

## General Introduction

To take a specific religious and spiritual tradition as one's point of orientation, in order better to grapple with the ethical dilemmas with which modern society is concerned, is perhaps not regarded as a useful pursuit in this era. Nevertheless, such an approach may challenge well-established perceptions, according to which the religious traditions, such as the Christianity, constitute an obstacle towards the foundation of a common morality.<sup>1</sup> This book will argue that the Christian tradition has at least the same power claims and therefore that it may participate in the public dialogue along with all those ideologies that have the benefit of being arbitrarily considered closer to the truth and more compatible with modern and postmodern society.

The description of the way in which such a claim might successfully be made is the first aim of this book. The framework for achieving this aim is the discipline of bioethics, which is a popular discipline that enjoys academic respect, as it has assumed the responsibility of establishing rules for exercising the dominant role, over the last decades, of medicine and technology over human life and death. Since my intention is to criticise the dominant reality, this will be more successful if it targets concurrently the study of a specific bioethical dilemma such as euthanasia.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. The designation of the moral norms that all humans may share (Veatch, 'Is There a Common Morality?', p. 189).
  2. For the rest of this book the use of the term 'euthanasia' signifies all forms of deliberate administration of death by those moral agents involved in the medical context such as the physician, the patient and the relatives.

Having completed an in-depth criticism of sovereign bioethics – and by this what is meant is the kind of bioethics that shapes the relevant discussions in the public arena, and unjustifiably imposes particular values, boundaries and conditions on the discussion relevant to bioethical dilemmas – it is helpful to see what the Christian tradition, and, more particularly, the tradition of the Church Fathers,<sup>3</sup> could contribute to an ethical dilemma like euthanasia. This is the second aim of this book. The intention is not only to make a contribution to theology, but also to demonstrate to a person of the modern world the value of appealing to content-rich accounts of human existence that ignore neither universal aspects of the human condition nor modern reality.

On this level we find elements that are true of human life regardless of political, religious or other ideas, elements that can be detected throughout the history of mankind. In a discussion on bioethics, it is valuable to study a description of this level of the human condition, because, first, the ideological confrontation as to what is ethical and what is not is thus transferred to the account of those elements that are inevitably related to the behaviour of all representatives of all views. Moreover, the issue of a shared understanding of human existence is not being sought through the Sisyphean struggle of formulating common values in a world characterised by a pluralism of values, but through the description of the diachronic fundamentals of human existence as they are verified through historical experience and their continuous presence in each worldview, and in each era.

With this description in mind, the reliability of each view regarding specific ethical dilemmas is not being judged on its religious or secular presuppositions, but on whether it takes into consideration and it successfully manages human reality. In such a questioning framework, the study of the patristic tradition is being judged on its readiness not to ignore human reality, since its main preoccupation is man and his concerns.

Undoubtedly, the question that readily emerges is concerned with the way that the description of human existence outside each available anthropological framework is possible. Such an endeavour presupposes the existence of a method that will approach human existence without the illumination of a normative tradition being necessary. Moreover, for the study of a modern ethical dilemma like euthanasia, the use of this method is only valuable if it is organically connected with human life and the reality of human death.

---

3. From now onwards, the reference to 'Christian tradition' signifies the Christian tradition upon which the theological aspect of this book is based, namely the Greek patristic tradition, unless otherwise noted.

## I. A Diachronic View of Human Existence: Bioethics and the Question of Euthanasia

The 'descriptive theory of decision' by Panajotis Kondylis<sup>4</sup> meets the requirements described in the General Introduction. To justify this selection, we draw on some points from his last and most systematic work to date – *The Political and Man: The Fundamentals of Social Ontology*<sup>5</sup> – that incorporates his major arguments, which he developed in some of his previous writings. A presentation of the descriptive theory of decision will follow.

A cornerstone of Kondylis' thought is his belief that, in order to understand the behaviour of an individual, superindividual factors must be taken into consideration, because the results of all human activities, decisions and actions originate in an ontological zone outside the individual actions of the active persons.<sup>6</sup> Kondylis places these superindividual factors in the so-called 'sociotic field' (*sozialontische Feld*), which 'consists of factors or powers, the constitution and spectrum of which direct the action of each active in each society'.<sup>7</sup> There are three factors, or powers, that are primarily interrelated and contribute to what is happening in a society: the social relation (*die soziale Beziehung*), the politic (*das Politische*) and the human being (*der Mensch*).

The social relation coincides with the very being of a given society and is a component of its very meaning,<sup>8</sup> whereas the politic is the particular social relation that makes society its object as a totality that must have cohesion as well as order.<sup>9</sup> The human being pertains to the

4. Kondylis, *Macht und Entscheidung*.

5. Kondylis, *Das Politische und der Mensch*.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-56. This is in direct contrast to contract theories (i.e. *The Theory of Communicative Action* of Jürgen Habermas) that establish the individual action as a superior explanatory principle.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 194. Kondylis, in adopting the concept of the sociotic field, aims to show that the perception of each social reality takes place in a such a 'field' and not in a vacuum which is 'more fluid, more movable, more multiform than everything that can be grasped by the different social sciences with the help of their conceptual weaponry, which is designated each time from the logic of their foundation' (*ibid.*, pp. 185-86).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 206. The definition of the social relation is based on the perception that 'whatever happens in a society and can be called social, is being conducted through visible and invisible human interrelationships and is born from the dynamic of these relationships' (*ibid.*).

9. The politic has as its object generally accepted rules and represents the social as it is used in more general terms. Here, when we talk about people's decisions and actions, they refer to the social totality and they raise the most general social claim (*ibid.*, pp. 209-10).

anthropological side of the sociotic field, i.e. the explanation of the way in which human nature is connected with the social relation and the politic. Here, socio-ontologically-directed anthropology does not treat the contents but the boundaries of the social relation which are marked out by the anthropological reality – the integral sociability and the integral mortality of the human being which means the possibility of being killed.<sup>10</sup> This is where the connection between Kondylis' thought and euthanasia, the topic of this book, begins. We will talk more about this in one of the following chapters. For the moment we will discuss the anthropological fact of mortality in a little more detail.

For Kondylis, the sustentation or the interruption of the vital functions constitute what is most fundamental and primary for man. In a way, someone may detect in mortality the deepest and most unique need of human existence. Thus:

the fact that life is recallable whereas death is irreversible gives life a superior position to death to the degree to which the intensity and range of social actions must be viewed in the light of their irreversible character, which is their proximity to death. Life can not become a criterion of death, since the dead person does not know what life is, whereas death may become a criterion of life, since the living may imagine death at any moment – death as he or someone else is dying or being killed.<sup>11</sup>

Neither mortality nor death would be important for us if death occurred everywhere and always in the same manner, as a 'natural death', and as a result of the malfunction and the deterioration of the vital functions, and without the intervention of other people or the indirect or direct impact of social factors. Kondylis' point – that it is not a mere expected reality but something that gives practical possibilities to the active subject – is of great interest. Man can use these possibilities 'at some, usually chosen, moments, both for other subjects and for himself, since everyone knows or finds what he should do to cause his own death or someone else's death, when this is sought'.<sup>12</sup> If the last statement reminds us of the issue of euthanasia as an option for modern man, then this is not accidental. For Kondylis, the anthropological fact of mortality reveals the extreme expression of the range in the social relation that is characterised through the dipole of friendship/enmity, which corresponds, on one hand, to the sacrifice of someone's

10. Ibid., p. 215.

11. Ibid., pp. 240-41.

12. Ibid., p. 241.

life for the other (self-sacrifice) and, on the other, the idea of someone killing somebody else (murder). In this framework of understanding, euthanasia comes somewhere between the two poles, i.e. it is only an intermediate point in this dipole.

The position that euthanasia occupies within the friendship/enmity dipole depends on the particular crystallisation of modern reality that is defined according to the specific anthropological content that accompanies it. As, since we are interested in the issue of euthanasia in modern society, we are also interested in a person's perception of euthanasia and the implied argumentation interwoven into that perception, as well as in how the 'indicated' practices of management of the specific ethical dilemma are formulated.

However, postmodern society is a society which thinks that we can truly subscribe to a common morality free of any particular anthropology – something that allows it to lay claim to general power. Sovereign bioethics and all the discussions relative to bioethical dilemmas are conducted within this climate. How justified is such a reality?

It should have become clear that this particular book is oriented towards criticising such a reality in order to show the importance of a content-rich anthropology for modern society and thus work towards a more rational confrontation of modern ethical dilemmas. To accomplish this, we must emphasise the fact that sovereign bioethics, like all theories of human existence, has a polemical character – it fights for self-preservation and sovereignty by exerting power claims over others – for it moves within the dipole of friendship/enmity, and therefore has friends and enemies. Then we need to show its partially subjective character with regard to the alleged representation of common ideas and values, something that will completely justify the expression of power claims in public life by particular spiritual traditions, such as the Christian tradition. Lastly, it is necessary to show the contents of the anthropology that represents bioethics. This will be made with reference to the issue of euthanasia.

Such an undertaking cannot be accomplished by an enrolee theory, such as a normative theory, but rather only by a theory devoid of any normative or axiomatic principle – all theories with normative<sup>13</sup> positions

---

13. Kondylis, in using the term 'normative', or 'normative principles' or 'normative values', does not refer only to the common ethical commandments. Instead, he refers to each 'world-construction' or worldview (*Weltanschauung*) that is shaped by the desire for self-preservation and the broadening of the power of a human being or of a collective entity (Kondylis, *Macht und Entscheidung*, pp. 11-12).

follow a procedure towards the submission of the various 'worlds' to the real world and, as such, they tend to ignore the resultant multiformity.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, Kondylis proposes the descriptive theory of decision. He argues that his theory does not indicate what is right and what is wrong, but rather that it describes the framework of human thought, and consequently essential elements of the human existence.

In the descriptive theory of decision (DTD), a decision (*de-cisio*, *Ent-scheidung*) is defined as an action or procedure of abruption and breakaway, from which an ideology or worldview that suitably safeguards a person's ability for orientation and self-preservation has arisen.<sup>15</sup> The cornerstone of DTD is the belief that the character of these kinds of decisions presupposes power claims that always aim towards the broadening of power of the subject or the subjects of decisions as a precondition for their self-preservation.

The DTD starts from the undeniable and irreversible character of historical multiformity, detects the cause of this in the action or the procedure of abruption and decision, and tries to explain the abruption and the decision by pointing out the necessity for the transformation of the objective from self-preservation to power claims. Thus, it can explain the emergence of different and peculiar 'worlds', namely the different theories of the human existence.

Given the innate orientation of all theories of human existence towards self-preservation and power claims, the existence of universal and objective ethical theories is beyond consideration and therefore all theories are fundamentally subjective. Then, an assumption is made that, as this is true of all proposed theories of human existence, the emergence of bioethics and its domination over modern ethical discussion is polemical in character. These two consequences of the descriptive theory of decision are of fundamental importance for this book, for the exclusion of 'particular' moralities from the current debate of bioethics is shown to be unjustified, given that all theories are basically subjective and polemical. Thus, the application of DTD, on the one hand, repudiates the widespread belief that a knowledge of human existence itself is not necessary but rather detrimental to dealing with current moral issues; while, on the other hand, it opens the door to a thorough-going consideration of each issue, such as, for instance, the question of euthanasia, given that the current debate on euthanasia does

14. Ibid., pp. 38-39. The purpose of Kondylis' theory is, among others, to challenge any previous theories on decision that are based either on the 'existential proper' or on the acceptance of an 'objective proper'.

15. Ibid., p. 14.

not take into account the character of human existence. In particular, these findings from the application of DTD in bioethics are made more explicit through an analysis of the 'project of common morality'.

The common morality project is based on the assumption that, in a fragmented world, bioethicists must designate the moral norms that all humans should share.<sup>16</sup> This assumption presupposes that the distinction between the 'common' and the 'particular' makes sense, where the former is considered as objective and the latter as subjective. It also implies that common morality is justified to reign over human life, given that the 'objectivity' that it enjoys safeguards the 'ethical interests' of all human beings. The application of DTD reveals the fallacy of making a distinction between the 'common' and the 'particular' through identifying the common ground shared by all theories relevant to human existence – all theories serve their own needs of self-preservation through presenting their subjective principles as objective and therefore as appropriate for power claims over human life.

This 'discovery' establishes the common ground that bioethics and the history of human existence share; it also allows us to find the measure of bioethics in this era and to gauge its character. Thus, though bioethical approaches, such as the project of common morality, are presented as being divorced from any anthropological account of human existence for the sake of universality and objectification, their actual application reveals a different picture. In particular, the current discussion around euthanasia reveals that modern bioethical thought involves a disguised system of anthropology and, therefore, in a different way, it is subjective and oriented towards power claims over human life. This anthropology is indirectly promoted in the sense that it designates the character of the discussions on bioethical issues, such as, which parameters of human existence are considered important, and, consequently, shapes human existence itself. Obviously, the distinction between the 'common' and the 'particular' is at least unjustified.

At this point we must consider the prospect of equal power claims that derive from particular traditions, including the Christian tradition. Since the Christian tradition will be examined in this book, it is important to note the relationship between Kondylis' thought and important concepts underpinning the Christian tradition.

Interestingly enough, the fundamental assumption of DTD, according to which all theories of human existence are polemical in character, is

---

16. The core idea of this project is the possibility of there being a pretheoretical awareness of certain moral norms by all humans (Veatch, 'Is There a Common Morality?', p. 189).

shown to be in total agreement with the Christian tradition and what Christ says about the character of this world with regard to those who want to prevail over others: ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them [κατακυριεύουσιν], and those in high positions use their authority over them [κατεξουσιάζουσιν].’<sup>17</sup> Also, the position that the friend/enemy schema represents a common anthropological norm is perfectly justified by Christ’s commandments regarding human relationships: ‘love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you,’<sup>18</sup> and: ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.’<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the anti-idealistic position of Kondylis, which culminates in his argument that there are no ideas, but rather there are human beings who fight for their self-preservation, is consistent with the Christian morality that is developed in this book, which is a morality that is not based on ideology but rather on Christ, the incarnate Son of God. However, from a Christian point of view, the use of Kondylis’ descriptive theory of decision in this book by no means assumes that such a theory can grasp human existence as a whole. The theological part of this book shows that, while DTD is also applicable to Christian

17. Matthew 20:25. The use of the prefix *κατα* with the Greek words *κυριεύω* and *ἐξουσιάζω* indicates that the power exercised by the rulers of this world over others has no limits.
18. John 15:12-14. See also Kondylis, *Das Politische und der Mensch*, p. 321. In the patristic tradition this particular biblical reference is associated with Christian voluntary death (see, for example, St Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassion, Patrologiæ cursus completus* [PG 90], 725C-D), to which an extended part of this book is devoted.
19. Luke 6:27-28. The schemas of friend and enemy, friendship and enmity or peace and war are found also in patristic literature, and particularly in texts like those of Pseudo-Dionysius that continue to represent an important source for Christian theology. Thus, the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, refers to the establishment of peace among the living through a connatural friendship (*ὁμοφυῆ φιλίαν*) (PG 3, 952A) that is established through the self-existent peace that is God. In regards to the expressions of enmity among the living, this happens even when they desire peace and friendship: they grant their desire wrongly, since their actions aimed to fulfill are based on the effort to accomplish something so ephemeral (it is implied that they are not based on the self-existent peace that is God, a peace that does not change by time). (*τῆ ἀποπληρώσει τῶν αἰ ἀπορρέόντων εἰρηνεύει*) (PG 3, 953A). Interestingly, Kondylis also associates the operation of the spectrum friendship/enmity with the liquidity and movement of the sociotic field. The difference between Kondylis and Pseudo-Dionysius centres on the fact that the latter recognises the possibility of overcoming the entrapment that is associated with the particular spectrum in question.

theology, it cannot encompass those aspects of human existence that refer to the divinity given that, for the Christian tradition presented in this book, divinity is, in a way, part of human existence itself.<sup>20</sup> Some introductory points on the theological part of this book follow.

## II. Christian Individualism and the Individualistic Society of the Modern Era

If the distinction between the 'common' and the 'particular' cannot stand, a book on Christian ethics, which constitutes a 'particular' morality, itself may claim to have equal authority with the other approaches to bioethics and its own place in the public debate. Moreover, it may be possible to view it as a feasible alternative to what is generally accepted in bioethics. To be convincing, such an alternative must fulfil two conditions. First, it should not share common ground with the other theories of human existence, common ground that consists of an orientation towards self-preservation with consequent power claims over human life. Second, it should offer a persuasive alternative regarding the 'treatment' of the moral issues in the medical context and, in particular, euthanasia. This has to be adaptable within the current ideology that is dominated by individualism and the consideration of man as an autonomous being.

Regarding individualism as a characteristic of modern civilisation, this book uses the notion of individualism in accordance with the Alexis de Tocqueville's description,<sup>21</sup> according to which individualism:

is a reflective and tranquil sentiment that disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men and withdraw into the circle of family and friends, so that, having created a little society for his own use, he gladly leaves the larger society to take care of itself.

Such individualism, although not identified with egoism and the passionate and exaggerated love of self that causes the seed of all the virtues to shrivel up, 'in the end will be subsumed in egoism.'<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, a

---

20. The intimacy between divinity and humanity within human existence is discussed in detail in the second part of this book.

21. The continuing popularity of de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is indicative of the depth and truth of its arguments, which stir modern people 'from a sleepy complacency with the values that govern our way of life' in a democratic state (Koritansky, 'Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859)', p. 18).

22. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 585.

definition of individualism would be incomplete if it did not take into consideration the reality of mass democracy that supplements the ideas of the dignity of man and self-realisation.<sup>23</sup> Both these last ideas are associated closely with the arguments in favour of euthanasia. These will occupy a later part of this book.

Autonomy is the second cardinal characteristic of the modern society. Modern thought is basically characterised by the transition from self-governance to autonomy.<sup>24</sup> This transition is marked by the decline of heteronomy and the denial of any decisive role of God in human life. Thus, morality becomes human-centred, though it excludes the character of human existence from the centre of interest for the sake of universal principles and norms. It is within such a context that we consider the contribution of the Christian tradition.

The presentation of the theological arguments of the patristic Christian tradition in the second part of this book marks an epistemological transition from a descriptive to a normative approach with regard to human existence. Even though a Christian theological tradition is also subject to the descriptive power of the descriptive theory of decision, and as a consequence is subject to an orientation towards self-preservation and power claims, it also constitutes a disclaimer to both the self-preservation and the power claims over human life. A tradition that traces itself back to the voluntary death of Christ and those who believed in Him, such as the martyrs, would be considered a tradition oriented towards self-relinquishment rather than self-preservation and the power claims over oneself or others. Also, it should not be ignored that even Christians, to the extent that they are inescapably shaped by the secular character of this world, are subject to the descriptive

23. Kondylis, *Das Politische und der Mensch*, pp. 35 and 69-70. Kondylis develops his thought even more and talks about the 'individualising' (*Atomisierung*) of society, in which individuals (*Atome*) are considered to be 'the last elements in an operational whole that cannot be reduced to something else.' The existence of 'primarily independent, equivalent human beings of whose interaction society consists' is a prerequisite (*ibid.*, pp. 5-6). Manent's reference to man in modern society is particularly interesting, since he sees him in confrontation with the Greek city and the Church, noting that we have 'the genesis of this radical man, the individual prior to the citizen and Christian alike' (Manent, *The City of Man*, p. 35).
24. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, p. 483. The idea of moral self-governance can be traced back to St Paul's assertion that the gentiles are 'a law unto themselves' (Romans 2:14). On the contrary, Kant's idea of morality as autonomy 'presupposes that we are rational agents whose transcendental freedom takes us out of the domain of natural causation. It belongs to every individual, in the state of nature as well as in society' (Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, p. 515).

power of Kondylis theory. The discussion of such a bipolar character of Christian life is at the centre of interest for this book. In such a context, the elaboration of Christian individualism is considered within the parameters of Christian thought.

To avoid any misunderstanding, the choice of such a context for a theological discussion does not imply the acceptance of the fundamentals of contemporary society, particularly as expressed in the field of bioethics. It is assumed that this society, with its multicultural character, cannot assume any definite anthropological basis for ethical issues, for if it did, this would go against attempts to establish a universal morality in modern ethics. The Christian theology that is presented in this book stands at the very opposite pole to this assumption. In fact, according to such a Christian tradition, it is not possible to talk about man and the ethical issues surrounding human life if there is not a clear understanding of what man is.

The exposition of Orthodox Christian anthropology is an ongoing process. Christian theologians, while remaining deeply aware of the cultural characteristics of each era, try to properly present the Christian tradition, taking the Scriptures, the teaching of the Church Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils as a basis. This approach is by no means a process towards the secularisation of Christianity. On the contrary, it represents the consciousness of the Church that, while it constitutes the Body of Christ, it is at the same time a body of earthly human beings who live within a particular civilisation and who are influenced by contemporary ideologies. In other words, Christian theology does not ignore the role of history in human life and the inevitable dependence of all human beings, including Christians, on the particular historical (cultural, ideological) circumstances. The understanding of the character of man is a prerequisite for Christian ethics, an understanding that necessarily takes into account the relevant theological tradition as well as the contemporary cultural and ideological state of affairs. In this book this theological elucidation is developed as follows.

A book on Christian ethics that aims to discuss the issues surrounding euthanasia through the elaboration of a specific view of human existence could take as its starting point the narration of the creation of man in the Old Testament. According to this account, God created man according to His own image,<sup>25</sup> placed him in paradise, but warned him that if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would surely die.<sup>26</sup> Such a biblical narration clearly makes a link between, on one hand, a fundamental anthropological principle and, on the other, the entry of

---

25. Genesis 1:26.

26. Genesis 2:8-17.

death into human life. Therefore, the creation of man according to the image of God is the first step towards elaborating a Christian anthropology in order to be able to discuss the issues surrounding human death.

Although God created man according to His own image and placed him in paradise, man decided to abandon that life. The fall of Adam and Eve that followed changed man and his whole life. The changes that occurred in human nature, a nature shaped according to the image of God, is the second stage that needs to be examined in the theological inquiry of this book. Obviously, the creation of man according to the image of God entailed the presence of freedom in human life, and as a result of this freedom man was able to decide to reject the paradisiacal life.

Despite man's decision to leave his life in paradise, God decided to become man in order to save humankind from our fallen state and make us gods by grace. This was achieved through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Such redemption is continuously worked within the Church and Christian life as the faithful followers of Christ, such as the martyrs, have designated it. Therefore, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and its significance for understanding the character of human nature is the third stage around which the theological arguments in this book will be centred and developed.

This book develops this tripartite exposition of Christian anthropology with a view to the proper understanding of the character of Christian individualism. Within an individualistic secular society, a Christian individualism that presupposes a kind of relationship between the immanent and the transcendent sounds strange. However, it is worth making the attempt.

The writings of St John Damascene (seventh/eighth century)<sup>27</sup> and St Symeon the New Theologian (tenth/eleventh century),<sup>28</sup> two Greek

27. There is uncertainty regarding the dates both of his birth and death. Most scholars assume that he was born around 650 and died in 749 (Stiefenhofer, *Des Heiligen Johannes von Damaskus*, p. viii) or around the end of the first or the beginning of the second half of the eighth century (Kotter, 'Johannes von Damaskus', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* [TRE] XVII, p. 127). Others hold that he was born around 680 (Fitzgerald, 'John of Damascus', *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* [EC], Vol. III, pp. 70-71) and that he was alive at the time of the Synod of Hieria (754) that condemned him (Christou, 'Ἰωάννης Δαμασκηνός', *Religious and Ethical Encyclopaedia* [REE] VI, p. 1221).

28. There is no agreement on Symeon's chronology. The dates of his birth range between 949 (Hausherr, *Un grand mystique byzantin*, [Life] p. xxxix, and Krivocheine, *St Symeon the New Theologian*, p. 15) and 956 (Christou, 'Εἰσαγωγή', p. 21), whereas the year of his death is considered to be either 1022 (Hausherr, *Un grand mystique byzantin*, p. xxxix, and Krivocheine, 'The Writings of St Symeon the New Theologian', p. 298), 1036 (Christou,

Fathers, have been chosen for study for the purpose of forming a Christian understanding of individualism. The former experienced a society in a transition, a society that was on a quest towards a reconsideration of the relationship between Christian teaching and the ideological orientation of public life. The latter wrote and taught within the culmination of the end result of this reconsideration, namely a secular society marked by the centrality of individualism.

By selecting these two Church Fathers one by no means underestimates the significance of the rest of the Church Fathers. On the contrary, each Church Father always builds on account the preceding patristic tradition. This is true both of John Damascene, who in a way recapitulated the theology that preceded him, and also of Symeon the New Theologian, whose ideas correspond to the teaching of some well-respected Fathers such as St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Maximus the Confessor, St John of the Ladder, St Theodore and St Symeon the Studite.<sup>29</sup>

John Damascene lived in a Byzantine society that, while experiencing the so-called Dark Ages, was simultaneously a society in transition. The Dark Ages of Byzantine society is evident in the drastic reduction in literary output and in the production of artwork,<sup>30</sup> as well as the absence of any significant theological writings.<sup>31</sup> In such a context, it is not accidental that during this period apocalyptic literature re-emerged, a genre that usually flourishes during times of political, economic or spiritual crisis.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the iconoclastic controversy that took place in John Damascene's era is an indication that Byzantine society was really a society in transition.

---

‘Εἰσαγωγή’, p. 22), 1037 (Sotiropoulos, *Συμείων ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος*, pp. 20-21) and 1042 (Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte II*, pp. 403-08). However, what is of interest for this book is not the exact dates of their birth and death but rather the characteristics of the respective historical periods in which Symeon the New Theologian and John Damascene lived.

29. Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, pp. 271-75.
30. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, p. 14; Mango, ‘Historical Introduction’, pp. 1-6; and Moffatt, ‘Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries’, pp. 85-92.
31. Phidas, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία II*, pp. 271-72.
32. The apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius identified the Roman Empire with the last of the four world empires of the vision of Daniel and predicted an ultimate victory over the enemy, the Arabs (Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, pp. 367-68). The case of Anastasios of Sinai, whose work is likewise apocalyptic in character (ibid., pp. 431-33), is also very interesting as John Damascene seems to have known his *Guidebook (Hodegos)* (Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature*, pp. 78-79).

In particular, the emergence of iconoclasm was not accidental.<sup>33</sup> On the one hand, iconoclasm was an anti-spiritual movement that opposed the Greek tradition of the Empire;<sup>34</sup> on the other hand, iconoclasm came as a challenge to the established informal 'agreement' between the State and the Church and consequently worked against the particular character of their coexistence and cooperation. The belief that iconoclasm was simply the posing of the question of how far the divine is allowed to impinge on the human world<sup>35</sup> demonstrates the profound theological questions behind such a challenge. John Damascene's defence is oriented towards this challenge,<sup>36</sup> namely the desire for the reconsideration of the relation

- 
33. Though the eruption of iconoclasm could be characterised as a 'historical accident' in the sense that Leo III failed to see the consequences of his actions, the fact that the impact of iconoclasm was connected with a series of political, social, institutional and theological issues (Phidas, *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία I*, p. 773) may justify the argument that its character was not in fact accidental.
34. Zakythinos, *La grande brèche dans la tradition historique de l'Hellénisme, du septième au neuvième siècle*, pp. 318-19. It has been argued that this historical period may be identified with the last great choice of the Christians of the Greek-Latin West, that of the choice of 'humanistic' Christianity, according to which the incarnate God can be described. On the contrary, 'Asiatic' Christianity chose the elevation of the divinity along with the condemnation of the material (Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin*, p. 100). The result of that choice was 'the emergence of the Byzantine Church from the iconoclastic crisis as more than ever a "Greek" Church' (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 54).
35. Brock, 'Iconoclasm and the Monophysites', p. 57, and McGuckin, 'The Theology of Images and the Legitimation of Power in Eighth-Century Byzantium', pp. 47-48).
36. It is not accidental that John devotes a whole chapter of his second treatise against the iconoclasts to the unacceptable intervention of Emperor Leo III who, in 726, issued a law code, the *Ecloga*, in which he is presented, as the Emperor, to claim a kind of priesthood and, consequently, such legitimate authority on Church issues. John says that: "The emperors do not have any right to style themselves lawgivers in the Church. . . . Political prosperity is the business of the emperors; the condition of the Church is the concern of shepherds and teachers. . . . For if we begin to erode the foundation of the Church even a little, in no time at all the whole edifice will fall to the ground' (*Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres [Imag.] II*, 12, pp. 102-104). Also, it is not surprising that, in the third treatise against the iconoclasts, John connects the defence of the veneration of the icons with a passage from the New Testament (Matthew 22:17-21) that had been extensively used for the justification of the secular authorities and the obedience of the Christians to them: 'And in the Gospels the Lord Himself answered those who questioned and tested Him saying, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" He said to them, "Show me the money for the tax," and they brought Him a coin. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Render

between the immanent and the transcendent in Byzantine society.<sup>37</sup> In such a context, the view that John Damascene's writings are addressed only to the monastic public of his era is shown to be erroneous.<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, the victory of iconophiles and the unambiguous sanction of the veneration of icons within the Church were not accompanied by a correspondent change in Byzantine society. While the veneration of icons re-established the relation between the visible and the invisible, the immanent and the transcendent according to the Christian tradition, Byzantine society preferred a more secular way of existence. The testimony of Michael Psellos, the most representative thinker of the eleventh century who mapped an essential transition in Byzantine society is very interesting. Michael Psellos, in his *Chronographia*,<sup>39</sup> clearly indicates that the Byzantine Empire was not a religious state but rather a secular imperium.<sup>40</sup>

Even though the veneration of icons prevailed, the societal orientation that was implied by it did not survive because of the transition of Byzantine society from the Dark Ages and the disruption of the old social links towards an individualised model of life. The veneration of icons was a type of worship with strong societal characteristics, as the icons were available to all believers and they were considered as a common mean

---

therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' Since the coin bears Caesar's likeness, it is united to Caesar's person and you must give it back to him. Likewise, the icon of Christ is part of Him, and you must give it what is due' (Imag. III, 11, pp. 122-23).

37. The consideration of the intervention of Leo III as a reaction to the power claims on the part of the monks was another aspect of the ideological conflicts within Byzantine society (Phidas, *Εκκλησιαστική Ιστορία II*, pp. 84-90). The aim of this study is not the systematic consideration of the causes of iconoclasm and the assessment of the different propositions in the field but rather the identification of the grounds upon which the eventual veneration of icons was characterised as a 'triumph of Orthodoxy'. John Damascene defends the possibility of depicting the incarnate God and, consequently, the presence of God within the *cosmos*. The reality of the incarnation of God and its implications for human life is in the very meaning of Orthodoxy. John's teaching in the *Three Treatises against Those Who Attack the Icons* is but the Orthodox view regarding the limits of the relationship, and the analogies, between the immanent and the transcendent.
38. Studer, 'Jean Damascène ou de Damas (St)', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (DS) VIII, p. 455.
39. Michael Psellos' *Imperatori de Bisanzio (Chronografia)* is considered to be the most popular work of Byzantine historiography. It consists of a number of colourful portraits of individuals such as emperors (Chron. I, 1-37) and princesses (Chron. VI, 1-75) who dominated the life of the Empire during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Through these descriptions one learns about very interesting elements that characterised Byzantine life at that time.
40. Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia*, pp. 77-80.

towards the development of a relationship with God. It is not accidental that the veneration of icons was supported principally by the monks who lived in the monasteries organised as coenobitic houses or *koinobia* following the monastic tradition of St Pachomius and St Basil the Great.<sup>41</sup> On the contrary, it is after the seventh century that communal life in the villages turned to an individualised life consisting of isolated families. At that time, the *koinobion* was seen as an odd social group bound by organic links and its existence within Byzantine society as a contradiction to the new social order in Byzantium. Within this context, the argument of the iconoclastic emperor, Constantine V, that participation in Holy Communion – participation with highly individualistic nuance – is sufficient for salvation is easily comprehended.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, the new social order in Byzantium, the social order during the ninth and the tenth centuries, was principally secular and individualistic. Symeon the New Theologian<sup>43</sup> lived at the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century. He is known as a representative of mystical theology and the teaching of the way towards a personal or individual experience of God.<sup>44</sup> This shows not only that Symeon was part of the cultural characteristics of his era but also that his teaching could be taken as representative of Christian individualism.

Despite the long-standing belief that Symeon did not deal with the cultural and spiritual interests of his time,<sup>45</sup> it is this author's contention that his thought was not detached from the dominant ideology of the society in which he lived. Moreover, he was critical to the development of an alternative approach to the dominant ideology. Symeon's engagement in the life of Constantinople is easily justified by looking at his constant involvement with the centre of Byzantine society and his position vis-à-vis

41. Phidas, *Droit Canon*, pp. 166-75.

42. Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, pp. 1-13.

43. For a thorough discussion of the debate around the traditional name of Symeon as 'New Theologian', see Krivocheine, 'The Writings of St Symeon the New Theologian', pp. 315-27.

44. Though he does not make any precise reference to the 'prayer of the mind' or the distinction between 'essence' and 'energy' in God as St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) did, he understands Christianity as a personal communion with and experience of God (Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 74).

45. Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition*, pp. 10-11. A gifted man like Symeon who lived in a monastery situated in Constantinople – a place that was not only the capital of the eastern Roman Empire but also the most important city in terms of contemporary theological and philosophical discussions – could not be unaware of or uninterested in what was taking place outside his monastery and what was affecting the life of churchmen.

ecclesiastical practices in his era. He was taken by his father at a young age to Constantinople to be educated and to be placed in the emperor's service. Though it appears that he did not receive any higher education, he lived in the capital of the empire for more than fifteen years, and some of the time within the Senate as *spatharocubicularios*.<sup>46</sup> In other words, Symeon grew up, was educated and lived at the centre of political and cultural developments in the Byzantine Empire. In addition, Symeon's contact with current ideology did not cease after he became a monk, given that both the monastery of Studios where he was tonsured and the monastery of St Mamas, where he was professed, ordained priest and elected abbot, were located in Constantinople. As an abbot of the monastery of St Mamas, he would regularly receive visits from lay people,<sup>47</sup> following a long-standing monastic tradition according to which 'monks were closely knit into the fabric of Byzantine life.'<sup>48</sup> The fact that Symeon's *Catecheses* survived in versions addressed to laymen and not only to monks<sup>49</sup> is an additional argument in favour of the assumption that Symeon was, in a way, an active participant in the contemporary historical and cultural life of Byzantium and against the theory that Symeon was simply an ivory-towered monastic writer and theologian.<sup>50</sup>

- 
46. Life, 2-9. The term comes from the Greek word *σπαθάριος* (literally 'sword-bearer') which means dignity and refers to those imperial *spatharioi* who belong to the corps of the *koubikoularioi* (*The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* [ODB] III, pp. 1935-36) whose function, among others, was to escort the emperor (ODB II, p. 1154).
47. Ware, 'The Mystery of God and Man in St Symeon the New Theologian', p. 229. The location of the monastery of St Mamas in Constantinople reinforces even further the belief that Symeon was at the centre of the life of the city. There are two traditions regarding its whereabouts. The first tradition locates the monastery in the southwestern section of Constantinople near the gate of Xylokerkos (ODB II, p. 1287) and, therefore, well inside the city (Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, pp. 318-19), whereas the second tradition places it in the district of St Mamas, which included a harbour that by the terms of the treaties of 911 and 945 was assigned as the compulsory dwelling place of the visiting Russian merchants (Phidas, 'Μονὴ ἁγίου Μάμαντος', *Encyclopaedia Papyros Larousse Britannica* [EPLB] 40, p. 176). Obviously, both traditions justify the assumption that Symeon lived in a very active area of Constantinople that made him, in a way, part of the life of the city.
48. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, p. 349.
49. Krivocheine points out that these versions were designed by Nicetas Stethatos and not by Symeon, (Krivocheine, *Sources Chrétiennes* [SC] 96, pp. 169-74). Nevertheless, the design of these versions make sense because Symeon 'was a well-known abbot and spiritual father in Constantinople, and through his works he exerted incalculable influence on later generations' (*The Cambridge Medieval History IV: The Byzantine Empire Part II* [CMH], p. 199).
50. For the adoption of such a theory, see Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian*

On the other hand, the connection that is made between Symeon and individualism should not be linked to his characterisation as one of the representatives of the kind of monastic individualism that preaches an individual road to salvation and considers an occupation with the monastic community or other monks as spiritual destruction.<sup>51</sup> On the contrary, it is connected with his presence in a society where the emphasis on the individual is a point of reference in ideological discussions. Michael Psellos, a contemporary of Symeon, in his *Chronography*, a work that exemplifies the importance of individual creation, expresses the ideological climate of that era. In addition, Symeon's era is considered as the beginning of modernity, in the sense that the revitalisation of the *polis*, along with the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the development of trade are the first indications of a process that resulted in the modern state and the transition from self-governance to autonomy and the declaration of freedom and human rights.<sup>52</sup> Constantinople, the city in which Symeon lived, resembled the big cities during the revival of the *polis* in the West.<sup>53</sup> The individualistic environment of his time is also visible in the practice of providence as well as in the system of *charistike*. The former was the seizure of imperial-owned land by individuals, who would take the income from the land in return for military service, whereas the latter was a public programme sponsored by the emperor and the ecclesiastical hierarchy for the private management of religious institutions.<sup>54</sup>

---

*and Orthodox Tradition*, p. 11, and Gouillard, 'Syméon le Nouveau Théologien,' *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* [DTC] XIV, p. 2948. Similarly, Fountoulis thinks that Symeon did not deal with the relation between God and history or with issues related to the world outside the monasteries (Fountoulis, *Λειτουργικά Θέματα Α*, p. 103). Obviously, all these cases show an underestimation of the unavoidable historical designation of human life, even of the lives of the Sts. Johannes Koder, who was one of the editors of the *Hymnes* of Symeon in the series *Sources Chrétiennes*, adopts the opposite stance (as is also done in this book), although he uses completely different arguments when he talks about the dominant presence of political verses in the *Hymnes* – because of Symeon's association with Court circles in Constantinople and the fact that the event is not directed towards the monks of St Mamas but towards all those people (laymen, monks and priests) who are ready to understand and not to misinterpret (Koder, 'Τιὰ τὸ Συμεών ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος ἔγραφε τοὺς ὕμνους τοῦ', pp. 813-18).

51. Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, pp. 148-51.
52. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 142-45.
53. Pirenne, *Les villes du moyen âge*, pp. 76-77.
54. *Byzantine Monastic Foundations Documents* (BMFD) I, pp. xxviii-49. Given the relationships of Psellos within the cultural environment of the eleventh

In short, John Damascene can be considered an astonishing interpreter and a representative of both the first period and the beginning of the second period of Christian theology, which has been influenced by his thought up to modern times.<sup>55</sup> Damascene was primarily occupied with the designation of the proper relationship between the immanent and the transcendent by dealing with how far the divine is allowed to impinge on the human world. He also lived in a cultural environment that was implicitly oriented towards the centrality of the human being in human history and into which he tried to introduce an enduring spirit of an Orthodox kind of humanism.<sup>56</sup> Symeon experienced the flourishing of humanism that led to modernity and attempted to found a Christian form of individualism as a prophetic reaction to the changes of his era. In other words, the selection of John Damascene and Symeon the New Theologian allows us to delineate Christian thought during a period which eventually resulted in the revitalisation of the 'modern' *polis*<sup>57</sup> and from which the roots of modern society and thought may be traced.

### III. The Synthesis

The critical evaluation of modern society, as well as the presentation of a Christian alternative with regard to the issue of euthanasia based on the theological inquiry of this book, is the final step of the whole work. This is achieved by bringing together the ideological principles of modern society and Christian theology and by looking at the possible interplay between the two. This interplay coincides with the ongoing task of the Church to elucidate Christian understanding of the relation between the immanent and the transcendent in and for every era. This book aims to accomplish such a task, for it constitutes an attempt to make the proper transition from the theological tradition of the Church Fathers to contemporary society with a view to discussing the issues surrounding euthanasia.

The privilege of the Christian tradition is that it examines that very 'world' (i.e. the inner world of every human being), where moral decisions are actually made, namely the anthropological parameters of moral decisions, and this offers some interesting insights into current bioethical debates. It highlights the invisible and hidden – either consciously or

---

century in Constantinople, his designation as a notable *charistikarios* (BMFD II, p. 449) is quite interesting.

55. Karmiris, 'Η δογματική διδασκαλία του Ἰωάννου Δαμασκηνού', p. 3.

56. Matsoukas, 'Εισαγωγή', p. 9, and Duffy, 'Hellenic Philosophy in Byzantium and the Lonely Mission of Michael Psellos', p. 145.

57. Karayiannopoulos, *Η Μεσαιωνική δυτική Εὐρώπη*, pp. 109-11.

unconsciously – sides of the moral issues, and therefore enriches the various arguments in the field with a view to more convincing and more thought-out moral processing. The seriousness of bioethical issues deserves such careful consideration.

Thus, this book seeks to demonstrate the positive consequences of including a religious tradition in a debate that has been characterised as secular by elaborating a Christian form of individualism, given that the issues surrounding euthanasia constitute the after-effects of individualist and autonomous human being. Therefore, the designation of the fundamentals of Christian individualism is presented in contrast to modern individualism. What then emerges is a reshaping of the rationale that dominates the current debate in bioethics regarding the deliberate administration of death. As a consequence, the whole context within which euthanasia has appeared as an issue with a societal interest is challenged and redefined. In other words, this book ends with the provision of the necessary tools towards not only a Christian but also a secular ‘treatment’ of bioethical issues, such as euthanasia, tools that are sensitive to the Christian tradition as well as the concerns of modern society.

#### IV. Outline of the Book

This book, even though it belongs to the discipline of Christian ethics, is characterised by the inclusion not only of theological, but also philosophical, sociological and historical arguments. Such an interdisciplinary approach contributes to a better understanding of the ethical issue under discussion and consequently to a more profound analysis and an elaboration of more finely developed arguments. For a preview of this book as a whole, a brief presentation of its outline is necessary.

This book is divided into three parts. The first and second chapters constitute the first part. The first chapter contains a thorough-going analysis of bioethics as a discipline and delineates the necessary basis upon which all bioethical issues must be understood. More particularly, first the polemical and subjective character of bioethics is defined, and the way in which it is oriented towards power claims over those expressing a different reality is revealed. What follows is an exposure of the disguised power claims of bioethics by demonstrating the close link between bioethics and the just war theory, and by identifying the common ground shared by traditionally opposed bioethical approaches, such as, principlism and utilitarianism. The implications of such a reality are elaborated in chapter two by focussing on a specific bioethical issue,

namely euthanasia. In this chapter, the power claims of bioethics are particularised in the efforts towards the 'creation' of a 'new' human being, efforts that are fully justified on the part of theories of human existence that are interested in their sovereignty in the public arena. These efforts clearly imply an orientation towards a supposed objectivity and a universalisation based on the possibility of a common morality among the moral agents, a morality that at least in part underestimates the so-called 'particular' moralities. Throughout the first part, the authority of such a kind of morality is challenged and the prospect of including particular moralities in the current debate on bioethical issues is instigated.

Chapters three and four comprise the second part of the book and present a particular morality that is based on moral arguments that are rooted in the patristic tradition. The selection of John Damascene and Symeon the New Theologian gives a different slant on issues surrounding euthanasia compared to secular bioethics. The theological arguments of the two Fathers are developed along the lines of establishing a Christian form of anthropology and thus of a content-rich morality.<sup>58</sup> Issues such as the character of human existence, our free will, suffering and death are discussed. This discussion lays the foundations for a different kind of moral argumentation regarding euthanasia and lays out the necessary grounds for a substantial critique of arguments used by either the proponents or opponents of euthanasia. These arguments are briefly mentioned in this part.

In the third part the theological arguments on issues surrounding euthanasia are fully explained and placed within contemporary society and in relation to individualism, the view of human existence that predominates in this era. Taking into account the basic components of secular bioethical thinking as presented in the first part, as well as the centrality of individualism to the emergence of the issues surrounding euthanasia, this book applies theological arguments that link from the Scriptures and the patristic tradition to the current debate via the elaboration of the fundamentals of a kind of Christian individualism. On these grounds, the presentation of moral arguments surrounding issues relevant to euthanasia may represent a substantial contribution to the current debate of euthanasia.

---

58. To the best of my knowledge, the first attempt to discuss a modern bioethical issue, such as, in vitro fertilisation, from the viewpoint of Orthodox theology was undertaken as early as 1958. This was a fascinating paper by Metropolitan Konstantinidis, who presented a Christian ethical discussion of the issue in an interesting way (Konstantinidis, 'Τεχνητή γονιμοποίησης και θεολογία', pp. 212-30).