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Expanding Engelhardt's Cogitation: Claim for Panorthodox Bioethics

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editorial

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Expanding Engelhardt's Cogitation: Claim for Panorthodox Bioethics

In June 2018 the Texan philosopher and distinguished bioethicist Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. crossed the great divide to meet his maker, as he would probably put it. His work remains till now the most systematic effort to fully revise Bioethics on the basis of the Orthodox Christian theology doctrines, while it is also a precise account of Ethics and Bioethics in the "after God" era. Engelhardt was an excellent master of ancient Greek, medieval, western and eastern philosophy, and after he converted from the Roman Catholic to the Eastern Orthodox Church – officially the Orthodox Catholic Church – he indulged in the works of the Holy Fathers and became greatly influenced by them. This is clearly manifest in his views and continuous reference to Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers. His conversion crucially influenced not only his bioethical views, but also his entire philosophical system. This magnificent journey obviously turned the Texan philosopher into a true Theologist – not in the academic sense, but in the one the Orthodox Catholic Church accepts, according to which "a Theologist is a person of God, from God, before God and speaks to praise God"[1]. Engelhardt was not the first to deal with bioethical issues under the spectrum of Orthodox Theology, but he was the first to unravel both secular and Western-Church Bioethics and suggest a totally different version of Bioethics based on the principles of Orthodox ethics, the ceremonial and esoteric life of the Orthodox Church, having previously made himself a true communicant of both the paternal tradition and dogmatic teaching.

Engelhardt's conversion and the new, unanticipated views on ethics and bioethics it brought about attracted both favorable and critical comments. Several scholars assume that this conversion produced a totally new Engelhardt. Few however, acknowledge the organic unity between his former and his later work; among them the bioethicist Cornelia Delkekamp-Hayes suggests that this allowed Engelhardt to incorporate all his previously discordant views in a coherent and consistent philosophical system.[2] Tagging along with Delkekamp-Hayes I also believe that understanding

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[1] Ioannis Ladas, *The Problem of the Philosophical Foundation of Bioethics and the Bioethical Views of H. Tristram Engelhardt*, Jr. (PhD diss., University of Athens, 2018), 38.

[2] Mark J. Cherry and Ana S. Iltis, "Introduction At the Foundations of Christian Bioethics; or, Why H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.'s Orthodox Christian Bioethics is so very Counter-Cultural", in *At the Roots of Christian Bioethics – Critical Essays on the Thought of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.*, eds. Ana Smith Iltis and Mark J. Cherry (Salem: Scrivener Publishing: 2010), 6, and Cornelia Delkeskamp-Hayes, "Χ. Τ. Ένγκελχαρντ: Μια επιβλητική φυσιογνωμία της σύγχρονης Ορθόδοξης Βιοηθικής", accessed September 2, 2018, www.pemptousia.gr/2014/01/x-τ-

the philosophical, theological, ethical and bioethical views of the Texan philosopher one has to study Engelhardt's entire work; for example, the reader of *Foundations of Secular Humanism* who is not familiar with Engelhardt's work may jump to the conclusion that Engelhardt altogether rejects a broad spectrum of practices (e.g. abortion).[3] The comprehensive knowledge of Engelhard's entire work allows better understanding of his individual works and the complex thinking of the Texan professor.[4] Some scholars claim that his early period is the most important, but I believe this is mostly due to the fact that his later views are hard to be perceived by those who are not acquainted with the Orthodox Catholic Church dogma. Cornelia Delkeskamp-Hayes thinks on the one hand that it is not easy to accept the crucial diagnosis of Engelhardt in relation to the limits of secularist ethics of rationalism and the collapse of the work of Enlightenment, and on the other that it is very difficult to distinguish between the arguments of the Texan philosopher as regards the abilities of the secularist moral speech and the possibilities of Christian knowledge.[5]

I. Engelhardt 2 v. Engelhardt 1

The work of Engelhardt can be divided into his ante- and post-conversion period. It seems that in his early period Engelhardt discusses the issues he deals with as a secular religious thinker; in his post-conversion period, however, he completely revises his former views in such a way as to conform to the theistic approach he had meanwhile adopted. This gives to his later works a confessional character, something that is not at all strange, since after his conversion he seems to have developed the need to critically revisit and revise all his former views. He even seems to feel so guilty for his previous contribution to the development of secular Bioethics (from the beginning of the '70s up to the '80s), as to think of it as a sin.[6] This urged him to write both *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* and *After God: Morality and Bioethics in a Secular Age*[7], in the first chapter of which he mentions some biograph-

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ένγκελχαρντ-μια-επιβλητική-φυσιογ/.

[3] Kevin Wm. Wildes, S.J., "Completing the Picture: Engelhardt's Christian Bioethics", in *At the Roots of Christian Bioethics – Critical Essays on the Thought of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.*, eds Ana Smith Iltis and Mark J. Cherry (Salem: Scrivener Publishing: 2010), 101.

[4] Ibid, 101.

[5] Cornelia Delkeskamp-Hayes, "Morality in a Post-Modern, Post-Christian World: Engelhardt's Diagnosis and Therapy", in *At the Roots of Christian Bioethics – Critical Essays on the Thought of H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.*, eds Ana Smith Iltis and Mark J. Cherry (Salem: Scrivener Publishing: 2010), 28.

[6] H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *Μετά Θεόν: Ηθική & Βιοηθική στον Αιώνα της Εκκοσμίκευσης*, trans. PolyxeniTsaliki-Kiosoglou (Holy Mountain Athos:The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopedi, 2018), 284.

[7] H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *After God: Morality and Bioethics in a Secular Age* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2014).

ical data, that are very insightful for the evolution of his philosophical thinking and cover, as he notes, "what it could be considered as an unbridgeable gap between his early and his later work"[8]. The autobiographic references in *After God: Morality and Bioethics in a Secular Age* serve as explanations and facilitate the reader of his early works to understand the arguments used in *Foundations of Bioethics*[9] against those he adopts in *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* and the rest of his later works. In his previous studies, Engelhardt reviewed the reasons that his arguments could not offer regulatory foundation to a logically reasoned secular morality and bioethics, which led him to the conclusion that moral philosophy in general doesn't have the power to establish rules applicable to all humans and support morality and Bioethics by strong arguments only, if it is cut off from God.[10] So, the stake in the first edition of *The Foundations of Bioethics* was to establish a typical secular morality and Bioethics, one that would facilitate the solution of bioethical disputes. Engelhardt tried to establish an interactive morality, focusing on the distinction between moral bonds between friends (the morality of a specific community), and the moral agreement between strangers. This way he endeavored to offer a moral perspective, one that would overcome the variety and diversity in moral visions and provide at the same time a common moral vocabulary. The procedural secular Bioethics however, elaborated in the first edition of *The Foundations of Bioethics,* is by no means an idiosyncratic one; it is based upon a common virtue that can bind together people that are morally strangers enabling them to work together. Whereas his views were misinterpreted, in the preamble of the second edition, he makes clear, to avoid misunderstandings, that the said book is not a presentation of his own specific moral ideas, but an inquiry concerning the possibility of a morally authorized cooperation of morally strangers.[11] Nevertheless, his views had been perceived so diversely that some saw in them the creation of a new secular morality, and others the possibility of a valid substantial consent - several even considered that he supports individualism and the value of freedom, reaching to the point where he was called not only a liberal but also a libertarian.[12]

The Texan philosopher also stresses that in his works before 2000 the approach of the concept to live without God was not attempted, nor the roots of the dominating secularized culture together with the effects of the establishment of atheism

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[8] Engelhardt, *Μετά Θεόν*, 36.

[9] H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); also H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[10] Engelhardt, *Μετά Θεόν*, 38.

[11] Engelhardt, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, xi.

[12] Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Η 'Οικουμενικότητα' της Βιοηθικής και ο Tristram Engelhardt Jr.", *Φιλοσοφία και Παιδεία* (2016): 16-22, 20.

or at least agnosticism.[13] Indeed, in those works a thorough review of the way this condition is related to the cut-off of the dominating culture from God was never attempted[14], although the question is discerned vaguely in the bedrock of both *The Foundations and the Bioethics* and *Secular Humanism*.[15] *The Foundation of Christian Bioethics* looks into issues of morality, political theory and bioethics that may not be dealt with sufficiently within the limits of secular philosophy, and an effort is made to describe the character of the moral and bioethical principles that the Christians share as morally friends. In this book that clearly exhibits Engelhardt's ethical and bioethical views, one could claim that Engelhardt thinks like a theologist, using a language that, as Myrto Dragona Monachou notes, is strange to philosophers. Nevertheless, the way Engelhardt deals with moral dilemmas does not differ a lot from his previous approaches, but the "principle of approval" has not the same place anymore. Engelhardt refers scarcely to autonomy, freedom and consent, stressing that while consent is a serious moral principle for secular Bioethics, it is not so for Christian Bioethics.

II. Deconstruction of the secular and the western Christian bioethics

Bioethics according to Engelhardt was created to serve a theoretical as well as a practical purpose. The theoretical purpose was to describe proper moral behavior, while the practical one was to create a kind of secular priests, who would be able to provide advice in hospitals, medical schools and research centres. In its current form, bioethics resulted as a part of a secular system and was not a religiously neutral evolution, but a movement that was formed in North America and West Europe, where the dominating communities had cut themselves off from their Christian past.

Christian Bioethics, as the Texan bioethicist notes, didn't have the power to offer moral guidance to new cutting-edge medicine. The reasons for this may be summarized to the following three: First, Christian Bioethics tried to establish its assertions on apocalypse, which it approached with earthly terms. Therefore, it did not find a transcendent foundation, but a number of social-historic interpetations of the apocalypse of transcendence. Second, it orientated into a secular moral philosophy and found itself in front of great variety and fragmentation in many moralities. Third, there is not just one Christianity, thus Christianity was not able to provide clear guidance, since there are diverse views and anyone may choose among them.

On the other hand, secular determinism seems to secure unity for bioethics, it is rationally accessible by everybody and also able to provide guidance to public policy. However, the unity that the secular bioethics secures is empty in reality, because there are so many secular interpretation for morality, justice, integrity, exactly as

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[13] Engelhardt, *Μετά Θεόν*, 36-37.

[14] Ibid, 38.

[15] H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *Bioethics and Secular Humanism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991).

it is with regard to the religions. In his effort to avoid being trapped within a variety of moral and bioethical considerations, Engelhardt concluded that if the Truth is not revealed to us and does not guide us personally, we will remain forever lost in a labyrinth of moral and bioethical considerations. Engelhardt found the Truth in Christianity, therefore he claims that Christian Bioethics are directly dependent on the knowledge of the dogma of Christianity. But wihch among the several dogmas? The one, according to Engelhardt, that once upon a time united "in faith and pray the Mediterranean coast" and in our times is preserved within the experience of the Orthodox Church that abides by the tradition of the first ten centuries. Traditional Christianity may provide answers to bioethical issues through a teaching - and worldview - that was established "before the world gets dizzy from the spectrum of the Christianities created after the Reform and the Enlightenment". Therefore, where moral wisdom cannot be acquired through analysis and the pure reason, the experiential relation with God is required.

III. The most essential causes, according to Engelhardt, for the failure (secular and western Christian) bioethics exists within the Orthodox Church

By deconstructing western Christian Bioethics, the Texan philosopher shows that the division of Christianity played a serious role in the failure of Christianity to provide bioethical guidance, since through such a variety of "Christianites" anyone concerned could choose whatever pleased them most. The same applies to secular Bioethics, since the alleged unity it allows is only wishful thinking, given that there are equally many secular interpretations for morality. If we look deeper, we may find that also within the Orthodox Church there are no clear normative views, but in many cases there are extensive differentiations with regard to bioethical issues. This seems to be extremely annoying since it proves that one of the most essential causes, according to Texan philosopher, for the failure of both secular and western Christian Bioethics exists within the Orthodox Church.[16] These differentiations in dealing with bioetuical issues become a problem when they are expressed as the official views of the various Autocephalous Churches and have the approval of a local Holy Synod. The consequences of the adoption of different views within the Orthodox Church may be clearly manifest through this: The Church of Russia decided not to baptize infants given birth by a surrogate mother. Such a decision could not be accepted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the other Orthodox Churches, since it is based neither on the Holy Canons nor on Holy Tradition. Now let's consider two families living in Geneva, a city with several Christian communities, and let one belong to the Church of Russia and the other to the Church of Serbia. These two families, which may maintain friendly relations, both acquire their child through surrogate motherhood; however, although both infants were born to Orthodox Christian parents, only one of

[16] Ladas, *The Problem of the Philosophical Foundation*, 285.

them will be baptized. Such issues, especially when they concern the Diaspora, have huge ecclesiastical effects and are a wound for the body of the Orthodox Church; this is mainly due to the fact that some Churches, ignoring predefined geographical boundaries, hurried to create "national Churches" in regions that typically belong to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's jurisdiction. Although issues as such are not directly linked to Bioethics, but rather to the unity of the Orthodox Church, make bioethical debates even more complex.[17]

Differentiations as such among the Orthodox Churches made the coming together of a Panorthodox Council an imperative ever since the end of the 19th century. The Holy and Great Council of Orthodox Church, which eventually met in June 2016 on Crete, is undoubtfully the most important ecclesiastical event of the last centuries, since on one hand it declared the unity of the Orthodox Church, and on the other it stressed the strong interest the Church has for the the sciences, noting that "The Orthodox Church cannot remain on the sidelines of discussions about such momentous anthropological, ethical and existential matters"[18]. In fact, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his opening speech made clear that the Church, before it proceeds with dealing with the real issues that concern humanity (Bioethics-related ones included) has to resolve issues of domestic nature, which pertain to its visible unity.[19] As a result, it is certain that the new Holy and Great Council will express specific views on bioethical issues, combatting this way the deviances and the polyphony, so as to create the basis for a Panorthodox Bioethics.

IV. Articles and Texts Presented in this Book

The papers included in this Special Issue of *Conatus* devoted to T. H. Engelhardt Jr. cover a broad spectrum of Engelhardt's views on philosophy in general, and Bioethics in particular. The variety of the topics discussed is telling of the extend and magnitude of the Texan philosopher's thought. This issue includes eleven papers authored by prominent professors and scholars who have either studied and worked with Engelhardt, or are experts in his work in various fields. Any attempt to provide a summary of these papers in this Editorial would probably leave several aspects of these works out, therefore I will only suggest to the reader to proceed with the rest of this issue.

Now this brief Editorial comes to its end I wish to express my gratitude to Evangelos Protopapadakis, Professor of Applied Ethics at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Head of the Greek Unit of the UNESCO Chair in Bioeth-

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[17] Ladas, *The Problem of the Philosophical Foundation*, 6.

[18] "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church", accessed September 13, 2018, https://www.holycouncil.org/home

[19] Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Opening Address at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council", accessed September 13, 2018, https://www.holycouncil.org/home.

ics (Haifa), who inspired and motivated me to get involved with the work of Tristram Engelhardt Jr., and also for inviting me to be the Guest Editor of this Special Issue of *Conatus*. I am also indebted to the Associate Editors and the whole staff of *Conatus* for an absolutely impeccable cooperation – especially to the Managing Editor, Ms. Despina Vertzagia.

May this Special Issue be a worthy tribute to Hugo Tristram Engelhardt Jr. for his significant contribution to philosophy in general, and Bioethics in particular.

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