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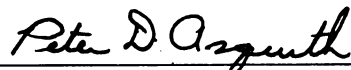
Appeals to Nature in Biomedical Ethics

presented by

Gwenolyn Gail Kott

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**APPEALS TO NATURE
IN BIOMEDICAL ETHICS**

By

Gwenolyn Gail Kott

A THESIS

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

APPEALS TO NATURE IN BIOMEDICAL ETHICS

By

Gwenolyn Gail Kott

This paper explores two critiques of biomedicine, that share common grounds for their objections. In each case, 'nature' and 'naturalness' serve as models of moral rightness. First, I examine Paul Ramsey's ethical challenge to in vitro fertilization. He morally condemns the unnaturalness of artificial conception. Secondly, I examine J. Gay-Williams' ethical challenge to euthanasia. He morally condemns the unnaturalness of actively promoting death. In contrast, I argue 'nature' and 'naturalness' are only descriptive terms, referring to things that exist or happen without human design. 'Naturalness,' alone, cannot define the morality of any biomedical procedure. Meaningful moral objections to in vitro fertilization or euthanasia need some grounds unrelated to 'naturalness.'

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
UNNATURAL FERTILIZATION	2
Natural Courses of Action	2
Rationality	4
Medical Ethics	5
Social Disaster	6
UNNATURAL DEATH	8
Natural Courses of Action	8
Rationality	9
Proper Medical Treatment	10
Social Disaster	11
NATURE AND NATURAL.....	13
Nature ₁	13
Nature ₂	14
Nature ₃	14
Naturalistic Fallacy	15
Natural Prescriptions	16
Natural Functions	16

Complex Functioning	17
Agency	17
Rationality	18
Condemning Civilization	19
Condemning Medicine	19
Empty Moral Distinctions	20
Immoral Intentions	21
Unnatural Violence	23
Social Disaster	24
Rhetorical Persuasion	25
Rational Restraint	26
CONCLUSION	27
NOTES	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of nature and naturalness frequently enter discussions of biomedical ethics. Often, appeals to nature underlie objections to particular biomedical procedures. For instance, one may say that a certain biomedical procedure interferes with natural functions and natural goals. This way of thinking presumes that nature has a positive moral value. It assumes that something's being "natural," makes it right. This assumption invites us to ask whether naturalness has any moral significance. If so, can someone ground an objection to a specific biomedical procedure by appealing to nature?

Two current issues in biomedical ethics that receive criticisms based on appeals to nature are in vitro fertilization (IVF) and euthanasia. Since the relationship between nature and right conduct often plays a key role in arguments that challenge particular biomedical procedures, this relationship invites careful examination. In this paper, I will identify and critically examine the hidden meaning of appeals to nature. I focus on the arguments against unnaturalness set forth by Paul Ramsey and J. Gay-Williams.

UNNATURAL FERTILIZATION

The first example, of biomedical critiques that appeal to nature, is Paul Ramsey's challenge to IVF. He bases his objections on this procedure's unnaturalness. Understanding his position requires an explanation of the medical procedure that he terms unethical. The surgical procedure referred to as IVF is a process of collecting some of a woman's eggs and then fertilizing them 'in vitro' with her partner's sperm. 'In vitro' is a Latin term that literally means 'in glass.' Some fertilized eggs develop in a petri dish until the eight-cell stage when a cell biopsy can determine the genetic normality of the eggs. The next step is the surgical transfer of genetically normal embryos from a petri dish to a woman's uterus. Around 25% of the time, one of the embryos will become implanted in the uterus and continue normal development until maturity.¹

In contrast, so-called "natural" fertilization is a process that occurs during a sexual union in which a male releases sperm inside the vagina of a female. In this process, the actual fertilization occurs in the fallopian tubes. This happens when a sperm cell unites with an ovum before descending into the uterus for full development.

Natural Courses of Action:

Ramsey gives fertilization through sexual intercourse, often called natural fertilization, a much higher moral weight than IVF. He strongly criticizes biomedical interference with the course of events leading to ordinary fertilization, holding that:

Procreation, parenthood is certainly one of those 'courses of action' natural to man, which cannot without violation be disassembled and put together again ... any more than we have the right to impiously destroy the environment of which we are a part ...²

As presented by Ramsey, IVF is problematic because it intrudes on the purposefully innate processes of nature. Like Aristotle, Ramsey holds that "... all things in nature have certain works and courses of action."³ This means nature designed all things for sustaining life and maintaining good order. According to this theory, everything in the universe has a purpose. As an example, one may say that nature designed eyes for seeing and eyelashes for protecting the eyes.

Ramsey adds that nature designed natural procreation for survival of our species. He claims the "spiritual autonomy" of nature creates a moral scope for viewing the self-initiated processes that perpetuate all living things without any medical help. Ramsey insists "there are aspects of existence that ought not to be violated."⁴ He holds that medical professionals have a duty to prevent "natural gestation" from becoming a mechanical process of "decantation."⁵ This comparison of IVF with wine-making illustrates Ramsey's view that reproductive technology lowers our respect for humanity.

The moral contrast between natural and unnatural medicine unfolds as Ramsey cites Leon Kass, an Executive Committee Secretary at the National Academy of Sciences. Kass makes the following claims regarding the role of humans in the natural order:

Human procreation is human partly because it is not simply an activity of our rational wills. Men and women are embodied as well as desiring and calculating creatures. Human procreation ... joins the pleasure of sex, love and the desire for children in the activity by which we continue the chain of human existence.⁶

This quotation relies on Aristotle's claim that "man is a rational animal,"⁷ to show the rightness of natural procreation. Kass contends the physical embodiment of humans places us in the animal kingdom where nature directs the perpetuation of our species.

In other words, humans are “embodied” by the innate physical responses of sex-linked hormones. Kass argues that these chemical changes show the natural rightness of [sexually] “begetting” children.

Rationality:

Conversely, he contends that ignoring our embodiment denies our human rationality. This rationality gives humans understanding of the superiority of natural procreation. Kass holds that biological parenthood promotes adequate caring for children.⁸ In his view, we only develop much needed psychological attitudes of love and responsibility toward children through sexual begetting of children. Kass stresses that the intrusive procedure of IVF will make sexual intercourse unnecessary and parenting inadequate. He concludes that there is no acceptable substitute for natural procreation.

In the following quote, Kass predicts that IVF will replace the “healing profession” with “embryologists-geneticist-physicians.”⁹

The mysterious and intimate processes of generation are to be moved from the darkness of the womb to the bright lights of the laboratory ... (where) the divorce of new life from human sexuality ... began with artificial insemination and will finish with ectogenesis, the full laboratory growth of a baby from sperm to term.¹⁰

Expanding on the warning from Kass, Ramsey states that IVF threatens to “replace human procreation with laboratory manufacture.”¹¹ “Manufacturing” is mechanically making, fabricating, fictitiously inventing or reproducing the work of nature. Ramsey often uses the term, ‘manufacturing,’ to criticize IVF as unnatural means of procreation. He argues that “the mimicry of natural fertilization ... cannot be guaranteed to be perfect.”

¹² In his view, IVF weakly imitates the true thing, and creates a false state of affairs.

Medical Ethics:

Ramsey claims that placing “artificial fertilization and gestation on a parity with natural processes” is medically unethical.¹³ He concludes that IVF creates unnatural, unnecessary and, immoral risks of genetic defects.

According to Ramsey, this needless risk of man-made birth defects grew out of “liberal abortion attitudes.”¹⁴ He finds that “... teams of scientists are now hard at work assaulting the entire process of human gestation.”¹⁵ This leads to Ramsey’s claim that reproductive technology ignores medical ethics to operate on the “principles governing biological manufacture ...”¹⁶

The problem as outlined by Ramsey carries over into other areas of reproductive technology. He finds “inherent immorality” in various medical practices that destroy the integrity of natural functioning.¹⁷ Ramsey insists that IVF, artificial insemination, abortion, and vasectomy and genetic engineering unwisely manipulate the natural process of procreation. He recommends that the medical profession condemn the entire trend.

In contrast with immoral alteration of natural events, Ramsey outlines the proper role of biomedicine regarding infertility as follows:

If, infertility is a clinical defect which should be remedied, this would call for reconstructive surgery on the oviducts ... By contrast, without curing a medical condition, IVF concentrates on a product.¹⁸

Here, Ramsey morally distinguishes reconstructive surgery on the oviducts from surgical fertilization and implantation. He views the former as a respected medical procedure while holding that “IVF is not a medical procedure.”¹⁹ Ramsey further states that IVF is an evasive response to the desire for children that ignores the cause of infertility.

The proper medical response to infertility, given by Ramsey, is either curing clinical defects or comforting those who must accept them. Ramsey interprets this as assisting nature. He holds “The proper objective of medicine is to serve and care for man ... in all his natural courses of action.”²⁰

Social Disaster:

Ramsey further develops the idea that tampering with nature is dangerous by citing two important literary figures. In 1932, Aldous Huxley published Brave New World, describing fertilizing and decanting rooms in the East London Hatchery. Later, in 1947, C. S. Lewis published The Abolition of Man, illustrating “man’s project of gaining ever increasing power over nature.”²¹ Ramsey recites the following warning from C. S. Lewis:

What we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument ... The long-term exercises of power in breeding will mean the power to make its descendants into what it pleases.²²

Ramsey claims that both Lewis and Huxley “singled out genetics, pharmacology and experimental embryology as sources of coming great evils” that are “the greatest threats to the humanity of man.”²³ Ramsey contends this is correct, since IVF is “a long step toward genetic Hatcheries ... and unlimited genetic changes.”²⁴

From Ramsey, we receive the warning that IVF opens the door to wide-scale technological abuse of procreation. He sees “the prospect of controlled breeding programs aimed at producing superior members of the human race.”²⁵ Biomedicine becoming a distorted science is a reality for Ramsey. He contends that IVF treats humans like machines whose “natural courses of action” can be “disassembled and put together again.”²⁶

In other words, IVF turns “medical care into a technological function.”²⁷ Comparing IVF with manufacturing allows Ramsey to convey a sense of harshness that he contrasts with the fluid events of “natural genesis.”²⁸

He uses this contrast to justify a moral distinction between ordinary fertilization and IVF. He predicts that a false sense of ethics will make our species into a “controlled product ... wholly plastic to ingenious scientific interventions and alterations” like the “breeding” and “cloning” of superior humans.²⁹ Ramsey adds that IVF represents a snow-balling displacement of medical ethics that will bring “social disaster.”³⁰ He concludes that condemning the practice of IVF reflects medical wisdom.

UNNATURAL DEATH

The second example, of biomedical critiques that appeal to nature, is Gay-Williams' challenge to euthanasia. Like Ramsey, he bases his objections on this procedure's unnaturalness. To understand his position, we need an explanation of the practice of euthanasia that he considers unethical. Euthanasia is a term taken from the Greek language, which literally means the good death of another. Although people define euthanasia in many ways, Marvin Kohl holds that acceptance for the following definition is growing:

The act or method of inducing as painless a death as possible where the organism is acutely suffering or in an undesirable state, where the relief of the condition is the only or primary motive and where there is convincing evidence that the resulting death is a greater good ... than the failure to actively intervene.³¹

In contrast, Gay-Williams rejects any definition that ignores the intentional aspect of euthanasia. He defines "euthanasia" as intentionally taking the life of a person suffering from an illness or injury and recovery cannot reasonably be expected.³² He holds that euthanasia only refers to the unnaturalness of deliberate and intentional killing.

Natural Courses of Action:

The main thrust of Gay-Williams challenge to euthanasia is like Ramsey's challenge to IVF. Gay-Williams appeals to the inherent wrongness of unnatural courses of medical action, contending:

Our reflexes and responses fit us to fight attackers, flee wild animals, and ... exercise caution and care necessary to protect ourselves. Our bodies are also structured for survival ... When we are cut, our capillaries seal shut, our blood clots and ... antibodies are produced to fight against alien organisms ...³³

According to Gay-Williams, our body chemistry and all of our organic structures right down to the cellular level work to protect our bodies. He claims the processes of nature, that are purposefully designed for survival, are literally assaulted by euthanasia

Rationality:

Gay-Williams argues that euthanasia is wrong because our rational understanding makes us unlike animals. We are aware that our physiological systems and our innate behavioral responses aim at survival. He contends that:

The organization of the human body and the behavioral responses make the continuation of life a natural goal. By reason alone, we can recognize that euthanasia sets us against our own nature.³⁴

In this view, “reason” asks us to recognize the survival goals built into our natural processes and patterns of behavior. He adds that euthanasia ignores our natural fear of death and life-threatening events. Gay-Williams insists that our basic human instincts and respect for the natural goals of the human body demand non-interference with death.

For Gay-Williams, showing respect for the self-sufficiency of our natural body systems gives credence to the notion of human dignity. He claims that “dignity comes from seeking our [natural] ends.”³⁵ Here, the term ‘dignity’ implies the Kantian notion of respect for persons as ends in themselves. This perspective on human dignity grounds a natural duty to sustain life and oppose medical acts bringing unnatural death.

Gay-Williams further builds his argument for the inherent wrongness of euthanasia by appealing to our general disapproval of ‘killing’. He claims euthanasia is different from letting nature take its course because euthanasia is a “deliberate and intentional” killing.³⁶

Gay-Williams states that:

Euthanasia involves acting as if the inclination towards survival and awareness of this as an end did not exist. Thus, euthanasia denies our basic human character and requires that we regard ourselves or others as something less than full human.³⁷

According to Gay-Williams, deliberately taking a human life is wrong regardless of any incurable suffering. In other words, suffering from a disease or injury without reasonable hope of recovery does not justify killing a human being.

Furthermore, Gay-Williams claims we cannot know with certainty that any illness or physical impairment is incurable. Since modern medicine “does not possess perfect and complete knowledge, a mistaken diagnosis is possible ... and spontaneous remission does occur in many cases.”³⁸ He concludes that allowing unnatural introduction of death, works against our natural self-interest.

Proper Medical Treatment:

Like Ramsey, Gay-Williams restricts the proper role of medicine to either curing physical ailments or comforting those who must accept them. Both of these individuals contend that proper medical treatment means working to make a patient well or allowing nature to take its course. Gay-Williams cites three cases of medical actions resulting in a patient's death without intending that death. These cases show his views on how intentions relate to proper medical treatment.

The first case is when a seriously ill or injured patient dies from an injection of the wrong drug. Gay-Williams claims this only shows a wrongful death.

He insists that euthanasia does not take place when the physician does not intend to cause death,³⁹ Gay-Williams claims that death never results from an accident in euthanasia.

The second case is when a patient receives an injection of a drug intended to treat his disease or improve his condition. Yet, the patient dies as a result of a bad reaction to the proper medicine. Gay-Williams argues that “this is neither wrongful killing nor euthanasia,” where medical actions intend to cause death.⁴⁰

The third case is nontreatment or withdrawal of treatment when there is no reasonable hope that treatment will save a life. Gay-Williams claims many people mistakenly term this situation, “passive euthanasia,” but it is not euthanasia, at all, because the intended outcome is not death.⁴¹ The goal is often sparing unjustified pain, indignation and financial expense. According to his theory, death following nontreatment or withdrawal of treatment occurs as a natural result of injuries or disease and not from the failure to receive treatment. Gay-Williams argues that a killing does not take place in nontreatment

Death naturally resulting from injury or disease, according to Gay-Williams, reflects our duty to respect the body’s innate defense mechanisms. He adds that it is right to reduce suffering only if this does not defeat these mechanisms. Gay-Williams holds that “we may legitimately seek ... easeful death,” but never “wrongful [intentional] death.” He adds that “euthanasia is not just dying. It is killing.”⁴² Since killing offends our sense of morality, Gay-Williams reasons that euthanasia offends medical ethics.

Social Disaster:

For Gay-Williams, like Ramsey, the seeds of social disaster exist in the misplaced compassion of physicians who treat patients’ desires, instead of treating illnesses.

Both individuals hold that unthinking sympathy and benevolence may lead to wrongful medical acts. As to euthanasia, Gay-Williams claims a patient may believe he and his family would benefit from his medically induced death. Yet, “suffering is a natural part of life” with value for individuals and families.⁴³

Conversely, Gay-Williams holds that opposing natural suffering by endorsing “euthanasia as a social policy is a slippery slope.”⁴⁴ In his view, euthanasia might “have a corrupting influence so that in any case that is severe, doctors and nurses might not try hard enough to save the patient.”⁴⁵ Gay-Williams claims that offering unnatural death as a solution to suffering may bring an overall decline in the quality of health care. and adds:

It is only a short step from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia, to directed euthanasia administered to a patient who has given no authorization, to involuntary euthanasia conducted as part of a social policy.⁴⁶

He argues that “the category of hopelessly ill” may provide opportunities for abuse. “Embedded in a social policy, it would give society ... the authority to eliminate all those who might be considered to ill to function normally any longer.”⁴⁷ Gay-Williams concludes that abruptly disrupting nature, with acts intending death, promises dire consequences for society at large.

NATURE AND NATURAL

Both Ramsey and Gay-Williams ground their objections to specific biomedical procedures on their unnaturalness. This strategy requires the primary assumption that nature, itself, and natural courses of action reveal moral rightness. Some parallel arguments given by Ramsey and Gay-Williams reveal the following variations of this assumption: First, they assume a rational awareness of our natural embodiment and behavioral responses can and should guide moral action. Second, they assume a rational respect for nature defines human dignity. Third, they assume only assisting nature or allowing nature to take its course is the proper role of medicine. Fourth, they assume unnatural remedies for health problems pose moral threats to the ideals of humanity. Fifth, they assume IVF and euthanasia can only bring social disaster. All of these assumptions imply that nature and naturalness have a positive moral value.

Understanding this implication requires us to explore the meaning of ‘nature’ and ‘natural.’ Confusion often surrounds these terms because we use them in different ways. Three different meanings become more clear in John Stuart Mill’s essay, titled “Nature.”⁴⁸ I will explain these meanings and call them: ‘nature₁,’ ‘nature₂’ and ‘nature₃.’

Nature₁:

According to Mill, ‘nature₁’ is, “... a collective name for all facts ... or a name for the mode ... in which all things take place.”⁴⁹ Mill claims the first meaning of nature is “the sum of all phenomena, together with the causes that produce them.”⁵⁰ Quite simply, ‘nature₁’ refers to all living and non-living things and the changes they undergo.

This all-inclusive meaning carries over to the adjective, ‘natural ₁.’ It describes all physical attributes of everything from marine life to modern architecture and all physical events from cell growth to atom splitting. Everything that exists or happens is ‘natural ₁.’

Nature ₂:

Nevertheless, a second meaning of nature often narrows the broad meaning of ‘nature ₁.’ According to Mill, ‘nature ₂’ is “... not everything that happens, but only what takes place without the voluntary and intentional agency of man.”⁵¹ Therefore, ‘natural ₂’ refers to the powers and properties that humans have not rearranged for their own purposes. Things without human shaping includes things such as wind patterns and ocean currents.

Nature ₃:

In contrast, there is a third sense of nature, which I call ‘nature ₃.’ Mill contends that many people have used this concept to convey the ideas of “commendation, approval, and even moral obligation.”⁵² He holds, “Nature does not stand for what is, but for what ought to be; or for the rule or standard of what ought to be.”⁵³ According to Mill, the unfounded prescriptive view of ‘nature’ has existed in all ages but, “the authority of Nature’s imaginary code” peaked when:

Christian theology ... erected Nature into the criterion of morals ... [while] man is by nature wicked. This very doctrine has made ... moralists almost unanimous in proclaiming the divinity of nature and setting up its fancied dictates as an authoritative rule of action.⁵⁴

Mill points out the irony of Christian theologians praising our purposeful ‘natural ₂’ inclinations while condemning our human natures. He argues that contradictions always arise from the prescriptive use of ‘nature ₃.’

These contradictions reveal the falsehood of 'nature₃' prescriptions. Since 'nature₃' has no criteria of its own, Mill insists that people create 'nature₃' by combining descriptions of 'nature₁' or 'nature₂' with unfounded moral views to fashion their own moral rules.

In the following passage, Mill describes how 'nature₃' shapes moral arguments:

That any mode of thinking, feeling, or acting is according to nature is usually accepted as a strong argument for its goodness ... [and] the imputation of being contrary to nature, is thought to bar the door against anything so designated.⁵⁵

Mill claims the third use of 'nature' poses serious problems for moral theory. He holds many people think wrongly that, "Nature" gives us physical criterion for moral behavior.⁵⁶

Naturalistic Fallacy:

David Hume explains the problem with appeals to 'nature₃.' According to Hume, it is one thing to describe something and something quite different to place a value on that thing.⁵⁷ In other words, people assign values to things. The value of anything is a judgment, that is outside of pure description. Nature, itself, has no inherent value to sanction it as a model for morality.

G. E. Moore's interpretation of this argument is called the "naturalistic fallacy."⁵⁸ He claims no value statement that something is good or bad, right or wrong, follows logically from a purely descriptive statement about what something is. According to Moore, it is logically unsound to move from descriptive facts about nature to prescriptive conclusions. 'Nature₃' prescriptions for human conduct result from improperly taking "what is" the case with unaltered things of 'nature₂' and deducing "what ought to be" for humanity. Any appeal to the morality of 'nature₃' slips from "is" premises to "ought" conclusions.

Natural Prescriptions:

Mill insists those who say we ought to act according to 'nature₁' cannot mean we ought to follow the laws of nature, since every act and its consequences follow these laws. He adds that, "Telling people to conform to the laws of nature, when they have no power but what the laws of nature give them, is an absurdity."⁵⁹ When we import 'nature₁' into a prescription, we are actually saying that everything we do is right. This use can inadvertently imply that anything from slavery to nuclear destruction is right.

Persons who use 'nature' as a prescription, might mean that we should follow the ways of 'nature₂.' Yet, 'nature₂' also creates problems for moral theory. According to Mill, if letting 'nature₂' take its course is morally right, then, "... to do anything with forethought and purpose would be a violation of the natural order."⁶⁰ Quite simply, all human acts interfere with 'nature₂.' Mill states that to plant, to build, and to wear clothes, are "clear violations of the directive to follow nature."⁶¹ 'Nature₂' is a sequence of mere happenings without human shaping, that cannot provide moral principles.

Natural Functions:

In contrast, Ramsey's objections to 'unnatural₂' medicines assume that 'natural₂' descriptions of human instincts and body processes can supply moral guidelines. Ramsey assigns moral propriety to "natural procreation" and "biological parenting."⁶² Gay-Williams assigns moral rightness to "natural instincts for survival" and to "natural body processes."⁶³ They both describe these functions as involuntary and spontaneous. This implies that unaltered human functions happen independently of human willing to conform

with 'nature ₂.' They conclude that doctors should respect the self sufficiency of these 'natural ₂' events.

Complex Functioning:

However, this view ignores the complexity of human functioning that prevents us from conforming with 'nature ₂.' Our body processes and instincts do not fit into categories of 'natural ₂' and 'unnatural ₂,' because they always interact with our intentional behavior. Our conscious thoughts, emotions and actions influence naturally occurring events such as respiration, pulse and heart rate. Our voluntary and involuntary functions interact in a way that makes conformity with unaltered events, impossible.

Those who prescribe 'natural ₂' behavior both endorse and condemn what is human. For instance, the 'natural ₂' inclinations endorsed by Ramsey and Gay-Williams may fit into two mutually exclusive classes, 'natural ₂' and 'not natural ₂.' Ramsey refers to 'natural ₂' inclinations toward sexual "begetting" or "siring" of children.⁶⁴ Gay-Williams refers to the 'natural ₂' inclinations to "fight attackers" and "flee wild animals."⁶⁵ These examples try to show the purposefulness of 'natural ₂' events. We find 'naturalness ₂' in the attitudes of fear and sexual arousal that accompany spontaneous chemical changes in the human body. Both fear and sexual arousal stimulate the adrenal glands to produce chemicals that travel through the bloodstream to speed up the heart rate and blood pressure.

Agency:

Yet, while our chemical responses to fear and sexual arousal meet the requirements for 'naturalness₂,' our immediate physical reactions reveal human agency. We can choose to participate or not participate in sexual activity, to fight or not fight attackers, and to flee or not flee wild animals. This shows that human design influences our natural inclinations. They are both 'natural₂' and 'not natural₂'

Very little of human functioning is entirely 'natural₂.' Human functioning almost always reflects the 'agency' that opposes 'natural₃' prescriptions for conformity with 'nature₂' The concept of human agency usually refers to responsibility for voluntary, intentional action. Human agency describes actions outside the realm of "nature₂" Excluding human agency excludes moral responsibility. When we enter the realm of moral evaluation, we have left the realm of 'nature₂.' Therefore, moral appeals to nature are empty.

Rationality:

Yet, we find parallel appeals to nature made by Ramsey and Gay-Williams that try to link rationality with letting nature take its course. In their appraisals of 'natural₂' fertilization and 'natural₂' suffering, Ramsey and Gay-Williams equate 'naturalness₂' with moral rightness. They argue that a reasoned understanding of our 'natural₂' body processes grounds a commitment to non-interruption by the medical community.

However, appeals to our rational understanding of 'nature₂' often hide conceptual contradictions. The act of moral prescription implies that we have rational choices. Yet, appeals to "nature" call for irrational conformity with the mere happenings of 'nature₂.'

Mill states that:

Nature, understood as the spontaneous course of things when left to themselves ... is absurd and contradictory. The aim and object of action are to alter and improve Nature. If the natural course of things were perfectly right ... to act at all would be meddling, which must make things worse. If action could be justified, it would only be in direct obedience to instincts ... but to do anything with forethought and purpose would be a violation of the perfect order.⁶⁶

Endorsing conformity with nature is nonsense, according to Mill. He claims that our rationality gives us the power to oppose and alter the purely natural occurrences.

Condemning Civilization:

Rational interference with “nature₂” largely defines civilized activities. For example, toilet training interferes with the ‘natural₂’ act of eliminating waste products, anywhere at all. Should we eliminate toilet training because it interferes with a ‘natural₂’ happening? Or, perhaps we should eliminate artificial lights and heat since they alter ‘natural₂’ states of affairs. The mere fact that we disrupt ‘natural₂’ events makes no moral statement.

Since all civilized behavior violates ‘nature₂,’ it cannot guide ‘nature₃’ prescriptions. No mere description of ‘nature,’ with or without human intervention, can define moral action. Simply because an act is ‘natural₂’ does not mean that we should do it. Acts of human agency aim at changing the course of ‘nature₂.’ Our civilized interference with ‘nature₂’ includes housing, communication systems, education and transportation.

Condemning ‘unnaturalness₂’ inadvertently condemns all civilization. Despite the claims of Ramsey and Gay-Williams, our human rationality makes us alter, not protect ‘natural₂’ events. In Mill’s words, rational thinking asks us to conquer, not obey the ways of ‘nature₂.’⁶⁷ All human progress is ‘unnatural₂’ in the sense of changing ‘natural₂’ states of affairs. Unavoidable interference with nature is a part of our exis-

tence. Humans have been altering 'nature ₂' ever since they first stood on two feet. Altering our innate behavior is not a moral violation of 'nature ₂.' We would oppose all human progress by condemning interference with 'nature ₂.'

Condemning Medicine:

Ramsey's and Gay-Williams' objections to unnatural forms of medicine imply that it is morally wrong to disrupt natural events.

Yet, a commitment by the medical community to not interfere with 'nature ₂' would leave us helpless to oppose 'naturally ₂' occurring viruses, infections and diseases. All medicine is "unnatural" in the sense of trying to alter 'natural ₂' events and 'natural ₂' body processes. For instance, vitamins, antibiotics, therapy, surgery and immunizations work toward interrupting, slowing and often reversing the 'natural ₂' events of injury, infection, disease, aging and death. Therefore, when a doctor brings about health, he creates an artificial change.

When Ramsey and Gay-Williams condemn IVF and euthanasia for being "unnatural" remedies, they are condemning all medicine. Yet, human nature rejects doing nothing about pain or suffering when we can do something. The abilities and talents that we are born with clash with passive observance of human suffering. Biomedicine may one day develop the ability to genetically correct birth defects or extinguish the cause of a deadly virus or crippling disease. Interrupting 'nature ₂' cannot be immoral simply because we impose our free wills on 'natural ₂' events. We cannot define right and wrong medical practices by evaluating their relationships to 'nature ₂.'

Empty Moral Distinctions:

However, Ramsey and Gay-Williams do not define right and wrong medical interference with 'nature ₂.' Their objections to the unnaturalness of IVF and euthanasia imply a broad moral directive for non-interference with 'nature ₂.' Yet, while all medicine attempts to modify undesirable 'natural ₂' events, neither Ramsey nor Gay-Williams explicitly condemns all medicine. Neither of these individuals places all medical practices under the heading of wrongful interference with 'nature ₂.'

They are unlike persons, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, who object to all medical altering of 'natural ₂' events.

Instead, Ramsey and Gay-Williams only oppose certain medical procedures that they set in opposition to a prescriptive meaning of nature. This appears more sympathetic to human needs and suffering than blanket condemnations, but it is not more rational. It is absurd to distinguish between various medical practices without explaining the difference between moral and immoral interference with 'nature ₂.' Yet, Ramsey and Gay-Williams do not specify or defend any meaningful criteria for deciding which medical acts violate and which acts assist 'nature ₂.' They simply carve out exceptions to condemning all medicine.

For example, Ramsey explicitly endorses surgery to correct blocked fallopian tubes, as moral assistance to 'nature ₂.'⁶⁸ He claims this surgery assists the 'natural ₂' scheme of things and IVF wrongfully interferes with 'nature ₂.' Ramsey judges one procedure as moral and the other as immoral. Even though both of these procedures alter

‘nature ₂’ for the goal of fertility, Ramsey assigns them different moral weights. Therefore, his appeals to ‘naturalness ₂’ cannot defend his moral judgments.

Immoral Intentions:

We also find unjustified moral distinctions when Gay-Williams differentiates the practices of “active euthanasia” and “passive euthanasia” on the basis of ‘naturalness ₂.’ He condemns the intentional termination of ‘natural ₂’ body processes. This is often called ‘active euthanasia.’ Yet, he endorses the withdrawing or withholding of medical treatment for hopelessly suffering patients. This is often called ‘passive euthanasia.’ He holds that termination of the body processes is not the intended result in passive treatment. For Gay-Williams, intentionally bringing about death is an immoral act against ‘nature ₂.’

The moral evaluations of Gay-Williams turn on individual intentions toward our ‘natural ₂’ functions. This implies that we can determine the morality of a biomedical procedure by analyzing the intended consequences. Yet, we cannot, with certainty, know the intentions of others. Since people often have primary, secondary or multiple intentions, we may even wonder about our own intentions. Moral judgments based on intentions are ambiguous. This platform absurdly ignores the fact that humans often feel confused about, or simply misunderstand, their own intentions or those of others.

Yet, Gay-Williams assigns different moral weights to “active” and “passive” euthanasia. He bases his judgment on whether or not the doctor intends to terminate the ‘natural ₂’ functions. He does not recognize that all forms of euthanasia, in some sense,

intend to bring death. Medical decision-making and care of patients shape the ‘natural 2’ courses of events, even when this is passive in a mechanically causal sense.⁶⁹

The doctor and patient relationship in ‘passive treatment’ is a special relationship where the moral distinction between omission and commission disintegrates. This special relationship resembles a parent and child relationship. For example, a parent who withdraws or withholds the feeding of a child, causes the child’s death. Likewise, a doctor who accepts responsibility for the care of a patient and then withdraws or withholds life-sustaining treatment, causes the patient’s death, though he physically does nothing. Therefore, withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment is like giving a lethal injection.

In each of these treatments, informed, deliberate, uncoerced medical decision-making demonstrates moral agency and responsibility for promoting death.⁷⁰ We cannot find a moral difference between these practices based on their relationships to ‘nature 2.’

Unnatural Violence:

Yet, Gay-Williams condemns [active] euthanasia for violently ending the ‘natural 2’ functions that support life. He insists it is rational to perceive the self-sufficiency of ‘nature 2’ and let nature take its course. According to Gay-Williams, when we violently end a life, we ignore our rational respect for our ‘natural 2’ defense mechanisms.⁷¹

However, Gay-Williams ignores the fact that euthanasia is not necessarily violent. The Dutch legal system does not prosecute doctors who conform to their formally specified conditions for euthanasia. Many Dutch physicians claim that death by lethal injection can be a swift, painless and humane end to incurable pain and suffering.⁷² Yet, if we try

to express moral rightness in terms of “naturalness ₂,” some doctors and patients will contrast abrupt death with unbearable living. “Naturalness ₂,” provides no moral grounds for a choice.

Nevertheless, even if euthanasia is violent in the sense of abruptly stopping life functions, violence cannot distinguish what is ‘natural ₂’ from what is ‘unnatural ₂.’ Frequently, what we call ‘nature ₂’ delivers violence in the forms of heart attacks, strokes and devastating illnesses like cancer. As noted by Mill, death, itself, is a form of violence that nature delivers to every living thing.⁷³

However, Gay-Williams uses the term, “killing” to show that a doctor who initiates death, commits an immoral act.⁷⁴

He ignores the fact that killing is usually condoned in certain situations. For instance, we generally view killing in war or self-defense as morally justified. Also, many people condone the intentional killing of incurably suffering animals. Therefore, the bare fact that euthanasia intentionally disrupts ‘natural ₂’ processes, cannot ground a moral objection. Instead, the term, killing, suggests rhetorical persuasion.

Social Disaster:

Instead of giving us moral reasons, Ramsey and Gay-Williams appeal to our worst fears about ‘human nature ₂’ and new medical technology. They both prescribe controlling the “evils”⁷⁵ that adhere in ‘human nature ₂.’ They both offer “slippery-slope”⁷⁶ arguments about giving too much power to the medical community. Their arguments say altering ‘natural ₂’ events can start out innocently and gradually lead up to morally unacceptable practices. Ramsey warns us “the principles ... governing biological manufacture” of chil-

dren will lead to dangerous experiments aimed at breeding and cloning superior humans.⁷⁷ Gay-Williams delivers the warning that it is “a short step from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia conducted as part of a social policy.”⁷⁸

These predictions that biomedicine will produce social disaster presuppose a negative picture of ‘human nature₂’ leaning toward greed and abusive power. Ramsey and Gay-Williams foresee evil domination by lawmakers, medical technicians and health care professionals. In this context, Ramsey and Gay-Williams see our ‘natural₂’ inclinations as immoral and want us to interfere with something ‘natural₂.’

However, their impoverished views of “nature” at work in our human personalities contradict their arguments for the rightness of what exists by ‘nature₂’.

It also undermines their objections to the “unnaturalness” of IVF and euthanasia. Since most human behavior alters ‘nature₂,’ arguing that we should let ‘nature₂’ take its course generates contradictions. We cannot maintain this as a philosophical position and live in civilized society.

Rhetorical Persuasion:

People who assign a moral value to ‘nature’ are combining description with prescription. This kind of conceptual chaos exists in the appeals to ‘nature₃’ made by Ramsey and Gay-Williams. These individuals confuse, blur and even mesh together various descriptions of ‘nature₁’ and ‘nature₂’ with unsupported moral views. In essence, Ramsey and Gay-Williams substitute emotional persuasion for moral reasoning when they assign moral rightness to descriptive accounts of our ‘natural₂’ inclinations and body processes.

Their harmonious descriptions of ‘nature ₂’ at work within ourselves, attempt to persuade us that ‘naturalness ₂’ has a certain rightness that we should not violate. These descriptions play on our respect for “nature” as a powerful and pervasive source of causation. This is a rhetorical technique that masks the emptiness of objecting to the unnaturalness of IVF or euthanasia. Both Ramsey and Gay-Williams exploit the ambiguity that often surrounds the different meanings of the term, ‘nature.’

Even though Ramsey and Gay-Williams show a general moral concern for misused medical technology and administration, their prophecies are merely rhetorical persuasion. They make dramatic predictions about the terrible effects of altering natural events. Ramsey predicts biomedicine will create superhumans that enslave the rest of society. Gay-Williams’ predicts society will initiate a contagion of killing persons deemed unfit. This reveals unnecessary pessimistic generalizations about ‘human nature ₂.’

Rational Restraint:

In contrast, Kohl offers a positive view of ‘human nature ₂.’ He holds self-imposed moral constraints prevent us from crushing an insect, believing this is permissible, and moving on to the belief “it is permissible to kill all living things.”⁷⁹ In Kohl’s view, ‘human nature ₂’ gives us the rationality to distinguish between permissible and impermissible killing.

Yet, whether we view human nature negatively or positively, the morality of a particular medical procedure or medical act does not come from its ‘naturalness ₂.’ We can morally evaluate difficult medical decisions about human suffering, only if we recognize that ‘nature ₂’ lacks the normative dimension needed to justify moral action. IVF and euthanasia do not lead to moral decay simply by altering ‘nature ₂.’

CONCLUSION

Ramsey and Gay-Williams use descriptions of 'nature ₂' in normative ways to gain support for their objections to IVF and euthanasia. These appeals to "nature" cannot by themselves determine the rightness of any medical procedure. We cannot condemn IVF and euthanasia simply for being "unnatural" solutions to health problems.

However, when Ramsey and Gay-Williams voice their objections to IVF and euthanasia, they play on our emotions. The common name for this technique is rhetorical persuasion. Ramsey dramatically presents IVF as the equivalent of manufacturing human beings and Gay-Williams dramatically presents euthanasia as the equivalent of premeditated murder. Yet, our general respect for 'nature ₂' and fear of uncontrolled medical technology act as an unsupported platform for their moral views.

They overlook the fact that 'nature ₂' is indifferent to morality. Instead of giving moral reasons, they discuss medical interference with 'nature ₂.' Yet, Ramsey and Gay-Williams do not condemn all medicine. They base their choices of what medical practices to call 'natural ₂' and 'unnatural ₂' on prior moral judgments about IVF and euthanasia. Yet, since all forms of medicine attempt to counteract 'natural ₂' occurrences, none are immoral merely because they alter or disrupt a 'natural ₂' sequence of events

Rather, it is the use or abuse of medical technology that justifies moral judgment. Although biomedicine holds the potential to enhance human dignity by addressing pain and suffering, it also holds the potential to degrade human dignity by actual misuse. The geneses of new biomedical procedures have the potential to alter the beginning, the continuation and the end of human life. These possibilities can bring varying degrees of biomedical achievement or destruction to the human race.

We will not judge the morality of the outcomes using alignment or discord with 'nature ₂.' The passing of time will reveal whether biomedical procedures bring morally negative or morally positive results. The general and specific outcomes of biomedical procedures like IVF and euthanasia will mirror the moral character of our society and its individuals.

A moral society requires the exercise of practical judgment at all levels of society. Our law-makers must exercise strict control over the many new types of biomedicine. We need wisely articulated social policies that reflect the best interests of the particular individuals directly affected and the best interests of society at large. Equally important, those who practice biomedicine must appeal to widely accepted moral principles as they evaluate particular cases.

Yet, appeals to what is 'natural ₂' and 'unnatural ₂' in a descriptive sense can never ground the rightness or wrongness of a biomedical procedure. We must not allow emotional appeals to 'nature ₂' or 'naturalness ₂' to distract us from genuine moral evaluation.

NOTES

1. Ronald Munson, "Reproductive Control," Intervention and Reflection, (St. Louis: Wadsworth, 1992) 156.
2. Paul Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," J.A.M.A. 220 (June 12, 1972): 1484.
3. *Ibid.*, 1484.
4. *Ibid.*, 1484.
5. *Ibid.*, 1483.
6. Leon Kass, "Making Babies," Public Interest 26 (1972): 30.
7. Richard Mckeon, editor, "Nichomachean Ethics," The Basic Works of Aristotle 1097b.
8. Kass, "Making Babies," 34.
9. *Ibid.*, 35.
10. *Ibid.*, 35.
11. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1482.
12. *Ibid.*, 1480.
13. *Ibid.*, 1480.
14. *Ibid.*, 1483.
15. *Ibid.*, 1483.
16. *Ibid.*, 1482.
17. *Ibid.*, 1481.
18. *Ibid.*, 1481.
19. *Ibid.*, 1481.
20. *Ibid.*, 1485.
21. C. S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man (New York: Macmillan, 1947) 238.
22. *Ibid.*, 238.
23. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1483.
24. *Ibid.*, 1481.
25. *Ibid.*, 1484.
26. *Ibid.*, 1484.
27. *Ibid.*, 1484.
28. *Ibid.*, 1482.
29. *Ibid.*, 1484.
30. *Ibid.*, 1485.
31. Marvin Kohl, "Euthanasia," Encyclopedia of Ethics (1992 ed.) 336.
32. J. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," Intervention and Reflection, (St. Louis: Wadsworth, 1992) 156.
33. *Ibid.*, 157.
35. *Ibid.*, 157.
36. *Ibid.*, 157.
37. *Ibid.*, 156.
38. *Ibid.*, 157.
39. *Ibid.*, 157-158.

40. Ibid., 156.
41. Ibid., 157.
42. Ibid., 157.
43. Ibid., 158.
44. Ibid., 158.
45. Ibid., 158.
46. Ibid., 158.
47. Ibid., 158.
48. John S. Mill, Nature, the Utility of Religion and Theism, (London: Longman, 1874) 5-13.
49. Ibid., 6.
50. Ibid., 5.
51. Ibid., 8.
52. Ibid., 9.
53. Ibid., 12.
54. Ibid., 10.
55. Ibid., 11.
56. Ibid., 13.
57. David Hume, Treatise of Human Nature, (London: Longman, 1739) 469.
58. G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica, (New York:: Cambridge UP, 1948) 143.
59. Mill, Nature, the Utility, 16.
60. Ibid., 20.
61. Ibid., 5-13.
62. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1482.
63. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," 157.
64. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1484.
65. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," 158.
66. Mill, Nature, the Utility, 19-20.
67. Ibid., 20.
68. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1482.
69. Martin Benjamin, "Moral Agency and Negative Acts in Medicine."
Medical Responsibility, (Princeton, Humana P., 1979) 170-180.
70. Ibid., 171.
71. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," 157.
72. Ronald Munson, "The Dutch Experience," Intervention and Reflection,
(St. Louis: Wadsworth, 1992) 153.
72. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1482.
73. Mill, Nature, the Utility, 19-20.
74. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," 158.
75. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1483.
76. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," 158.
77. Ramsey, "Shall We Reproduce," 1482.
78. Gay-Williams, "The Wrongfulness of Euthanasia," 158.
79. Kohl, "Euthanasia," 337.

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