

Smuggling Theology into Discussions of Ethics

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C. S. Lewis once wrote that he found he could smuggle theology into stories such as the Chronicles of Narnia and his science fiction trilogy. In these waning days of interest in theology for its own sake, it appears that it is possible to smuggle in a great deal of theology into discussions of ethics and moral concerns. Of course, that means that the theology we speak must be specific and not simplistically superimposed on issues. It is not enticing to serious thinkers to simply repeat the Ten Commandments when attempting to discover the right or wrong of a given situation. Law is a vital aspect of ethics, but Law alone may give the impression that the only message Christians have is, "Thou shalt not!" It is the Gospel that interprets and gives life and new meaning to the dilemmas we face.

The approach of ethical relativism in issues of bioethics betrays a serious fault. Such an approach does not make allowances for the Judeo-Christian vision of the world that gives life meaning. Without the Christian vision, confusion over the use of the new technologies and what limits, if any, there ought to be will continue to plague us. For several decades there have been efforts to create a new ethics divorced from the ultimate moral considerations of right and wrong. In short, since the 1970's, ethics has become a matter of following procedures that, for the most part, merely guarantee the right of the individual to invent his own notion of right and wrong. But individuals still need to live in community and an ethic that simply gives individuals freedom is an ethic that creates chaos for a community. Someone once said, "All questions regarding the good of this or that act imply the question, 'What is the purpose of life?' Until this great question is answered, it is not possible to offer a standard of choice among competing goods."