

# Preface

Every living thing has a narrative that ends with its death. These narratives, which are merely the living thing's life story from its beginning as a living being to its end as that being, range from relatively simple to extremely complex. Found among the simpler stories are simpler living things, such as the unicellular organisms of bacteria, protozoa, and some algae. For a generally short period of time, these beings interact with their environment and then cease to exist as a living being. Their stories tend not to hold much interest for people unless they somehow affect those beings that have much more complicated narratives.

Among those with complicated narratives are, of course, human beings or persons. Their narratives are created by causes sometimes within their power and sometimes outside their control. Involuntary external forces act upon people, such as their environment, as well as internal powers, such as their genetics. In addition and perhaps most interesting is the artificial power each person has to help craft her own stories. What she chooses to be and how she lives her overall life are at least a small bit within her control, unlike the unicellular organisms which are limited to the influences of their nurture and nature. These more complicated stories hold our interests when it comes to death and dying and what it means because these are the individuals we value the most.

In this work, I will construct a pragmatic moral framework to think about intrinsically valuable individuals and their narratives. I do not claim that the framework can answer all questions that might be raised in death and dying issues, but it is useful to justify positions so that reasonable people can see that the framework's outcomes are reasonable, although they might not be universally adopted as something each person is permitted or obligated to do. In order to build the framework, I start with the same approach found in John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: The ground covering must first be cleared so that a strong foundation can be laid. To remove the obscuring brush, I will address the value of using intuitions in reasoning. Although this might seem far afield in a book devoted to examining death's values, the literature is rife with the use of intuitions and "common sense" views on which many erroneous conclusions have been based. Before getting to the heart of death's values, we need to see what

should be used and what should be put aside at the most basic level of how to think about these issues.

Secondly, if we are going to have a pragmatic discussion of death's moral values, then it is vital to delve into how morality is possible in the first place. This investigation allows us to see some important limitations and requirements morality has so that a proper understanding of death's values in bioethics does not venture into the realm of the conceivable but causally impossible. These will be the building blocks of the superstructure that comes later. After the materials are identified and sorted, the pragmatic moral framework foundation is laid using them. The Practical Principle created is based upon two central truths about how we think about morality: Things with intrinsic value should be respected according to their worth, and we should make the world a better place. In order to make sense of these two sub-principles, there has to be a value theory. After all, if we cannot identify intrinsic value, then it will be impossible for us to respect things with such worth as they should be or to make the world a better place unless that happens by sheer accident. However, for morality to exist in the first place, our narratives as people are not merely accidents or fully outside of our control. I will establish a plausible, pragmatic case as to why certain entities have intrinsic value and how much they have, as well as showing how such value can be reasonably determined. The remaining chapters are devoted to explaining what is lost when someone's life narrative comes to an end, and what if anything survives the event of death.

I offer a bit of a warning to the reader: In what follows, I spend a great deal of time developing those ideas in death and dying which I think require much more depth than they are often given. The reason for this approach is that ethics and bioethics deal with the most important issues. Therefore, we need a more nuanced way of thinking about things that reflects each situations' reality and gravity. In other words, we require Fox thinking over Hedgehog thinking. According to Philip Tetlock, the Hedgehog knows one big thing and then tries to force all decisions to fit that idea or principle, regardless of whether they can be adequately accommodated by it. For example, a Hedgehog might expect standard act utilitarianism to fully answer every bioethics question without residue, even though standard act utilitarianism ignores morally relevant information, such as the facts that people deserve to be respected for their own sakes and that relationships matter in ways uncondusive to number crunching cost-benefit analysis. Although appealing because Hedgehog thinkers exhibit so much confidence in their cutting of bioethics' Gordian knots, they can be rather dangerous if we are truly interested in doing and being what we should (Tetlock 2006, 219).

Fox thinkers do not have this dynamic, harmful characteristic because of how they do what they do. First, Foxes have more nuanced views of situations, unlike Hedgehogs who try to make everything fit their too few pieces of information and rules. In addition, Hedgehogs dismiss anyone who does not fully agree with them and their beliefs, positions, and conclusions because to disagree is to challenge the one thing that they know. Any challenge to her blind certainty then becomes an attack on the Hedgehog's identity—the Hedgehog cannot make compromises since she knows one thing, and to challenge that is to attack who she is. On the other

hand, Foxes are open to re-examining and altering their views as new information becomes available. To challenge them does not attack their identity given they are willing to be wrong and to have altered one or more of the many things they know (Tetlock 2006). Finally, Foxes are unlikely to attack others with different viewpoints. For the former, it is not a dichotomy between the totally compliant and everyone else as found with the Hedgehog, who must demonize any challenge to her views lest they be also a challenge to who she is. Foxes know that the situation is complex with many different interconnected factors and relationships involved; therefore, many different stakeholders must be consulted for relevant bits of information. From these strands of moral factors, the Fox weaves a complex solution that works for many, if not most, of the stakeholders. In other words, a Fox crafts a solution to fit reality instead of forcing reality to fit the solution.

Even though a great deal more time and resources are available now for Fox thinking, and most people are in agreement that such thinking is vital in bioethics since the situations are so complicated and the moral stakes are so high, there has not been sufficient environmental pressure to abandon the Hedgehog way. The problem is that being a Hedgehog continues to work well enough in many cases.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Hedgehog thinking outperforms Fox cognition if being successful is measured by influence in one's sphere and certainty in one's position. Comfort comes from the beliefs that there is no chaos to threaten us. Any problem can be solved easily by those who are strong and powerful; we should not worry or be involved.

Of course, bioethics and ethics cannot afford to form beliefs, think about, or make decisions primarily from a desire for comfort and need for security. Its subject matter is far too important for that. Hence, in what follows it is vital to go where bioethics' gravity and need for high standards and depth understanding takes us.

## References

- Kahneman, D. 2011. *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Tetlock, P.E. 2006. *Expert political judgment: How good is it? How can we know?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Kahneman's System 1 explains how a Hedgehog would think generally. System 1 "operates automatically and quickly with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control." (2011, 20) System 1 appears to be the result of innate and deeply learned responses and patterns.



<http://www.springer.com/978-94-017-7263-1>

Death's Values and Obligations: A Pragmatic  
Framework

Cooley, D.R.

2015, XV, 311 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-017-7263-1