Global Bioethics with Humility and Responsibility

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1. The Leopold Connection

Global Bioethics may be seen as the ultimate quid pro quo for the Land Ethic called for by Aldo Leopold in 1949. The core of that idea is conveniently expressed in the dedication of my first book on bioethics to Leopold directly quoting him. In the second of four paragraphs he had said: There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.

And in the fourth paragraph he had said: An ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Leopold's Land Ethic, as ethic, is clearly an intuitive call for a new morality.

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Bioethics, as a word and as an intuitive concept might have been assumed to be based on the ethic sought by Leopold in those two paragraphs. But Aldo Leopold and I never met as colleagues during the period between 1940, when I returned to a position in cancer research, and his untimely death in 1948 and I was unaware of his existence. Thus my dedication was my only acknowledgement of his contribution after I had been invited to assemble the book from a series of lectures published from 1962 through 1970 with no reference to Aldo Leopold and after the 1971 book had been given a title. The debt was paid in the title and chapters in the 1988 book. While Leopold implied that the path _not discernible to the average individual_ might be available to those individuals well equipped with ethical and scientific insight, that mantle was not assumed by me when the book _Bioethics, Bridge to the Future_ was written. While the title implies authority, the Preface displayed more humility when its purpose was defined merely as the intention to contribute to the future of the human species by promoting the formation of a new discipline from an interdisciplinary foundation.

Today we are forced to admit that the future of the human species is questionable when examined in the time frame of the Third Millennium, or even in a shorter time span. In 1971 it was accepted that since the future seems in doubt then possibly, we might build a “bridge to the future”, by building the discipline of Bioethics as a bridge between the two cultures.

But while the title of the book implied authority the very next paragraph in the Preface showed more humility. It opened with the words _This book is not such a bridge, it is merely a plea that such a bridge be built_. In the Year 2000 Leopold’s “path of social expediency” is still not discernible to any individual or agreed-upon by any interdisciplinary commission or governmental authority. Bioethics advances incrementally, with Global Bioethics emerging in 1988.

2. Global Bioethics in the Year 2000

Bioethics was adopted as part of the name of a proposal for a _Kennedy Center for the Study of Reproduction and Human Development_ changing it to a proposal for an _Institute of Human Reproduction and Bioethics at Georgetown_. With the proposal successful the word “bioethics” was defined in terms of attempts to resolve actual clinical decisions on old problems such as abortion, euthanasia and all the new problems resulting from the technological advances in the clinic and in the laboratories that studied human cells. Despite the thou-

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sands of articles and books written on the medical dilemmas, no medical agreement has ever been reached on what to do in the name of ethical “social expediency” called for by Leopold. Partly as a result of the focus on medical problems and the lack of attention to ecological problems and partly because of the fact that the future of the human species is a world-wide problem, Global Bioethics became the name of the new extension of the “third step” in ethics called for by Leopold. Hence the subtitle of the new book was Building on the Leopold Legacy, and it involved going beyond Leopold into “Dilemmas in Medical Bioethics” and beyond the medical focus with “Dilemmas in Ecological Bioethics”. Thus Global Bioethics was seen as a “bridge” between the medical and the ecological applications. The word global was defined as not only world-wide but as unified and comprehensive.

It appears that articles on “bioethics” have been written by authors who have not seen or not read either the 1971 book or the 1988 book. Notable exceptions are Prof. Ivan Šegota in Rijeka, Croatia and Dr. Artur Filipowicz, S.J., in Warsaw, Poland.

3. Phase I Global Bioethics Not Enough

Despite the vision of Global Bioethics as a bridge between medical and ecological specialisations, in the year 2000 that vision is not enough. The next phase is a matter of social justice. Just how bad the present situation is we have to go beyond the terrible injustice in Bosnia and Kosovo in the Balkans but at the chaos in Africa. In the New York Times Week in Review for Sunday, July 2, 2000, for example, McNeil asked the question How much would it cost to contain the global AIDS epidemic? and answered it with a question that makes for humility in the next phase of Global Bioethics: How much would it cost to banish ignorance, to deaden lust, to shame rape, to stop war, to enrich the poor, to empower women, to defend children, to make decent medical care as globally ubiquitous as Coca-Cola—in short, to get rid of all the underlying causes of the epidemic in the third world?

4. Global Bioethics and the Forces of Nature

Global Bioethics in 1988 was intuitively proposed as a secular program of evolving a morality that calls for decisions in health care and in the preserv-

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5 V.R. Potter, Global Bioethics..., op. cit., 78.
tion of the natural environment. It is a morality of responsibility. (...) Bioethics remains what it was originally – a system of morality based on biological knowledge and human values, with the human species accepting responsibility for its own survival and for the preservation of the natural environment.

From the 1970's to the present it has become apparent that the adaptive, healing, and restorative forces of nature have been overwhelmed by the destructive forces of the human species. One of the missions of Global Bioethics has been to advance environmental ethics to correct this trend. There are many organisations working in the same direction without naming survival as the goal or Global Bioethics as a necessity. The wish list consists of “what we must do” not “what we ought to do”. Global Bioethics, as a secular morality, urges that we ought to do what we must do. The mission might develop greater motivation with a sense of obligation. Leading organisations for “what we must do” include the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), The Natural Step (TNS), Environmental Defense, Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), and The Turning Point Project, a consortium of over 50 like-minded organisations, and many other advocacy groups. Despite all this effort the forces of nature may continue to be overwhelmed by the human species only to strike back with local disasters and with climatic changes on the global scale.

5. A Secular Bioethics and the Warsaw Connection

At this moment in the middle of the Year 2000 I do not have the time, the energy, or the information needed to sustain a scholarly analysis of the needed dialogue between a secular Bioethics (Global Bioethics) and religious beliefs in general. However, I am stimulated to begin because of my nascent friendship with Artur Filipowicz, S.J., Ph.D. which he initiated after reading my publications on bioethics dating from 1970 to the present while at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. In February of this year [2000] he received a Ph.D. in Moral Theology at the Papal Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, where he has been the lecturer of Moral Theology and Philosophical Ethics since 1995. The relevance of all this is the title of his Ph.D. dissertation: Bioethics of Van Rensselaer Potter and its evaluation in the light of moral teachings of John Paul II. The title of the thesis will be used as the subtitle of his forthcoming book.

In order for me to understand his perspective Dr. Filipowicz kindly sent me a complete copy of the lengthy document John Paul II Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, Vatican City, 1995. This gift makes it possible to complement the work of Dr. Filipowicz in advance and to begin the analysis of the points of

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congruence between secular bioethics and the philosophy of John Paul II from the present perspective of Global Bioethics here and now, with the hope that "biomedical ethics" will be re-examined in the light of *The Gospel of Life* and knowledge of religion in general by readers in the opening decades of the Year 2000. I believe that there is a trend toward substantial agreement up to the final hurdle: identification of the source of what I see as intuitions based on scientific observations of real changes in the environment and in life forms over long periods of time. Meanwhile John Paul II is concerned about the same phenomena that concern bioethics and he calls for similar responses.

6. A Secular Bioethics as Intuitionism

Bioethics has been presented as an intuition on numerous occasions since 1970. The intuition that it is right and good to work for the survival of the human species to the year 3000 and beyond, to seek help from science to determine "what we must do", and to mobilise political support all in the name of bioethics is better served by publicising the facts of where we are today and by documenting the results of appropriate action\(^\text{10}\) than by debating the ethical validity of the basic proposition and its corollaries. This position endorsing intuitionism, while not informed by contemporary literature, has been influenced by the extensive discourse of Henry Sidgwick, a 19th Century Cambridge philosopher of the old school, who published the First Edition of *The Methods of Ethics* in 1874 with a passion for intuitionism that was maintained throughout his life. In the Preface to the Second Edition (1877) he concluded that he felt enabled to *transcend the commonly received antithesis between Intuitionists and Utilitarians*. In the Sixth (1901) and Seventh Editions (1907) he returned to Intuitionism in three chapters including Chapter XIII, Book III Philosophical Intuitionism. Discussing the task of philosophers as commonly assumed he concluded *Rather, we should expect that the history of Moral Philosophy — so far at least as those whom we may call orthodox thinkers are concerned — would be a history of attempts to enunciate in full breadth and clearness, those primary intuitions of Reason, by the scientific application of which to common moral thought of mankind may be at once systematized and corrected*\(^\text{11}\).

While targeting the long-term future, *Bioethical Issues for the 21st Century*\(^\text{12}\)

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stressed “sustainability” and asked “sustainability for whom?” “for what?” and “for how long?”. The questions call for answers in the name of “bioethical sustainability”: for whom? – diverse ethnic populations; for what? – for a maintained and restored natural environment with species diversity and a decent society; and for how long? – in the absence of a decent world society over the past 5000 years and even today, the primary goal calls for action with present day payoffs that anticipate the long-term future. The video presented at Gijon, Spain ended with the intuitive admonition: *The Third Millennium will be either The Age of Global Bioethics or The Age of Anarchy.*

The contact with Artur Filipowicz was coincident with a new development. The above mention of the video presentation at Gijon, Spain was the result of an invitation that came in 1999 to participate in the opening ceremony of the World Conference on Bioethics June 20-24, 2000. Shortly after the event, in July 2000, I received from Dr. Palacios notice of the presentation on June 24 of the *Bioethics Declaration of Gijon* by the 19-member named Scientific Committee of the *International Society of Bioethics*, and of its availability on the Internet in English and French at www.sibi.org. I immediately obtained the *Declaration* in hard copy and noted the content of the 15 clearly-stated paragraphs that might be called intuitions.

The point of all this is that the Declaration is in a way a counterpoint to the *Gospel of Life* although much less extensive and not directed toward all the same points. Paragraph 14 differs from the unequivocal position of the *Gospel* which seems to say that Death is evil and should be postponed as long as possible even for dependent terminally ill older people in nursing homes, avoiding assisted dying. Paragraph 14 in the *Declaration* states *The ethical debate on end-of-life issues should be continued in order to analyse in depth the different ethical and cultural conceptions in this context and in order to assess the way of their harmonisation.* Although open-minded in Paragraph 14, the *Declaration* is more explicit in Paragraph 3: *The teaching of Bioethics should be incorporated into the educational system, and should be the object of understandable and accurate texts.*

### 7. A Secular Bioethics and *The Gospel of Life*

With the foregoing presentation of a secular bioethics as intuitionism and the challenge of the A. Filipowicz thesis and forthcoming book not yet available in English, but with the gift of the papal encyclical, the time has come to raise the question “Are original religious insights all based on intuitions?”

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13 See *World Conference on Assisted Dying, Boston, September 1-3, 2000* jointly sponsored by The World Federation of Right to Die Societies and The Hemlock Society [www.hemlock.org].
John Paul II is aware of the word bio-ethics and he refers to the idea amicably; at one point he declares Especially significant is the reawakening of an ethical reflection on issues affecting life. The emergence and ever more widespread development of bioethics is promoting more reflection and dialogue – between believers and nonbelievers, as well as between followers of different religions – on ethical problems, including fundamental issues pertaining to human life.

Later in the Encyclical he called for a cultural change that is completely congruent with global bioethics. In a word, we can say that the cultural change which we are calling for demands from everyone the courage to adopt a new lifestyle, consisting in making practical choices – at the personal, family, social and international level – on the basis of a correct scale of values: the primacy of being over having, of the person over things. This renewed lifestyle involves a passing from indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance of them. Other people are not rivals from whom we must define ourselves, but brothers and sisters to be supported. They are to be loved for their own sakes, and they enrich us by their very presence. Then he remarked Intellectuals can also do much to build a new culture of human life (...). A specific contribution will have to come from Universities, particularly from Catholic Universities, and from Centres, Institutes and Committees of Bioethics.

The question here is whether, if these ideas are intuitive in bioethics, are they not intuitive in the mind of John Paul II? If religious leaders aren't required to find “reasons” based on moral philosophy, why am I? The answer, of course, is obvious.

Intuition has been the farthest thing from the claims of every religious innovator from Martin Luther to Joseph Smith, one of the most explicit pioneers. Smith claimed to have unearthed the Book of Mormon inscribed on golden plates. After translating the book he recruited five associates and founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Fayette, N.Y. on April 6, 1830. After much travail the movement achieved permanence and today is one of the most powerful forces for the common good in the world. The many other Christian movements are less explicit about their origins.

8. The Gospel of Life and the Survival Issue

Secular bioethics has stated the intuitive goal as survival in a decent society to the year 3000 and beyond. The papal encyclical suggests a time frame and the responsibility of the human species toward future generations (see EV 42) and there is a reference to survival and to responsibility in the statement attrib-

uted to Moses (Deut. 30: 15, 19): See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil (...) I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live (EV 28). The reference in The Gospel to this admonition by Moses raises the question of the need for family planning in order to limit an excessive increase in the total human population. John Paul II develops a perspective that is quite compatible with that of Global Bioethics except for the methodology of the individual couple. He opens par. 91 with the declaration Today an important part of policies which favour life is the issue of population growth. Certainly public authorities have a responsibility to "intervene to orient the demography of the population". While stressing that reproduction is the inalienable responsibility of married couples and a matter of human rights he opposes methods of individual choice that involve contraception, sterilisation and abortion in order to regulate birth. Here he states a critical premise that is completely bioethical Governments and the various international agencies must above all strive to create economic, social, public health and cultural conditions which will enable married couples to make their choices about procreation in full freedom and with genuine responsibility. In other words, "a decent society". This entire section of The Gospel (91 and following) is worth the attention of bioethicists. The whole issue is seen as one of practical ecumenism - an area for dialogue and joint efforts with the followers of other religions and with all people of good will. No single person or group has a monopoly on the defence and promotion of life. (...) On the eve of the Third Millennium, the challenge facing us is an arduous one: only the concerted efforts of all those who believe in the value of life can prevent a setback of unforeseeable consequences for civilisation. In other words, if the value of life can be seen in the broader perspective of Aldo Leopold: man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it and not be limited to the human species we might just be able to prevent a setback of unforeseeable consequences for civilisation.

In other words, the Third Millennium might be The Age of Global Bioethics and The Gospel of Life and we might avoid The Age of Anarchy.

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In all humility, I believe that Biomedical Ethics needs to broaden its mission to include the responsibility of all of us to think and act in relation to the long-term future State of the World that will be faced by the human species. Critical study of the Filipowicz message and the Gijon Declaration as well as a return to Aldo Leopold and the book Global Bioethics might help the intellectual community to formulate activity that would help us to avoid The Age of Anarchy.