



Recensioni e segnalazioni

Max Bazerman and Ann Tenbrusel, *Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011

This is a book on the new discipline of behavioral ethics. The authors explain how human beings often behave irrationally, and unknowingly act against their own ethical standards. This interesting work describes the less than honest actions that we all take while still thinking we are wonderfully ethical. The authors give many examples of how this occurs, especially in the business world but which can also apply to other fields, including pharmaceutical enterprises and governmental policies.

It is a highly readable book, studied with many examples, surveys, actual stories, and experiments the writers conducted. They illustrate how these ethical "blind spots" occur at the individual, organizational, and societal level.

At the individual level, the authors note that people often fall prey to psychological processes that bias their decisions. What is worse, most of the time they are unaware of the existence of these biases. The book describes several psychological mechanisms at work. For instance, people usually have a much higher view of themselves as ethical agents compared to others. When asked about how ethical they think they are compared to their colleagues, most people think they are more ethical than the rest, which is a statistical impossibility. The authors give many examples of how people tend to overestimate their ability to act ethically in future situations. At the moment of making choices, they tend to make choices based on gut feelings that are not well thought out. Then, after the fact, people tend to have memory revisionism which only sees the positive outcomes of

their decisions while ignoring the unethical elements.

Blind Spots shows how people subvert their ethical principles time and time again due to a human tendency to justify their own actions with little thought for their consequences. For instance, it has been shown that ethicists are more likely to lie than experts in other disciplines because their sophisticated reasoning tends to be self-justifying. In libraries, books on ethics are more likely to be stolen or unreturned compared to other disciplines. The authors give an example of a patient presenting an illness to different specialists to obtain the best option of treatment. Not surprisingly, each specialist skews towards providing his area of expertise as the best treatment option.

At the organizational level, the book describes a phenomenon called bounded ethicality. This means that by focusing only on certain decisions considered as directly involving an ethical issue, one tends to neglect the ethical significance of other actions done without being consciously aware of their problematic nature. For example, in the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster, NASA engineers were pressured to advise in favor of a launch simply because of the way questions were put to them, and despite clear knowledge of mechanical problems, a decision that ultimately led to the explosion of the space shuttle.

The book gives various examples of how employees can contribute to dysfunctional organizations for fear of rocking the boat. Interestingly, reward systems, ethical codes of conduct, sanctions, or disclosure of conflict of interests can produce the opposite effect in organizations. This is due to the displacement of the problem from an ethical one to that of management or fulfilling set protocols. As an ex-

ample, kindergarten staff noticed that some parents were late in picking up their kids after work. In an attempt to correct this, they imposed a small fine for late pickup. Surprisingly, the number of late pickups increased, because the question has been shifted from one of ethics (consideration for the staff) to that of cost-benefit calculation (how much penalty I am willing to pay for this option). The authors offer another example of the collapse of Enron which was undetected by the auditing company, because they were blinded by the fact that Enron was their main client.

Bazerman and Tenbrusel then turn to blind spots at the government level where decisions can exacerbate unethical behaviors. There is a tendency to ignore future consequences and only focus on immediate interests. For instance, there is now a crisis of overfishing of blue tuna. However, none of the countries can agree on the quota reduction of fishing, and as a result of each country only looking out for their own interests, extinction of the fish and eventual collapse of the industry is inevitable. Another example is organ donation. If taken as a whole, most people would agree that the opt-out policy (presuming agreement to donate organs unless stated otherwise) would increase donations and benefit everyone. However, most countries can only agree on an opt-in policy (signing that they are willing to donate their organs) because of self-interest.

There are some problems in the book's critique of traditional moral systems. The authors describe the differences between intuitive and logical reasoning. Intuitive reasoning is quick, spontaneous, immediate, and visceral decisions made especially when one is under pressure. Logical reasoning is more pondered, slow, and deliberate. The

authors posit an ethical gap between the two ways of thinking, claiming that intuitive reasoning tends to be more immoral than logical deliberate ones. One example they use to prove this is the famous trolley problem: A train is about to crash into five innocent bystanders. You have the ability to change the track of the train to avoid the crash, but it could kill one individual. Most people's immediate intuition would be to consider this change of track acceptable. According to the authors, logical reasoning would, however, see this to be no different from killing one person in order to save five, a form of utilitarian calculation to maximize the outcome. However, applying the traditional principle of double effect, one can justify this act. The main intention of the act would be to save the five persons by changing the track, with the undesired effect that the train could kill one. The authors give other examples that ironically cannot escape their own blind spots. One is the example of climate change which the book presents as a proven reality which I am not so sure. They use two other examples that are considered intuitively abhorrent: Flag burning and eating dog meat. However, this is culturally based. A Canadian would not be bothered by the former, and a Chinese may not find the latter disgusting. What are the solutions to avoid blind spots in ethical thinking and acting? The book mentions some practical ones, such as having foresight, recognizing our blind spots, weaknesses and tendencies, and evaluating our unethical self accurately. In fact, these blind spots we all have are covered under the traditional heading of "passions" that virtues ethics can rectify. I think many of the suggestions the authors give to overcome blind spots are already included in the considerations of the virtue of prudence. A truly prudent person is the one who can overcome these weaknesses through experience, self-knowledge, objectivity, and foresight. It would be interesting to compare behavioral ethics with

virtue ethics to see how many of the blind spots mentioned in the book can be overcome.

Joseph Tham, L.C.

Janet Morana, *Recall Abortion. Ending the Abortion Industry's Exploitation of Women*, Saint Benedict Press, Charlotte 2013, 211 pp.

De un modo claro y valiente, Janet Morana, directora ejecutiva de la asociación «Priests for Life», y cofundadora de «Silent No More Awareness Campaign», muestra en este volumen que el aborto no es ninguna atención sanitaria ni ofrece ayuda a las mujeres, sino que se trata de un acto que destruye la vida de muchos hijos y que daña gravemente a las madres.

La finalidad del libro es indicada en la advertencia del padre Frank Pavone: Janet Morana no busca entrar en el debate entre los defensores o los detractores del aborto, sino hablar a quienes, sin ideologías, se preocupan seriamente por las mujeres (p. XI).

Tras la introducción de Teresa Tomeo, el volumen se divide en 12 capítulos. En el primero, Janet Morana recorre brevemente su vida. Explica cómo, tras perder sus creencias católicas, usó con frecuencia píldoras anticonceptivas; y cómo recuperó la fe y entró a formar parte de los grupos provida.

En los siguientes capítulos se presenta el aborto como el mayor fraude cometido contra las mujeres, con testimonios sea de mujeres que han abortado en situaciones de control público a veces inferiores a lo que se exige en algunas clínicas veterinarias, sea de médicos y otras personas que han trabajado en centros abortistas y luego han abrazado la causa de la vida. Además, la Autora muestra cómo el aborto legalizado se ha convertido en una especie de incentivo para muchas mujeres que han optado por ese gesto precisamente desde el engaño que produce el ver algo como aprobado por la ley.

A lo largo del texto Morana responde a diversas objeciones y a tó-

picos de quienes promueven el aborto o de quienes adoptan ante el mismo una actitud incorrecta, especialmente en los capítulos 7, 8 y 9. En concreto, busca responder a la famosa frase «yo estoy contra el aborto, pero ¿cómo actuar en los casos de violación e incesto?» (capítulo 7). La Autora, desde testimonios concretos, muestra cómo el aborto no soluciona el trauma de quien ha sufrido una violencia, sino que añade dolor al dolor...

También se analiza cómo la píldora y otros métodos anticonceptivos cambiaron profundamente los modos de vida de las mujeres, sea respecto al modo de regular sus relaciones con los hombres (fuera o dentro de cualquier relación estable), sea respecto a la edad de contraer matrimonio o de tener el primer hijo (capítulo 10).

El libro publicado por Janet Morana encarna una importante dimensión de la bioética: dirigir la mirada a las personas concretas involucradas en las decisiones sobre la vida o la muerte. En un tema como el aborto son importantes los argumentos, pero de modo especial es necesario aprender a escuchar a quienes han sufrido a causa de una decisión tan injusta, y que necesitan iniciar un camino de sanación y rescate.

Fernando Pascual, L.C.

Clarke D. Forsythe, *Abuse of Discretion: The Inside Story of Roe v. Wade*, Encounter Books, New York NY 2013

The judicial and political battles over abortion, unleashed by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1973, continue unabated. A recently published book, "Abuse of Discretion: The Inside Story of Roe v. Wade," examined the papers of eight of the nine justices responsible for the Roe v. Wade decision, as well as Doe v. Bolton. Forsythe, senior counsel at Americans United for Life, details in several hundred pages, the reasoning that led to the wholesale approval of abortion. Even those symp-

thetic to *Roe v. Wade* refer to the decision as an “engine of controversy,” Forsythe said in his introduction. Others described the judgment as “the preeminent symbol of judicial overreaching.”

The effect of the 1973 decisions was to nullify all of the abortion laws in the 50 states, enabling abortion clinics to open everywhere. According to Forsythe the Supreme Court surprised even pro-abortion activists, who did not expect such a favorable decision. In the judgment the justices decided that the right to liberty included a right to privacy and that abortion is part of that right to privacy. Then, they also affirmed that the unborn are not persons, as defined by the Constitution.

In the *Doe* judgment the justices also defined health as including the emotional well-being of a pregnant woman, without defining what this meant, leaving it at the discretion of those carrying out abortions. As commentators on the Supreme Court’s decisions observed the radical nature of the judgments placed America amongst only a handful of countries in the world with such sweeping liberty to abort the unborn. Another major criticism made by Forsythe is that the Supreme Court’s intervention took the abortion issue out of the control of state legislatures, where it had resided until then, thus overriding the normal political processes of debate and democratic process.

“The Justices centralized what had previously been decentralized,” he commented. This meant, he continued, that the American people were no longer free to debate and decide on the issue. While a number of states had already allowed abortion before 1973 the result of the Supreme Court decision meant that the number of abortions rose significantly, from 550,000 in 1972, to a high of 1.6 million in 1992.

In concluding Forsythe commented that the Justices “seriously underestimated the storm they were heading into, and the conditions that caused it.” *Roe*, he said, “was heavily influenced by short-

term legal, political and social calculations, including heated population crisis predictions that were eventually proven false.” “Numerous assumptions – about the risks of abortion and future abortion practice – were based on little more than a hunch,” he added.

Forsythe went on to observe that, while the Justices thought they were acting in accord with public opinion, in fact they were going well beyond what the public supported. There are only four nations in the entire world, he noted, that allow abortion after fetal viability – the United States, North Korea, China, and Canada. By acting in such a unilateral way, Forsythe said, they made the issue of abortion “more divisive and irresolvable by taking it out of the democratic process where even the most controversial political issues are moderated by political and legislative debate.”

Forsythe also took issue with the arguments used by abortion supporters that its legalization would have positive results for women, in terms of reduced maternal mortality. “There is no peer-reviewed data to show a reduction in maternal mortality,” as a result of the legalization of abortion, he affirmed. In fact, data from countries that do not allow abortion, such as Chile or Ireland, show that maternal health is better compared to neighbouring countries that have legalized abortion. “The claim that *Roe* has reduced maternal mortality is a house of cards,” he affirmed.

Forsythe also amply documented the abuses that have taken place in abortion clinics, with unsafe medical practices and the medical and psychological effects that have affected many women. “There is growing evidence that the national policy of abortion for any reason at any time of pregnancy – never yet approved by the people through popular referenda – has brought a load of physical, emotional, and social problems that in fact burden women and impede their happiness.”

At the same time Forsythe warned the pro-life movement against put-

ting its hopes in another legal decision that would overturn the 1973 verdicts. In the majority of states, he observed, there are no prohibitions against abortion. Legislative debate at the state level is now going on, he noted. In recent years a number of states have restricted abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Abortion will without doubt continue to be a hotly debated topic. Another issue, same-sex “marriage”, is also the subject of numerous court battles, not the least in California where the state court overruled a vote by the people. It remains to be seen if judicial intervention or democracy will have the upper hand.

John Flynn, L.C.

Courtesy of Zenit News Agency
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Hugo Tristram Engelhardt jr., *Viaggi in Italia. Saggi di bioetica*, a cura di Rodolfo Rini e Maurizio Mori, Le Lettere, Firenze 2011, 428 pp.

El pensamiento bioético de H.T. Engelhardt ha suscitado en algunas personas o asociaciones italianas un especial interés, sobre todo entre quienes promueven cierto modo de entender la bioética laica. En este contexto, el volumen que ahora presento recoge en buena parte la presencia y difusión de textos, artículos y entrevistas de Engelhardt publicados en italiano durante los últimos años, de un modo organizado y temático.

Al inicio encontramos un prefacio de Maurizio Mori, un representante de la bioética laica italiana, que explica el origen y la elaboración del volumen, así como algunas reflexiones sobre el pensamiento del autor norteamericano, orientadas a demostrar, entre otras cosas, que Engelhardt, al distinguir entre ser humano y persona se situaría dentro de una tradición católica, y que no resultaría correcto etiquetarlo como «laico» (pp. 12-17, y lo que se dice más adelante respecto de otras propuestas de Engelhardt).

Mori aprovecha su introducción para considerar a los defensores de la ley natural como impositivos (p. 27), mientras que exalta a Engelhardt como un autor cristiano ortodoxo que sabe respetar la libertad de los otros (pp. 28-29). Además, Mori aclara, hacia el final de su texto, que no comparte las ideas del profesor texano, pero las considera estimulantes por presentar un «catolicismo ortodoxo» diferente del «catolicismo romano» (pp. 30-31).

Tras una nota de quienes prepararon la edición sobre cómo se consiguieron los textos y algunos criterios de uniformación estilística, encontramos una introducción del mismo Engelhardt preparada *ad hoc* para este volumen. De un modo sencillo y vivencial, el Autor cuenta sus primeras impresiones al llegar a Italia con apenas 13 años, en 1954, y cómo constató con el pasar del tiempo el fracaso de la fe en la razón que había sido clave en el catolicismo romano (p. 39).

Engelhardt ofrece en estas líneas iniciales algunas de sus afirmaciones más paradójicas. Por ejemplo, que el catolicismo produjo una «nueva religión» entre los años 800 y 1274, y que dejó como heredad al mundo occidental la «falsa idea de una conexión no sólo entre fe y razón, sino también entre razón y moral y entre razón y ser», con la esperanza de superar desde tales propuestas el pluralismo moral (p. 40). Tras estas afirmaciones explica su paso o conversión al cristianismo ortodoxo (entre 1988 y 1991), y luego ofrece diversas críticas a la bioética y moral laicas, incapaces de reconocer un fundamento racional a sus propuestas (pp. 42-43, 45).

Los diversos artículos recogidos en esta obra están agrupados en cinco partes. La primera está dedicada a algunas investigaciones sobre la teología y sobre el fundamento filosófico de la bioética. La segunda analiza las «bases conceptuales de la bioética». La tercera se pone ante algunas intervenciones normativas referidas a temas particulares. La cuarta aborda el tema del pluralismo ético en relación con las leyes y la laicidad del Estado. Al final se

reproducen tres entrevistas ofrecidas por el Autor a dos periódicos italianos y a una revista. Luego encontramos la bibliografía de las fuentes citadas en el volumen.

Sería complejo analizar los numerosos análisis y propuestas que ofrece Engelhardt a lo largo de los textos aquí recogidos. En cierto modo, quien ya conoce su pensamiento verá cómo ha ido elaborando y repitiendo algunas ideas que resultan reiterativas, con sus no pocos elementos de contradicción. Por fijarme en un punto, quisiera evidenciar ahora su noción de persona, vista en relación con el fundamento de una autoridad moral laica (pp. 121-136).

Para Engelhardt, si se carece en bioética de una concreta visión de Dios, o de un modo de concebir la racionalidad moral, o de un cierto tipo de visión sobre la naturaleza, ¿qué queda? Según él, sólo la persona, pues es lo único que podría servir como fundamento de la autoridad moral (pp. 122-124). ¿Cómo se llega a esto? A través de una propuesta paradójica: «si no existen parámetros externos, los únicos sobre los que se puede confiar son los que derivan de la persona en cuanto sujeto moral agente e interpretante» (p. 123). En realidad, sostener esta afirmación sólo es posible desde cierta racionalidad, lo cual previamente ha quedado puesto en entredicho... Además, ¿según qué criterios se escoge a la persona, considerada como la única autoridad moral? ¿Sólo por el pragmatismo de una sociedad que actúa así, mientras se deja de lado cualquier referencia al valor de la persona, como se indica en la p. 135? Pero tal actuación tiene sus motivos racionales, que merecen ser justificados, cosa que el Autor no hace a causa de su peculiar manera de analizar la situación postmoderna y de presentar la crisis de la racionalidad en algunas sociedades o grupos.

Por eso sorprenden afirmaciones gratuitas como decir que «la fuerza no tiene ninguna autoridad moral, porque en realidad no existe ninguna justificación racional para el recurso a ella» (p. 124), lo cual de-

jaría en un extraño vacío justificativo cualquier intervención policial en el mundo, incluido en el Estado de Texas exaltado en ocasiones por Engelhardt... Igualmente es curioso el esfuerzo «racional» y argumentativo para mostrar que faltarían argumentos racionales válidos para fundar cualquier sistema moral... (pp. 126-129); o la defensa de un respeto que permitiría crear un modo aceptable de convivir entre extranjeros morales (p. 133): ¿aceptable según qué criterio y por qué motivos? Es imposible fundar ninguna convivencia entre seres humanos sin tener un mínimo de consenso sobre contenidos, y tal consenso, aunque Engelhardt parezca no entenderlo, sólo puede surgir sanamente cuando existe una referencia mínima a elementos básicos que sólo encuentran su fundamento y justificabilidad en la ley natural.

Engelhardt ha sido y sigue siendo un provocador, como en cierto modo él mismo había reconocido al final de su obra más famosa, *The Foundations of Bioethics* (con dos ediciones diferentes, 1986 y 1996). Frente a sus reflexiones hace falta un sereno y continuo trabajo, lleno de confianza en las capacidades del hombre, por profundizar en los verdaderos fundamentos de la bioética, más allá de las dificultades que generan un pluralismo malsano y desde la búsqueda de principios válidos para garantizar la vida de todos, sin discriminaciones como las que se permiten, desde propuestas supuestamente «tolerantes», con la legalización del aborto o la eutanasia...

Fernando Pascual, L.C.

William Tucker, *Marriage and Civilization: How Monogamy Made Us Human*, Regnery Publishing, 2014

Monogamous marriage was a crucial influence in shaping Western civilization, affirms William Tucker in his new book. Tucker, a journalist and author of various books, covers a wide range of topics, from anthropology to the origins

of civilization, the role of religion and the contemporary situation of family life. From the start of human history, Tucker explained, the unique social contract of marriage has freed persons to work together in cooperation and enabled the birth of human civilization. He added that while monogamy is a more successful way to organize a society it is always under siege and requires rules that must be upheld by its members. If a society becomes indifferent about maintaining the rules then monogamy will unravel, as is happening in the United States today.

Tucker was quite critical of the form the Welfare State has developed in recent years, in providing incentives for single mothers to remain single. The two-parent family is a strong institution, he noted, but is not indestructible. "With the proper economic incentives it can be torn apart," he said. Then, once dismembered it may be very difficult to reconstruct.

In a chapter dealing with interpretations of marriage in primitive societies Tucker explained that while in the 19th century some authors proposed a situation where polygamy was the practice, later research showed that initially it was monogamy that was the original form of human bonding, while in some societies polygamy was a later development. Tucker also observed the polygamous societies are more prone to warfare because they have created an imbalance by allowing each man to have more than one wife. This leads to a need for additional women that is satisfied by engaging in combat with other tribes and stealing the women.

As part of his historical overview Tucker commented on Ancient Greece and noted that it was the first complex society to impose monogamy on its members, even those at the top of the hierarchy. "For the first time since the last hunter-and-gatherers, the egalitarianism of the original human society has been restored," he added. Following this the Roman Empire consolidated the norm of monogamy as the model for families.

Another key role was played by Christianity, Tucker affirmed: "Christianity played the crucial role in making monogamy the norm on Western society," he stated. After a lengthy historical examination of various societies and religions Tucker returned to the contemporary situation in the United States. How is it, he asked, that in the space of merely 50 years, marriage and a two-parent family go from being the ideal and most common form of family life to being "a fairytale to which only the most privileged can aspire?"

Tucker went on to affirm that monogamy does not satisfy everyone's desires and that is why it is easy to undermine. At the same time he said that: "Monogamy is the end point of civilized behavior that recognizes, however unconsciously, that enforcing the rules creates advantages at the societal level." Therefore, he concluded that we have a situation where monogamy does not satisfy everyone's desires, yet it is a form of family life that creates advantages at the societal level. Tucker went on to affirm that humans are happiest when living in stable, long-term marriages and that their

children are also much better off. Monogamy, however, he went on to say, does require people to make certain sacrifices. One factor Tucker identified as an undermining force in family life was the end of the idea of a family wage, which enabled the male to be the sole income earner. With the entrance of large numbers of women into the workforce men's job prospects were reduced, particularly those who were less well-educated.

A second major change was the 1960s sexual revolution and the separation of sex from childbearing. This led to a great weakening of marriage and to major changes in family structures. In his concluding chapter Tucker affirmed that nations' fates are above all dependent on the human beings who make them up. "Monogamous families create socially conscious human beings ready to live in peaceful societies," he said.

At the same time he questioned if it is possible to restore the monogamous ideal to American society. That is, to return to a situation where both men and women understand that there are certain rules that must be honored and certain behaviors that can threaten family stability. Monogamous marriage, Tucker went on to affirm, is a thrilling adventure, but also the work of a lifetime. It is also, he repeated, an institution that enables civilizations to flourish and to build a prosperous and flourishing world.

John Flynn, L.C.

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