



Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics: A Virtue Approach to Craniotomy and Tubal Pregnancies

Martin Rhonheimer

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Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics by renowned Swiss philosopher Martin Rhonheimer considers some of the most difficult and disputed questions in Catholic moral theology. With great rigor, he addresses classic dilemmas including the morality of the procedure known as craniotomy, and of various treatments for tubal pregnancy. Rhonheimer's approach, grounded in his retrieval of Thomistic virtue ethics, supports the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* in showing how these cases can be resolved without recourse to the revisionist method of "weighing goods."

The debate that *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics* addresses traces back to late-nineteenth century declarations of the Holy Office, which directed that Catholic institutions were prohibited from teaching that the craniotomy was a licit procedure; this teaching had restrictive implications for related cases. In this book, his newest work to be translated into English, Rhonheimer analyzes the morality of different procedures that might be employed in cases "vital conflict," where the life of the embryo or fetus can not be saved, while that of the mother can be saved, but only through a procedure that traditional moral theory would judge to be a "direct," and thus illicit, killing.

These traditional conclusions, however, are not easily accepted because they contradict the basic principle of medical practice that requires physicians to save lives when possible. To resolve this aporia regarding cases of vital conflict, Rhonheimer clarifies fundamental aspects of moral theory, such as the meaning of the prohibition against killing, makes a case that prior analyses are unsatisfactory, and proposes his own solution.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Martin Rhonheimer is professor of ethics and political philosophy at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. His publications include a dozen books, several of which have been translated into multiple languages. His *Perspectives of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy* was the first of his books to be made available in English by the Catholic University of America Press. *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics* was brought into English by William F. Murphy Jr., associate professor of moral theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum and editor of the *Josephinum Journal of Theology*.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"*Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics* is a valuable addition to bioethical works addressing the beginning of life, chiefly because it provides Catholic physicians with a semiauthoritative moral interpretation that allows for the mother's life to be saved."?Ruth Townsend, *Journal of the American Medical Association*

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