



Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, and Change (Moral Traditions)

By Lisa Sowle Cahill

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The field of bioethics was deeply influenced by religious thinkers as it emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s. Since that time, however, a seemingly neutral political liberalism has pervaded the public sphere, resulting in a deep suspicion of those bringing religious values to bear on questions of bioethics and public policy.

As a theological ethicist and progressive Catholic, Lisa Sowle Cahill does not want to cede the "religious perspective" to fundamentalists and the pro-life movement, nor does she want to submit to the gospel of a political liberalism that champions individual autonomy as holy writ. In *Theological Bioethics*, Cahill calls for progressive religious thinkers and believers to join in the effort to reclaim the best of their traditions through jointly engaging political forces at both community and national levels.

In Cahill's eyes, just access to health care must be the number one priority for this type of "participatory bioethics." She describes a new understanding of theological bioethics that must go beyond decrying injustice, beyond opposing social practices that commercialize human beings, beyond painting a vision of a more egalitarian future. Such a participatory bioethics, she argues, must also take account of and take part in a global social network of mobilization for change; it must seek out those in solidarity, those involved in a common calling to create a more just social, political, and economic system.

During the past two decades Cahill has made profound contributions to theological ethics and bioethics. This is a magisterial and programmatic statement that will alter how the religiously inclined understand their role in the great bioethics debates of today and tomorrow that yearn for clear thinking and prophetic wisdom.



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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #155434 in Books
- Published on: 2005-11-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .72" w x 5.98" l, .96 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Cahill is to be commended for seeing the critical need for theological bioethics. Her argument, in its substance and its scope, makes eminent sense."*America*

"Covers considerable ground and includes theoretical and practical positions sure to engage readers who operate from diverse disciplines and vantage points. Cahill writes with the care and clarity so characteristic of her work, offering substantive scholarship in accessible prose. The volume justly will become a standard text in graduate and seminary classrooms, and portions may be used in upper-level and undergraduate courses."*Journal of Religion*

"Offers a vision and a voice that enriches the field of bioethics and invites the reader to take specific practical steps: actions that will eventually become true democratic activism, both locally and globally."*The Way*

"A comprehensive and forceful vision of theological bioethics that goes beyond, without discrediting, traditional approaches to standard beginning and end-of-life issues that often characterize theological engagement with bioethics."*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*

Review

"Faithful at once to the tradition of Catholic social teachings and to the biblical mandate of liberation, Lisa Cahill brings the 'preferential option for the poor' to bear on public discourse about bioethics. The resulting book enriches reflection about bioethics by its attentiveness to global issues of justice, to the social conditions which form and limit decisions, and to the dominant cultural narratives of liberal individualism, scientific progress, and the market. Cahill helps her readers, moreover, not only to think in new ways about some of the issues in bioethics but also to act more compassionately. If more of us who are interested in theological bioethics were to follow her call to engagement and to justice, there might really be change."*Allen Verhey, professor of Christian Ethics, The Divinity School, Duke University*

"Lisa Sowle Cahill has given us a first-class text on bioethics that proposes an engagement of theology in public bioethics. For anyone who wants a comprehensive social analysis of bioethical issues that combines the theological and the ethical, this is certainly the book to read. It will make an excellent text for scholars and the classroom."*James J. Walter, Austin and Ann O'Malley Professor of Bioethics and chair, the Bioethics Institute, Loyola Marymount University*

"Cahill promises and delivers, *Theological Bioethics*, a new social and engaged ethics. Not every reader will agree that theological bioethics must move beyond critical reflection, normative judgments, and theoretical accounts to 'taking part in a global social network of mobilization for change.' But no thoughtful reader will be allowed to rest comfortably in the status quo. This carefully researched text issues a serious challenge to use theological bioethics to alleviate the social conditions that create these problems."*Carol Taylor, director of the Center for Clinical Bioethics, Georgetown University*

"In *Theological Bioethics*, Lisa Sowle Cahill gives us an excellent, essential book in which she demonstrates

compellingly the vital role of an authentic progressive theological voice in contemporary bioethics. With solid theoretical grounding and a rich panoply of practical applications for enduring controversies, Cahill convincingly argues for a participatory theology that keeps social justice, the common good, and the 'achingly latent' transcendent aspects of biomedicine at the fore."⁷Margaret E. Mohrmann, MD, PhD, associate professor of pediatrics and religious studies, University of Virginia

About the Author

Lisa Sowle Cahill is the J. Donald Monan Professor of Theology at Boston College. A former president of the Society of Christian Ethics and the Catholic Theological Society of America, she is the author of *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics; Family: A Christian Social Perspective; 'Love Your Enemies': Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory*; and other books.

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