, nothing mysterious. Consider, for example, the domain of inquiry and knowledge. Consistency, clarity, certification, and explanation are regarded as values here, because thinking with these characteristics continuously expands, while inconsistent, confused, uncertain, and loose-ended thinking gets nowhere.

The order of human action and the order of art and technique are similar systematic wholes in which values can be discriminated. The values with which we shall be concerned henceforth in this paper are in the order of human action.

Relative values for human action include whatever anyone wants. But it is possible for human agents to want and seek what they do not really need, and to fail to want and seek what they really do need. Absolute or unqualified values for the human agent are those things that fulfill the capacities of the person as an agent, and lead to open-ended development. We are not interested here in merely instrumental goods, nor in anything ex-

trinsic to the person. We are interested in realizations which fulfill potentialities intrinsic to the person, and the fulfillment of such potentialities can be considered terminal, except to the extent that any single action only contributes to a larger and always expanding whole.

Life, health, and safety; play and skill of all sorts; aesthetic experience in art and nature; knowledge of theoretical truth; inner harmony; authenticity in one's life; justice and friendship; and religion — all of these seem to me to be possible objectives of human striving that can stand up under criticism as unqualified values in the sphere of human action.

These values can be considered in two ways, however, according to the second major distinction mentioned above. From one point of view the values mentioned are objective and only potentially normative; from another point of view they become inter-subjective and actually normative. Prior to reflection and understanding, the human person who is potentially an agent is already disposed toward the values listed; this predisposition underlies the possibility that they will become objectives sought in action, and this possibility is a necessary condition for the human being to become an agent.

This predisposition is a matter of fact which is given immediately in experience. As a given, it is potentially intelligible. Understanding of this datum is twofold. In reflection, the thinking subject can consider himself with detached objectivity, and then can note, for instance: "I am curious". But in entering into the sphere of action the thinking agent does not consider his own inclination with detached objectivity; instead, the inclination is the starting point of the plan of action: "This problem is to be solved".

"Is to be" is the general form of ought-thinking. Such thinking is not reducible to is-thinking. Ought-thinking is just as basic as is-thinking. But the two are different modes of thought, different language-games.

Note that while values become inter-subjective and actually normative insofar as they enter and are expressed in the form of practical discourse, the distinction between qualified and unqualified values still must be maintained. If there are many values that potentially can stand as unqualified in the field of human action, not all of these can be simultaneously absolute values when they become formally normative.

At the level of general appreciation of possible objectives of action, one can appreciate a multiplicity of values, but rationally structured action must be a systematic whole in which some sort of synthesis must be worked out in order to make the most of one's opportunities. Concrete factors must be taken into account.

This final step raises the properly ethical problem. Moral goodness is the unqualified value of the system of one's life as a structured unity of action. We shall come back to this point in part four.

For the present, it is sufficient to collect the following as the conclusion of this section. There are a number of possible objectives of human action to which human beings, as potential agents, have a natural disposition or

affinity; these objectives become formally normative insofar as they are immediately understood in a practical mode, as starting points or presuppositions of practical discourse; human life itself, it has been suggested, is among these goods. The last point is the one to be further developed in the remainder of this paper.

But before moving on to a more precise consideration of human life as a value, it may be useful to point out the relationship between the theory of value presented here and the three types of theories outlined above. My theory has an affinity with theories of the first type inasmuch as I would ground unqualified or absolute values in a metaphysical conception, although I do not regard these values as entities having a priori reality. My theory has an affinity with naturalistic theories inasmuch as I would locate value in the real conditions of developing entities, but I would not limit value to the relationship of organism to environment. Finally, my theory has an affinity with non-cognitivist theories inasmuch as I would locate normativity in practical discourse itself, but I would ground this normativity in the actual value which is normative for the agent because it suits the person who is an agent.

## II.

In this section I offer some reflections on the concept — and the reality — of human life. There are four points. First, life is intrinsic to the human person. Second, life permeates the person. Third, life transcends the individual; it unites men with one another and mankind with the natural world. Fourth, life often has been regarded as sharing in sanctity.

Modern philosophy and modern thought generally have been marked by various forms of dualism. The epistemological turn, beginning with Descartes, involved highlighting the opposition between thinking subject and object of thought. The thinker's own body tended to be placed among the objects of thought, while the self-conscious mind was reserved to the subjective side.

Cartesian dualism, of course, is by no means the only form of it. Kant's distinction between the phenomenal world of objects and the noumenal world of the acting self set up a sort of dualism different from Descartes'. What Kantian dualism has in common with the Cartesian form is that the human body is still alienated from the center of the self.

Pragmatism and other forms of operationalism that attack the subject-object dichotomy nevertheless do not overcome the dualistic assumption.

For subject and object, the operationalist substitutes user and used. The true self is the user; the body, of course, is among things used. The body belongs to the world in which problems arise. Problem-solving intelligence stands back from the world in order to deal with it. If knowledge is power, the knower who has the power is altogether distinct from the subject matter over which this power is exercised. Medicine is not the least successful form of applied science.

Anyone who has had the misfortune to undergo extensive medical treatment knows what it means to be a patient. And the patient-role of the body is only intensified if "it" doesn't respond to treatment. To be ill is for it not to work right; the person is not sick, but his organs are not functioning. Physician and patient conspire in establishing and in maintaining the dualistic attitude, since it is an implication of the physician's technical point of view and it is a consolation to the patient's threatened sense of self-identity. "I'm not sick. It's just that the old lungs are rotting away."

Classical psychoanalysis did not improve matters even though it tried to get rid of the soul. The patient is still patient, and the conscious self in contact with reality is still confronted with an objective breakdown. The *id* and the *superego* are not getting along with each other.

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Modern ethical theories are likewise thoroughly dualistic. Kant has been mentioned already. Classical utilitarianism locates value in conscious experience. For practical purposes, the person is the subject of the experiences of pain and pleasure, and the worth of the person tends to become a function of the proportion of pleasure to pain.

The real person is the consciousness that calculates, manipulates the world, including the body itself, and receives a pay-off in pleasurable experience. The body is like a slot-machine; one pulls the lever and waits for the jack-pot. Utilitarianism is an ethics of the masturbator as hero.

In recent decades, developments in theoretical philosophy have turned against the prevalent dualism. A great deal of work in phenomenology has pointed to the conclusion that the body is not simply a possession nor an instrument of the person. There is more to personality than bodiliness, but the body is intrinsic to the person. Similar conclusions have been reached by linguistic analysis. Language is communication; communication occurs in bodily behavior; any consistent dualism makes the self incommunicable.

But practice lags well behind theory. Human life is widely thought of as a set of organic processes — what goes on in the body that stops at death. But since the body is regarded as distinct from the person, human life is considered extra-personal. If life is a value, then, it is not regarded as a *personal* value. Rather, life is a necessary condition of personal value; it is somehow extrinsic and it

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Life . . .

**is the existence of the organism. If we are concerned with the life that death terminates, such life is still intensely personal. That is why death is intensely significant from an existential point of view.**

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belongs to the order of means, not to the order of ends.

On the principle that a sound understanding of values cannot go on assumptions that are theoretically untenable, I submit that the practical dualism of most current consideration of the value of life must be set aside. If the human body is not extrinsic to the human person, then human life also is intrinsic to the person. Whatever value human life has, this value is not infra-personal.

This brings me to my second point. Life permeates the person. Existence is not one property alongside other properties of existing things. Neither is life a property of the organism. Life, rather, is the existence of the organism. A dead body is not an organism lacking one of its integral parts or usual properties. A dead body is the remains of an organism that no longer exists.

At the outset of this paper, I pointed out that the word "life" is ambiguous. I am concerned with the reality that medicine and safety precautions try to protect, that killers destroy, and that death terminates. But what, exactly, is this reality?

The temptation is to view life as a property or set of properties that living things have in common. Growth, nutrition, and reproduction are vital functions. These functions are the subject matter of biology. Biology is the science of life. Thus life is nothing but this set of functions. Biology does not study the human person as person. Thus life is extrinsic to the person.

The conclusion, of course, is another version of the dualism I have been pointing out. Where does the argument go awry?

In the first place, we must notice that even from a biological point of view, growth, nutrition, and reproduction are not really common functions of living things. At the level of abstract statement we can say, correctly, that living things are characterized by these functions. But in concrete reality, what is involved in the growth or nutrition or reproduction of one kind of organism is not what is involved in the growth or nutrition or reproduction of another kind of organism. That is why biology does not engage in lengthy dissertation upon these vital functions as such, but gets down to cases. The "common" biological functions of human beings are specifically human, even from a purely biological point of view.

In the second place, if organic functions characterize living things, it does not follow that the life of living things is nothing more than a collection of these functions. The

organism is a unity; the functions in question are multiple. In some sense, the organism exercises its own functions *for the sake of* the whole.

What I am arguing for is not vitalism, which is itself a version of dualism in the biological field. Rather, I am suggesting that there is real teleology, and this is nothing more than to say than an organism is really a unity, not merely a region of natural events and processes. In other words, I am assuming a metaphysics in which the physical universe includes a multiplicity of really distinct individuals, and I am rejecting the sort of metaphysics that regards the entire physical universe as the sole substantial reality.

From this it follows that life is more basic than organic functioning. Life is the mode of existence of organic entities. This mode of existence embraces the capacity for organic functions. The exercise of these functions is the actuality of life. Consequently, if all organic function ceases, there is no life and hence no organism. Yet life embraces all the vital functions, and thus no single vital function can be identified with life itself.

A third consideration is that even in the sense in which growth, nutrition, and reproduction are common vital functions, these functions do not exhaust the set of vital functions for all living things. Sensation and anticipation, thinking and choosing, and other functions belong to various kinds of living beings, with concrete diversifications, just as growth, nutrition, and reproduction belong to all kinds of living beings. Only a covert form of dualism drives a wedge between vital functions on the one hand and psychic actions on the other. (I of course do not mean to deny the distinctions that are to be made.)

The apparently obvious inference from "biology is a science of life" to "life is nothing but what biology studies" actually assumes a whole metaphysics. If we are concerned with the life that death terminates, such life is still intensely personal. That is why death is intensely significant from an existential point of view. The life that is terminated by death is not an extrinsic condition but rather is an intrinsic principle of the life that a biographer writes an account of.

This conclusion brings me to my third point. Life transcends the individual, uniting persons with one another and human beings with their natural environment.

Reproduction is a vital function involving at least two organisms; sexual reproduction involves at least three. Nutrition involves both the organism and something not already united with it; there is vital interchange with a natural environment, directly or indirectly with the inorganic world.

In other words, if individuals that live are really substantial entities, they also have real relations to other living individuals and to the inorganic aspects of the natural world.

Dualism removes the organic foundation of community and the natural foundation of appreciation of non-organic conditions of life. If we reject dualism, we must reassert these grounds. The person is not a monad.

These considerations are of the utmost significance in



the background of ethical reflections upon problems involving the family, sexuality, and the human use of natural resources. All too often such problems are treated on assumptions that clearly isolate "mere biological processes" from "personal values," as if human parenthood, human sexual love, and human engagement in the natural world were reducible to one aspect or to the other, or resolvable into an inadequately integrated juxtaposition of both aspects.

My final point in this section is that human life often has been regarded as sharing in sanctity. "Sanctity" means more than ethical or legal inviolability. "Sanctity" means holiness, the proper attribute of divinity. "Sanctity" is the inviolability of what belongs to God or the gods.

I do not intend here even to sketch a philosophy of religion, or to outline a metaphysics of divine reality. All I wish to do is to point out some unquestionable historical phenomena, some facts of human religious experience.

The concept of life is a basic theme of many religions, and it is certainly central in the entire Judeo-Christian tradition. God is the Lord of life. The idea of life undergoes a considerable expansion in the course of this religious development, but at no point does the Christian theme of salvation depart from the basic conception of life as a reality opposed to death.

Thus, the central elements of Christian faith include the death and restoration to bodily life of God incarnate. The hope of Christians is for the resurrection of the body and everlasting life. Death, which resulted from sin — that is, alienation from God — is overcome by Christ who reconciles mankind to God.

Such ideas will seem odd to those who do not share Christian faith. But these ideas also find other expressions. Children are awed at the wonder and mysteriousness of life; the concept of "reverence for life" does not seem nonsensical.

Of course, it is possible to purge oneself of all such feelings. The question is, whether it is possible to expel all feelings of reverence for life in its basic sense and still maintain an appreciation of the meaningfulness of life in its most expanded sense. Is it possible to reject the sanctity of life while maintaining the dignity of the person?

If dualism were correct, clearly there would be no problem. But if dualism is rejected, the difficulty begins to emerge. If life does not come from God, it presumably comes about by accident. Clearly, the meaning of life cannot be a matter of mere chance. Meaning therefore must be taken as supervening upon the data. But in this case, why should one set of data be more susceptible to meaning than another? It seems to follow that the meaning of one's life has absolutely nothing to do with what actually goes on in the course of it.

The concept of the dignity of the person involves the idea that human persons are ends in themselves, not mere means to ulterior ends. Either this arises simply from the fact that one acting always is the end of his own activity, and then the dignity of the person means nothing more than the inviolability of the powerful, or there must be some metaphysical foundation beyond human

meaning-giving for the assertion that human persons are equal. If there is such a metaphysical foundation and if dualism is firmly rejected, then the same ground on which we establish the claims of justice also will be a ground for regarding human life as sacred. And it makes no difference whether the metaphysical foundation of human dignity is expressed in traditional religious categories or not.

### III.

Having considered the problem of theory of value in general and having clarified the concept of life, I here draw the elements together into a position on the value of a human life.

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**If we are concerned with the life that death terminates, such life is still intensely personal. That is why death is intensely significant from an existential point of view.**

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My conclusion can be stated briefly. Human life is an unqualified value in the sphere of human action. Persons are ends in themselves. Life is intrinsic to the person, not merely an extrinsic condition or means. Objectively, then, each person's life shares in his dignity. To the extent that action can be undertaken on the presupposition of the formally normative principle, *life is to be sustained and respected*, the care of each individual's life becomes itself a reasonable effort, part of a meaningful existence.

On my theory of value, there are other goods as basic for action as life itself. Not only life is constitutive of the person. Each of the possible purposes of human action that is an aspect of the person can ground the reasonability of such action, without appeal to any ulterior end.

Play, theoretical knowledge, justice, and so on — all these can be regarded as ends in themselves. All go to make up the reality of the person in his actual existence. All, therefore, share in the dignity of the person. None should be regarded as mere means.

This position raises the question: What is the comparative value of these many ends? My position is that apart from the fact that all are intrinsic personal values, there is nothing in common among them. In other words, I deny that fundamental human values have a least common denominator. The content of each of these values dictates that it be objectively valid and formally normative for practical discourse. But the content of none of them dictates its absolute priority to any of the others.

In taking this position, I do not deny all sense to the conception of a hierarchy of values. For the person, what

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**For the person, what is infra-personal is merely a means or a condition of human value.**

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is infra-personal is merely a means or a condition of human value. For the non-dualist, the integral value of the person is superior to the merely experienced side of personal value — for example, knowing the truth with all that such knowing involves is superior to the merely felt enjoyment experienced in the knowledge of the truth. The whole is greater than its parts.

Moreover, anyone in his own life must constitute his own being by an integrated set of commitments to the possible categories of value. In the scale of a particular personality or in the life-style of a particular culture, the values will fall into a certain order. Inter-personal appraisals of human value nevertheless must respect the incomparability of the diverse categories of human goods, except to the extent that those in a particular group communicate in a similar life-style, to which they agree.

Theories of value of the first type discussed in part one, above, generally suppose that there is an objective hierarchy among values themselves. Often, an attempt is made to draw ethical conclusions directly from the relative positions of values in such a hierarchy. Usually life, if included at all, is well down the list. Thus the conclusion can easily be drawn that anti-life acts are violations of a human value, but may be justified in virtue of the demands of superior values.

Such arguments often are infected with dualism. Even when they are not, they rest upon the objectification of a particular life-style, which is taken as an absolute constitution for human personality as such. The result is that those who are not at the moment pressed by concern about the maintenance of their own lives are able to feel considerable superiority to most of the human race, among whom mere survival usually has been the practical matter of first priority. If quality of life is superior to life, then those whose survival is assured can feel justified in exterminating those who will achieve nothing more than mere life. There will be no selfishness in this, of course; the lower value merely yields to the higher.

Theories of value of the naturalistic sort have a built-in inability to see life itself as a value. Values arise within the context of life. It follows that life is a presupposition of the value situation, but is not itself the object of any interest, enjoyment, or other psychological state. From this point of view it can be argued that someone who is killed is not harmed, since he no longer exists when he is dead, and disvalue as well as value must be for an organism.

Such difficulties do not prevent naturalists who are also

utilitarians from arguing that life may not be worth living, and that in difficult cases it may be acceptable to kill one person in order to save two. Clearly, however, all such arguments assume that life is not intrinsic to the person, or that there is no such thing as the dignity of the person, and that value is the meaning-giving of the stronger.

Theories of the third sort do not seem to me to lead to any definite normative consequences except to the extent that they either trivialize the whole problem or illicitly import principles that give normative discourse some significance transcending discourse itself.

I would maintain that the place for the weighing and balancing of “values” is in the field of means. So long as one is concerned with something instrumental and extrinsic to the first principles of action, it makes sense to play off one consideration against another within the framework of these principles. Everything can be quantified if one puts a price on it, and one puts a price on everything that doesn’t really matter. As soon as we come to what really matters, the game of putting the prices stops. We arrive at what we would “give anything for.”

It is easy enough for a healthy person who is reasonably secure to think of human life as an extrinsic and merely instrumental value. Let such a person become seriously ill and his attitude changes. It is easy enough for a society lacking imagination to regard nuclear deterrence as a necessary safeguard of freedom. The survivors, if any, of a nuclear war might think differently.

Those who wish to assign a determinable value to human life — or, at least, to some human lives — assume that there is a normative standpoint beyond that of the person to whom life is an intrinsic constituent, or assume that life is not really intrinsic to the person. A move of the first kind might be justified by a god, for whom the sphere of human action was itself reducible to a higher framework. A move of the second sort is some sort of practical dualism.

#### IV.

This final section is intended to do no more than to point out that there are factors besides the value of a human life that must be taken into account in developing the ethics for evaluating practices that affect human life.

In arguments on such questions as euthanasia, those arguing for the possible moral acceptability of the practice often assume that if we grant that life is in any sense an unqualified good, then we must always act in a way that will prolong life as much as possible, and we may never use any resource for any other purpose if it could be used to promote life. Similarly, abortionists argue that the moral condemnation of their practice would logically imply that everyone should have as many children as possible, up to the absolute limit the world can be made to support, regardless of the effect such a natalist policy would have on all other human goods.

Such implications will follow only if one assumes that there is a single principle of value that determines all of

the conclusions of normative ethics. Such ethical monism has a long history. Greek thought looked for *the* end for man, his proper function. Christian thought put the end in union with God — and justified the Inquisition and the Crusades. Modern thought, except in a few strange cases, has tended to seek man's final good in a worldly version of heavenly bliss.

If I am right in thinking that there are many primary normative principles in the field of human action, then there can be no direct inferences from a theory of value to normative ethics. Even if life is an unqualified good in the order of action, still a monistic ethics based on this as on any other good will draw absurd conclusions.

Before drawing sound conclusions, it seems to me, one would have to develop an adequate theory of human action, which is the subject matter of ethical reflection. One also has to explain how many irreducible principles of action can be embraced within a unified conception of moral goodness—in other words, how many intrinsic constituents of the person as moral agent can form the unity of a good life according to one or another possible style of life. Finally, it is necessary to articulate modes of obligation, which will serve as normative criteria for judging existing or proposed moral codes and concrete moral evaluations.

Among the modes of obligation, I think, is one that rejects as immoral any action that directly violates any one basic human good for the sake of realizing that or some other good through an ulterior action. In other words, the end does not justify the means. But what this generative meta-rule amounts to cannot be seen without a complete analysis of the conceptions of end and means, and a clarification of the conditions of acting directly counter to a certain value.

If the ethical considerations that would lead to absolute negative moral norms are clearly unlike any sort of utilitarian theory, the reflections that would lead to important positive formulations are developed in a quite different way. Here, a consideration of values cannot lead to ethical conclusions without information about opportunities and obstacles, interests and prior commitments.

Should we feed as many of the starving as we can *rather than* continue with explorations of outer space? That question is not settled directly by determining that human life has an unqualified value. But one should not suppose that utilitarianism will be more helpful. I would argue that only a recognition that this question cannot be settled by calculation or talk of "conflict of values" can clear the way for any rational discussion of it.

Moreover, as I pointed out at the beginning, no judgment on the value of a human life will by itself settle questions about ethical problems such as abortion and organ-transplants. A further consideration is required to settle the question when human life begins and when it ends. If dualistic conceptions are set aside, however, I do not think this problem nearly so difficult as it has been made out to be in recent discussions.

Finally, still further considerations enter the ethical discussion if we move from actions that directly affect human life to actions that affect such actions. Thus, problems about laws regarding abortion or medical regulation of transplant procedures or cooperation in suicide require more complex ethical reflection than the initial problems about abortion, transplants, and suicide.