March 10, 2000. Interview with Tom L. Beauchamp, PhD, Professor of Philosophy, and Senior Research Scholar at the Kennedy Institute, Georgetown University, Washington D.C. The interview is being conducted by Dr. Judith Swazey at Dr. Beauchamp’s office at the Kennedy Institute.

1 Swazey: Let’s start with your family background, parents, where you were raised.

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3 Beauchamp: O.K., my father was a lawyer in Texas. He was actually the Chief Executive Officer of Blue Cross/Blue Shield in Dallas, which was the plan for the State of Texas. He had a business degree as an undergraduate. My mother had only a junior college degree and was never employed. She was a homemaker.

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8 Swazey: Did you grow up in Dallas?

9 Beauchamp: I grew up in Austin and Dallas. I was born in Austin.

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11 Swazey: What about the role of religion in your upbringing?

12 Beauchamp: I was raised a Methodist, though there was more than one Protestant group
in my family. And when I was in the vicinity of high school senior, I began to have my doubts about it, which I’d probably nowadays say were largely philosophical but at the time I thought of as theological. I’m not even sure at the time how much theology was in my vocabulary, but I wouldn’t have thought of them as philosophical doubts, although in retrospect that’s what they were. And this led me on an odyssey out of Methodism and into an affiliation with the Unitarian/Universalist Church.

Swazey: Were your doubts particularly about Methodism?

Beauchamp: The thing that caught my fancy, I think, was the doctrine of the Trinity together with the doctrine of the Messiah, that the Messiah had come and distinguished Christianity from other religions. Both struck me as, I’m not quite sure what word I would have used at the time, but perhaps something as strong as bizarre, very odd beliefs, and so I set out to prove, as young people are wont to do, that they were true or false. And came to a conclusion that there was no way to make a determination one way or the other on the basis of belief. And this of course led me into an odyssey about faith and reason and so I took quite a few theology courses and in
fact eventually ended up with a theology degree at Yale University, and it was then that I went on to philosophy. So I would say thinking theologically was very influential on the whole pattern of my intellectual development. I would not say religious doctrines -- perhaps certain teachers of religious doctrines were, but that is not because of the doctrines but because of the teachers themselves.

Swazey: What about college? What did you major in?

Beauchamp: I was a social science undergraduate major, which I hooked together with philosophy. They had a quick Masters program which you could sort of combine with your undergraduate program. So I took a social science undergraduate degree combined with a Masters Degree in philosophy.

Swazey: What was your general area in social science? Was it sociology?

Beauchamp: The general area was a social science degree, but I took more psychology than anything else.
Swazey: That makes you fairly unusual in bioethics. Not that many people have a social science background with social science training.

Beauchamp: Well, since Ruth does too we talk about that a fair amount. And I think you are right - it is a fairly small minority. You may know that we did a book some years ago here at the Institute on ethical issues in social science research.

Swazey: Yes, and I want to talk more about that in a little while, along with your books on ethical issues in business.

Beauchamp: Well, it was early. I am not sure how important it was. It did have quite a few users given the small number of people teaching that kind of thing at the time.

Swazey: Why the decision to go to Yale and study religion?

Beauchamp: I was working on these theological problems at the time and my studies in philosophy had led me to the Perkins School of Theology at SMU. I might
have a hard time convincing you of this, but it was probably the most liberal in the sense of free-thinking seminaries, including the secular university seminaries. Universities like Harvard and Yale, for example, which do have seminaries but the universities themselves are not strictly affiliated with a particular church, or would deny that they are affiliated with any church. But the Perkins School of Theology at SMU was - I am going to use a strong word here - considerably more liberal than these places, meaning by that, that they allowed considerably more free thinking in professors that they appointed. And I was really quite taken with this, given my interests and the fact that the philosophy department that I had studied in as an undergraduate was a pretty boring department. And so I decided that Yale was a pretty good place to continue my graduate studies given my interest at the time. But, of course, one of the things that I found at Yale was that it wasn't where I wanted to continue my graduate studies. But that is OK. We all go through that process of figuring out what we want to do and how our career is going to go.

Swazey: What did you see yourself as doing when you were getting your Masters in philosophy?
Beauchamp: I was just interested in philosophy and I had already declared the social science undergraduate degree, and I think it was particularly the kind of thinking that students engage in when they think of a double major. Because the way they arranged it you could get through the Masters degree in nine months.

Swazey: Did you see yourself having an academic career at that point?

Beauchamp: I was thinking seriously about it. When I went to Yale they had something in the program I was in called Track 4, which was research studies, and they allowed me to declare a cognate field, so it became complicated. Research studies in religion and philosophy - that was the program. I don't think it exists any more but it was a really neat program at the time in the sense that it allowed you to do pretty much what you wanted to, which is what happened after the Vietnam War. I was actually there during the major early protests at Yale and other universities about the Vietnam War. So it was before the curriculum changes. But the kind of stuff that we heard about curriculum change at the time, especially what this program was, you could pretty much do what you wanted to do,
fashion your own program.

Swazey: Who did you study with at Yale?

Beauchamp: My major professor was a man named William Christian, Bill Christian, who I suppose is no longer living, although I did have some letters from him some years after I left there as a student. I adored him because I thought he was such a dispassionate thinker with a very reflective mind. But he wasn’t terribly popular with the students. The other man that I studied with greatly was a man named Robert Lowry Calhoun. Calhoun was adored by the students. By then he was a rather old man who isolated himself in his office. But I thought he was a great man. He had been at Yale for all of his career, sometimes in the Philosophy Department, and most of the time in Religious Studies, and next to Christian I took most of my courses from Calhoun. So they were certainly the two people that I studied with and that I was the most influenced by.

Swazey: Mentors? In the real sense of the word?
Beauchamp: Right. I had hoped to be more influenced by the people in the philosophy department but I just was not enamored by a lot of the people in that department. There was a man named Robert Brumbaugh that I liked very much in Greek philosophy and studied a lot in that area with him. But most of the people in metaphysics and epistemology, which were the areas that I was working in most of the time, I did not find stimulating teachers, shall we say. One of them was the Sterling Professor and I always wondered how this man could possibly be a "sterling" professor!

Swazey: Were any of the other people who have become prominent in bioethics at Yale when you were there?

Beauchamp: Oh, yeah. Stan Hauerwas was there. Jim Childress was there. LeRoy Walters was there. Al Jonsen was there for one or two years when I was there. And Paul Menzel was there. That is a pretty good group in terms of later contributions to bioethics. Also Barney Twist and Jock Reader, if you know them. They were early on interested in bioethics. I am not sure what their interests are today, but we were all students together.
122 Swazey: Did you study with Jim Gustafson at all?

123 Beauchamp: Yes. Gustafson was not a major professor of mine but he was of most of these other people. I wasn't all that much interested in ethics at the time since metaphysics and epistemology and the philosophy of religion were my big areas of interest. Although I liked Jim Gustafson very much. I was the student representative on the Lecture Committee and he was the Chair of the Lecture Committee, and he and I worked together a great deal on the lecturers that would come to the University. I liked him very much in that context, but I just didn't take to what I thought was his rather doctrinaire teaching. I don't mean that he was a doctrinaire person; I mean the books that he chose to teach were doctrinaire and uninspiring to me. This was a very counter-cultural view of mine I suppose, because you were supposed to love Jim Gustafson and work with him if you were at all interested in ethics. The man you weren't supposed to like because he was an alcoholic who sometimes showed up in an alcoholic state was a man named Liston Pope, and I liked Pope very much. I thought he was a very nice man and he taught very interesting things, so I was at odds with my fellow students.
Swazey: So you knew this whole circle of people like LeRoy and Al and so forth.

Beauchamp: Yes, though none of us knew anything about bioethics at the time. And some of these people I was closer to than others. I was very, very close to Stan Hauerwas and his wife - that was socially, but also in terms of the course work we were doing. And I was very close to Jock Reader because of the stuff that we were studying. But I knew all of the other people. Probably knew Al Jonsen the least of the group. He was well advanced in his studies and he was mostly downtown whereas most of us were uptown.

Swazey: Had you decided by the time you got to Yale that you were going to go on for a PhD in philosophy?

Beauchamp: I think I decided it by at least the middle of the second year I was there. It was a three-year program.

Swazey: And you have already said that the department at Yale did not appeal to you to stay and get your PhD.
153 Beauchamp: No, neither the Philosophy Department or the Religious Studies Department. Not to say that I didn't have a lot of great teachers. I did, and I just enjoyed my years there tremendously. But it was not what I wanted to go on to do.

157 Swazey: Had you thought at all of a PhD someplace in religious studies or had you focused on philosophy?

159 Beauchamp: I thought about it but rejected it. I was certain that was not what I wanted to do. It might strike you as odd, because it is clear that both at SMU and at Yale the people that I was most attracted to as teachers were people in religious studies. But these were people who were very philosophical; both Christian and Calhoun were very philosophical in everything they did. Because after a while you ask yourself, why should I get a degree in religious studies when in fact what I am doing is philosophy?

166 Swazey: And the obvious answer fits -- philosophy.
Beauchamp: That’s right. Paul Menzel, by the way, the exact same thing happened to him. He was in exactly the same situation I was in.

Swazey: Why Hopkins?

Beauchamp: Part of that was Christian’s influence. There was a man named Victor Lowe at Hopkins who did a lot of the stuff that Christian did, particularly in the philosophy of Whitehead. I was also very interested in the history of philosophy by this time, and Hopkins has the great Lovejoy tradition in the history of philosophy. And they had several other people that I liked just as individual teachers. When I visited the campus I also fell in love with it -- this is not the East Campus, the medical school campus, which, of course, nobody who has seen the main campus ever goes to. Nobody would fall in love with the East Campus, but the main campus is just a wonderful place. It is small and beautiful and has got a lot of rich tradition, etc. So, like all of the people, I applied to several places but when the offers and opportunities came back it was a very clear choice, it was a very easy one.
Swazey: So your PhD work continued on in epistemology and...

Beauchamp: Yes, even in graduate school in philosophy I took relatively little ethics, some ethics, but I concentrated on metaphysics and epistemology and did my dissertation in that area and I was hired here to do that sort of thing, along with the philosophy of David Hume, which was by then a concentration of mine. Actually that had begun at Yale as well.

Swazey: One of the discussions we have been having with just about everybody has been the predominant role of analytic philosophy in bioethics, which is a tale you know far more about than I do.

Beauchamp: That is a tale I know fairly well!

Swazey: Yes, I imagine you might! One of the things that interests us is why various Continental philosophy schools have had so little influence in America. Very few people who we've talked to in bioethics ever studied it, had any training in Continental philosophy. How broad was your
graduate training in philosophy?

Beauchamp: Well, the department at Yale was very influenced by Continental philosophy and some of that rubbed off on me as it would anyone in that environment. It was much more Continentally-oriented than it was to what most people think of it as analytic philosophy now. I am not a real believer in this distinction. There is good philosophy and there is bad philosophy. Some good philosophy comes from the Continent, some comes from the United States, and some comes from England, some comes from Australia, and there is a lot of bad that comes from all of these places too. I think what one ought to do as a philosopher is have enough confidence to say I can distinguish good philosophy and bad philosophy, and I don’t need the labels like analytic and phenomenological or Continental or Eastern and Western, which I have also found don’t work very well. So this kind of way of thinking about it is not something that I find very helpful. However, I do think there are people who have been enormously influential in bioethics whose basic training was in Continental philosophy, unless one thinks of Continental philosophy in an awfully narrow way. Take Tris Engelhardt, for example. Tris is a person I would say had very little training in analytic philosophy and a very heavy
training in phenomenology, and I think you could name a number of
people like that in the field. I think that basically the reason why there
aren’t more people around who have been trained in classical Continental
philosophy -- Hegel and Heidegger, for example -- is because the
European countries themselves are retooling their understanding of
philosophy. Sometimes it is in the light of their own history and they’re
reinventing their relationship to that history, and sometimes it is under the
influence of, say, elements of American philosophy. People like John
Rawls, for example, who doesn’t fit terribly well in the category of
analytic philosophy but has been so influential all over the world in both
ethics and political philosophy. So I think the old phenomenological
tradition, the old Continental tradition, is not dying away but you are
seeing smaller and smaller numbers of people and smaller and smaller
number of courses in part because the Continent itself is being reshaped.

Swazey: But would that been true, say 20 to 25 years ago, when people of your
generation were studying philosophy in this country?

Beauchamp: There was much less retooling at that time. Yes, that’s right.
Swazey: You had people like Tris who concentrated on Hegel, but to my knowledge there weren't that many doctoral programs with training in Continental schools.

Beauchamp: Yeah, absolutely. What was very common was to have one or two people on the faculty, sometimes very influential on students. Then you would have schools like Yale, University of Texas, Northwestern at that time that were heavily in that area, but nobody was succeeding in that area with the exception perhaps of Northwestern. But there I have already named three fairly significant graduate programs at the time, Texas, Yale and Northwestern, which were oriented heavily in that direction. And there were lots of other places; take Vanderbilt for example, where you could get very good training at the hands of someone like John Compton or other people who were at Vanderbilt at the time. So I think it was maybe a little bit larger influence on American philosophy than some people think. Sometimes it was hostile, of course. There were wars within departments, totally unnecessary wars as far as I am concerned. I saw some of this at Yale although there was in part personalities too. Nobody could get tenure at Yale when I was there because it was impossible to get the votes.
Swazey: The happy Ivory Tower of academia which we all know and cherish!

Looking at your CV, your first bioethics publication was in 1976. What got you started on the bioethical topics?

Beauchamp: I don’t think that was the first one I wrote. I think maybe it was the first one that was published. I think the one on the Monist may have been the first one that I ever wrote or at least the first article in a professional journal that I wrote. I think the one on genetics in '76 was because the editor or editors wrote me and said we are trying to put this book together. As you know, back in those days there was so little published in what people were increasingly beginning to realize was a rich area. People were throwing things together in fairly short order and in the very early years, when I plug into it, '72 to '75, you might have some difficulty getting a publisher. Come '75 if you had an interesting topic it wasn’t difficult to find a publisher.

Swazey: What interested you in going into bioethics?

Beauchamp: That actually is a fairly easy explanation. Unlike a lot of philosophers
I was always interested in what today is called applied philosophy. Of course, nobody used that language at the time I was a graduate student and it didn't appear for many years after that. But I was interested in all kinds of issues that had been around in philosophy for a long time, like I mentioned Rawls' writings on civil disobedience. The big issue that had come along when I was a graduate student, because of the Vietnam War, was freedom and dissent, on the one hand, and violence on the other, the justification for violence, if it has a justification, etc. And then there were allied issues like capital punishment that would float in and out. And when I came to Georgetown they asked me to teach a basic ethics course -- unlike most people in those days who were teaching a little Plato and a little Aristotle, maybe Aristotle - it wasn’t so popular in those days -- certainly Kant and Mill and so on -- I put together a course that had a lot of applied philosophy of this genre in it. It had nothing to do with bioethics, not a single bioethics topic. And I taught that course for several years.

I came here in 1970. In 1971 the Kennedy Institute opened its doors. We learned about this by reading the Washington Post. I remember I used to work every Saturday, and another member of my department and I were talking outside our offices and he said "Did you see this article in the Post?" I said "Yes, a very curious thing that we are going
to have an ethics institute at Georgetown and nobody ever said anything to
the Philosophy Department about it”, which was true. And that is how I
learned about the Kennedy Institute. But subsequent to that I had
discussions with LeRoy who, of course, was one of the first two people
hired in the Institute, Warren Reich being the other. And from LeRoy and
Warren I naturally met Andre Hellegers, the founder of the Institute. For
some reason things between me and Andre just clicked. Although, in
truth, Andre knew very little about philosophy and had an enormous bias
toward theology as a discipline that was going to solve bioethical
problems, which I never shook him of. I tried but I never...

Swazey: Never converted him.

Beauchamp: No, this came from his Roman Catholic background, of course. But Andre
and I subsequently had lunch together at the Tombs here, which has a
bench in his honor because he used to go to the Tombs every day. Andre
and I would have lunch on Saturdays and we would talk about bioethics’
issues and talk about figures who might make a contribution to the field
which was of some interest. Just trying to raise money and bring people to
And one thing led to another and eventually Andre offered me an office at the Institute. It was really odd given office space in a modern university, but when he first got a group of offices over there he had a lot of space that wasn’t being used. He said you take this office. I think it was actually “share this office with Seymour Perlin,” when Seymour was here on sabbatical from George Washington. So in 1973 or 1974 I did take him up on his offer. I didn’t leave my department office but took a second office over there and then eventually the Institute gave me all of the kinds of things that you would like to have in the way of backup support in a university, a secretary and research assistants and all that kind of thing. It didn’t make sense really to stay in the Philosophy Department office and at that point I more or less made the transfer.

Andre never asked me to do anything in bioethics. There was never any tit-for-tat. He just asked me if I would like to join them at the Kennedy Institute and that is how it happened. And eventually I did take a lot of interest in bioethics. I developed a lot of interest prior to the summer of 1974 when, as I am sure you know, Sam Gorovitz had his group at Haverford College. Sam was a good friend of mine by then because we both worked in theories of causation in philosophy. Sam would come to be Chair of the Department at Maryland and we lived close together, a few
miles apart, and I had gotten to know him quite well in that circle. And then we found out we were both interested in bioethics. So Sam and I would drive back and forth to Haverford College for the six-week program. I wasn’t a teacher, I just went. It was a luxury. It was like a research leave and they paid for everything, all free. And I think Sam’s ideas were influential on me too, although I don’t know that it was the philosophy side of it so much as it was the potential of bioethics. Sam had very good instincts, as had Andre, both of them a very forward looking idea of the potential of this field to be developed. The difference was, of course, Andre saw it all in theological lines and Sam saw it all in philosophical lines, and here I was talking at that point with both of them a good bit about these matters, and I think, retrospectively, being influenced a good bit by both of them.

Swazey: Can you encapsulate the “message” you got from Sam about potential in bioethics? What was he saying?

Beauchamp: I think what Sam thought was that these problems are basically ethical problems, and the way a philosopher naturally thinks about an ethical
problem is in term of the field of ethics, which philosophers think, unlike
some other people, that they have owned since Greek philosophy. And I
think what Sam did was just put it in that mode and say there are always
interesting concepts. We are all interested in conceptual issues as being
part of philosophy. In fact, the first issue that I really got very excited
about and spent a great deal of time thinking about, not reading so much
but just thinking about, was informed consent. And it wasn’t because I
was going to solve doctors’ problems about how to get an informed
consent. It was “what is it?” What is an informed consent? And what
conditions would you have to satisfy to get one, and do people basically
fail because they don’t satisfy these conditions? That kind of thing. I
think Sam had a very good idea of the enormous potential of untapped,
interesting concepts. Now remember also, back just about this time the
prefatory problems that led to the National Commission were on
everybody’s front page. We had had Tuskegee; we had had, especially
here in Washington but nationally, people like Peter Breggin running
around talking about the horrible things that had been done in
psychosurgery. And there were all the allegations about prisoners, etc.
That was all in front of all of us, so there were these pressing social issues,
many of which fit into my interests in civil rights that had led to the other
interests in the applied philosophy, so the whole thing began to come
together. Sam had very good sense of that. So this is more or less the
normative side, the potential for not just conceptual approaches but also
normative approaches.

Swazey: Just to jump back briefly to when you were a student at Yale in the
Vietnam era, did you get involved in any of the civil rights protests?

Beauchamp: I had been involved in the civil rights movement when I was in Texas.
Bear in mind that Texas is really the South, and I grew up in an entirely
segregated social system. So I was involved in the civil rights movement
in a big way there, the whole thing, sit-ins, everything. I wasn't that taken
with that dimension of it at Yale and the protest dimension that mimicked
civil rights protests. I thought it was aimed at the wrong targets and I
thought the idea of blowing up a college dormitory, for example, which
was popular at some campuses, was just ludicrous. And it seemed to me
that mostly what these students were doing was trying to interrupt a
football game at half-time, which struck me as penalizing your own
institutions that you didn't think was doing the right thing. If you wanted to
protest you go to Washington or something like that, and in fact I did go to
a couple of the protest marches in Washington. But if you are asking
about the group at Yale, no. The person I was most influenced by at Yale
was a man named David Little. Little was a teacher of mine and I became
personally somewhat close to him. Not as close as my friend, Jim
Childress, but I knew David quite well at the time. I was very influenced
by his objections to Paul Ramsey’s views. That was more or less the level
at which I plugged into that discussion. And there also was a man named
Stoughton Lynn at Yale at the time. I invited him to give a couple of talks
at Yale, which the press came to and found quite inflammatory because he
was kind of an inflammatory character, but I think he probably had
basically the right views.

Swazey: I was asking because in talking with people of your age group in bioethics,
many were involved in the civil rights movement.

Beauchamp: I was certainly involved in the civil rights movement, yes. I did get into
the Vietnam protests a little at Hopkins but not to carrying placards and
things like that. When I was in Texas it was very different from carrying
placards around Baltimore. When you go into a Trailways Bus Station and
you shut it down you don’t know what is coming in the way of private
police or public police or the press or anything else. That is a lot different
than carrying a placard around Baltimore.

Swazey: Very! Alex talked about his involvement in civil rights protests and the
time he spent in jail, etc.

Beauchamp: Alex Capron?

Swazey: Yes. It was part of that whole movement of various rights that seems to
have been a crucible of bioethics.

Beauchamp: I’m sure you’re right. I’m sure there is some connection there. There is a
way in which it is obvious, although there’s also a way in which you could
have gone a very different way in philosophy or law.

Swazey: Going back to the Haverford weeks with Sam, at that point had you started
to do bioethics here?

Beauchamp: By that time I had had a lot of discussions with Andre and with LeRoy, and with a young woman who was becoming a very good friend of mine on the faculty named Patricia King. And also a young woman that Andre got me together with named Judith Arene, now the dean of our law school, one of the more influential deans in the country, both of whom, as you may know, have a history in bioethics. I am sure you know about Patricia but I don't know if you know Judy’s history.

Swazey: Some, but not as well as Pat's.

Beauchamp: This was a very nice circle of people to be talking to, and just as Andre and Sam stimulated me these people certainly stimulated me. I still worked in the other areas of philosophy, and if you look at my CV you can see from the start I was still publishing on Hume. But I began to work on publications on bioethics and then began to teach courses on it, some with LeRoy and some by myself. We also had the Institute course that was started in those years and I believe I have taught in that course every year it
has been given with the exception of the first, which I have always been
very glad about because there is a man who was sent by the Kennedy
Foundation to teach in the first year course named Arthur Dyck. I don’t
know if Dyck is someone on your interview list.

Swazey: He is not on our list but I know him from my Harvard days.

Beauchamp: Dyck was not someone whose views I admired. His relationship to the
Kennedy Foundation made it very difficult for us to accept the way that
course was laid out, but we managed to get control about the second year.
The first year was out of our control really. It was really under the control
of the Kennedy Foundation. They sent Dyck down to be the savior, to
give all these great lectures which....

Swazey: How did your job as staff philosopher with the National Commission
come about in 1977?

Beauchamp: That is a very interesting story. Stephen Toulmin was appointed the staff
philosopher of the National Commission, as you may know. Are you interviewing Stephen?

Swazey: We've tried but so far can't connect with him.

Beauchamp: It would be worth doing because he goes back so far. Stephen had been appointed but this was only for, I believe the period was six months, while he was able to take leave or he was on sabbatical, one or the other, from the University of Chicago. So the staff director, Michael Yesley, was pondering what to do when Stephen left. He asked Stephen to make some well-placed calls - the term that he used - to philosophers as to who would be an appropriate replacement because Stephen himself didn't have any names. Bear in mind that back in those days there were not an awful lot of philosophers that someone like Toulmin would recommend to Yesley. So Stephen placed a call to Joel Feinberg, and I had known Feinberg for some while and he knew that I was working in these areas by this point and he recommended me. And Yesley thought this was absolutely fantastic because I was right here in Washington. He wouldn't have to go through this problem that you usually had about people taking leave and then
wanting to go after six months and having to relocate and where did they live. Toulmin in fact was living with Yesley when he would come into town and then he would leave every weekend. So Yesley thought this was an absolutely marvelous suggestion. Immediately, after only interviewing me for one day, he was completely behind the idea of my replacing Stephen as the staff philosopher. However, Joe Brady was one of the Commissioners. Are you interviewing Joe?

Swazey: Probably not.

Beauchamp: A very interesting guy. I had given a talk at Walter Reed on animal research, ethical issues and animal research, which, as you may know, is a longstanding interest. And Joe was there and he was not convinced. So he told Michael that he really had some reservations about my appointment. Then there was a Commissioner named Donald Seldin, another person who would be very interesting for you. And Donald says, I don't want anything less than a Stephen Toulmin. He said, I want a major philosophical appointment. So Yesley had some hurdles. Bear in mind that Pat King was a Commissioner, and of course she was telling
everybody how wonderful I am, etc, but Brady and Seldin were not convinced for totally different reasons. Joe Brady and Don Seldin were two of my very best friends on the Commission. In fact, I spent a huge number of hours with Seldin. It turned out, happily I suppose, that he and I had very, very similar philosophical interests. I can go into that, too, to tell you why but I may get sort of tedious after awhile. And Brady and I got along very, very well, so that turned out not to be a problem and so the appointment was made. That's basically the history of that appointment.

Swazey: I must say that I thought probably the most enjoyable thing at the Belmont Revisited conference last year was your dialogue and debate with Al Jonsen. As someone who was trained in contemporary history I just sat there grinning.

Beauchamp: I don't think we are finished with that yet! Alex Capron said he was asleep at the time. He said he heard an explosion and wondered what was going on at the meeting!

Swazey: Let me switch to your two edited books on business ethics, that I also find
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interesting. What....

Beauchamp: Actually one is not edited, one I wrote.

Swazey: That's right. You and Norman Bowie edited one.

Beauchamp: We edited it, but the other one is one that I wrote. And that is not irrelevant either. That is a case studies book. As far as I know, despite the criticisms that have come along about my work at the hands of casuists like Jonsen, Arras, and others that I could name, I am the first philosopher ever to write a case studies book in ethics. Bob Veatch had his out first but I am saying I am the first person known to me to have a PhD in philosophy to have written a case studies book. I have always taken case studies very seriously and Childress and I have always thought it was very staple to the methodology that we use, unlike what some of our casuist critics say.

Swazey: How did you happen to get into business ethics as an area?
Beauchamp: Well, there is a lot of overlap with bioethics. If you look carefully at the case studies in the book that I wrote, you will find a lot of it is concentrated on health issues, many of them public health issues. The fields are not as disparate as people for years thought. It is a very odd mentality that separates them. And now with managed care issues coming to the fore, suddenly people are beginning to discover the overlaps across these fields. I thought it was there from the outset, but I also just got interested in certain kinds of issues that were important in business ethics at the time and I think still are important. A good example of that is affirmative action. I got interested in affirmative action because of my civil rights movement stuff. But affirmative action is not a problem of bioethics. There are a number of issues like that that I got interested in and they all pointed in the direction of business ethics. At the time, I am talking about 1975, unlike bioethics, which by then had had people like Sam Gorovitz, Dan Callahan, Al Jonsen -- you know the names -- who maybe had been around for 10 years, and people like Joe Fletcher for maybe 20 years, and Ed Pellegrino for maybe 20 or 30 years working in this area, the figure was virtually zero in what we now think of as business ethics. And I had made a friendship with Norman Bowie who was at that time the Executive Secretary, I believe that was the language that was
used, of the American Philosophical Association. This is an
administrative position, it is not an honorary position. It was full time
work for him then. Norman and I had discovered that we both had these
interests in this area. I think he got them in part because of the business
side of running the American Philosophical Association, although I am not
quite sure that is true. And we said, look, let’s put these things together,
let’s create a book in business ethics that would be the functional
equivalent of what has happened in biomedical ethics and effectively
create a field, because most of the stuff that was available at the time was
called “business and society.” It was done by people in business schools
and it was kind of crude social science and crude philosophy. I don’t think
that is too unfair. It was just a mishmash of disciplines and approaches.
Norman and I thought that at least for philosophers we could put
something together an awful lot better than this one. And so we did. A lot
of the stuff that was in the first edition of our book we actually
commissioned because there was literally nothing in the literature. Back
in those days, around 1974 - 1977, when Norman and I were working on
our book and LeRoy Walters and I were working on our anthology, both of
which were among the first -- actually the Gorovitz/Macklin book was a
little bit ahead of us as an anthology but they were at the press at the same
time, I think we were six months behind them or something like that -- I had made an acquaintance with a man named Bill Pitt, William Pitt. He was a professional bibliographer, and I had a little money from the university in grants, etc, to pay him and I basically had him search everything that was in the reasonable scope of what one might consider bioethics and business ethics. Bear in mind our library didn’t exist, there were no informational retrieval data bases which you search. You remember those days, right! So Pitt did this for me, and I remember the way we used to do research was on index cards, and he came back and had them all organized, etc. The entire fields of both bioethics and business ethics over say a 30-year span could be put in one long index box, about a foot long.

Swazey: Yes, I can agree with that.

Beauchamp: And most of those articles were in fact pretty irrelevant.

Swazey: I was going to say probably not only irrelevant but for business ethics probably virtually non-existent.
Beauchamp: Yes. There were a number of texts that had come out of Catholic schools that had a heavy Catholic theological component, underlying the theory that was there, and then there was the business and society stuff, and that was it.

Swazey: Connecting bioethics and business ethics, we have been tracking the growing interest of people in clinical bioethics consultation in organizational ethics. And I, frankly, am deeply concerned that very few of them seem to feel any need to know anything about organizations, either the sociology of organizations or organizational ethics, business ethics. They somehow seem to think they can leap from clinical bioethics into organizational ethics by virtue of being bioethics consultants. Two years ago at the ASBH session on organizational ethics, one of the questions was, “Is there anything useful we can learn from the field of business ethics?” And I thought, if you have to even be asking that question, this is not going to be a good session, and it wasn’t. So I think those connections, for whatever reasons, still need to be made.

Beauchamp: Yes, and I think it is going to be slow to come. There are not that many
people who work in both areas. It will take quite a few years. You raise an interesting issue that we can generalize considerably. I don’t know if it is something that you want to get into -- or anybody wants to get into -- because you probably would just make enemies and not friends. But the truth of the matter is that the way bioethics has developed there are a lot of areas that you get into for which you need a certain expertise. Let me just take genetics, for example. If you are really going to work in those areas, whether it is gene therapy or whatever it is, you need to have a knowledge of genetics, a knowledge of genetics policy as it exists, precedent law in genetics, etc. I would venture to say, based on what I have seen over the years, that very few people, I don’t say none, but very few people in bioethics have that kind of knowledge or anything that approximates that kind of knowledge. And one of the reasons why, in the case of my own publications in bioethics over the years, I have concentrated on just a few areas, methodology is obviously one, and the death and dying stuff, particularly in the area of suicide and physician assisted suicide and euthanasia, is because I thought I could more or less master the literature, the concepts, the empirical work that had been done, etc., to have a competency to speak to the issues that I was addressing. And I have really tried to stay away from those areas where I thought that was not the case.
Unfortunately, as you are pointing out, some people are rather unabashed.

In fact, we have some people in bioethics who will comment in one or two sentences on almost anything, and go on television to do so, which I find quite astonishing.

Swazey: Changing topics, let me ask you how you would characterize bioethics. What is it?

Beauchamp: Andre Hellegers used to say to me, American medicine - bear in mind that he was trained in Europe - I think he meant a lot more than American medicine, I think he meant medicine around the world - is totally unprepared for the ethical issues that it is going to be facing in upcoming years. He would put that in the context of professional association guidelines and traditional oaths and the like that were available, and he meant literally was ill-equipped to deal with these problems, didn’t have any answers and wasn’t even gearing up to deal with them. I’ve always thought that was a good insight, and that the development of bioethics was people from a number of different fields seeing these problems or piggybacking in some way on the way other people saw these problems.
That’s what a national commission does in a way; it’s a reaction to something. And it gets fueled, to use a provocative word, by “scandal”.

The way I read the recent history of one side of bioethics, research ethics, it is a reaction to scandal. You are not going to have a reaction unless you have a Tuskegee, or to take a more recent example, the gene therapy event of the sort that happened at the University of Pennsylvania. You are not going to get the kind of galvanized reaction from the FDA and NIH and then after that, usually, from bioethics. That is a really interesting case, I think, the gene therapy one. Here you have a situation where supposedly appointments were made to protect against this very thing, which was a good idea, was a great idea. And here it happens in the very institution where there is supposed to be protections against it. And you see the enormous reaction as a result of that scandal. Now to answer your question directly, these kind of events are noticed or become anticipated; they all fall in the model of what Andre Hellegers saw as medicine being ill-equipped to deal with these issues that you have to grapple with. And these are practical problems. They are not just the kind of thing that, say, Dan Clouser used to engage in, both in personal discussion and also in the journals, about methodology, which is not, as I see it, so much a practical issue as a theoretical issue. Basically bioethics is driven by practical
issues, and so whether it comes out of philosophy, called applied
philosophy, or whether it comes out of some other discipline and you call
it something else, it is an attempt to come to grips with these problems.
And there are obviously a lot of methodologies or fields that can be
brought to bear on the problems. I happen to think that the ones in the
early years that were the most successful were not, as some people have
said, the theology and philosophy backgrounds I came from but rather law.
I think law was more successful than any other. But I have always thought
of bioethics as an interdisciplinary field, and I think what bonds the fields
together is these problems that come out of medicine and research that
need some kind of solution, and people, for whatever reason, come to
appreciate that they need a solution or redress for whatever the problem is.

Swazey: Has bioethics over its many years, because I think it is a lot more than 30
years, has it become a discipline?

Beauchamp: No, I don’t think it is a discipline. It is a field but I don’t think it is a
discipline. A discipline to me indicates something that has a specific
method or set of methods that define it, and probably the history of the use
of those methods eventuated in bringing a bunch of people together who can form departments in a university where they can meaningfully do the same kind of thing. If that is even possible in bioethics, and I am not sure it is, we are a long way away from it.

Swazey: Is it a profession?

Beauchamp: Profession. A funny word. Ever since I read Talcott Parsons and found his analysis interesting but totally unconvincing, I guess my view is "profession" is not a very helpful term. It just covers way too much nowadays. A simple answer would be a yes, because virtually everything that you do to earn a living now is a profession.

Swazey: The concept certainly has lost its original meaning of the powerful professions of law, medicine, and clergy.

Beauchamp: If you went back to the older meaning of professing, no, bioethics is not that, no.
Swazey: Do you think there should be a PhD in bioethics as opposed to a PhD in a discipline with whatever would be a concentration in bioethics? In terms of what the field is or could become?

Beauchamp: I don’t like the idea. On the other hand, I think I would have to admit that some of the people we produced in our own PhD program here, which has a track in bioethics but is a philosophy program, were very, very narrow in terms of their interests. So narrow that about the only thing they really studied seriously was bioethics. But I don’t like the idea beyond the Masters level; I think it is fine for a Masters level. It gives somebody a credential at the Masters level, but for a PhD I still believe in disciplines and getting first rate training in a discipline and then taking that training and using it for purposes of treating bioethical problems. I think if you don’t have that you don’t have anything that you have come out of. You have a little of this and a little of that, a little of the other thing. I have met people that I think were trained that way, and I think they think they have had a very interesting education because they know a little of this, a little of that and a little of the other thing and they try to put it together, etc. But I am just not convinced that these are people who are going to make good contributions to the field.
Swazey: To me, an interesting question is what would a PhD in bioethics consist of?

Beauchamp: I think it would be a little bit like these public policy programs that we see springing up all over. I don't think public policy is a discipline any more than bioethics is. On the other hand, if you have got people there who do good enough work in this kind of thing or that kind of thing in public policy, behavioral analysis let's say, because there are good behavioral scientists, then they might be able to give you a good program. But then you have this problem in, say, public health schools. What is a public health degree? Well, it is a little of this and a little of that and a little of the other thing. And that is one reason why an MPH is so big. Now you are getting a lot of people with PhDs in public health, but my hope is that most of them will be people who concentrate in something or other, concentrate in epidemiology or whatever.

Swazey: I think health services research is another example of a field rather than a discipline.
Beauchamp: Yes. I think a lot of people think we have a PhD program in bioethics, and we do get a lot of applications from people who don’t really appreciate that they are applying to a philosophy program, but they are almost all rejected. Got to be. A 100% rejection rate because we are looking for people who have already studied philosophy to a considerable extent, who have been able to take GRE’s in school, who are able to write philosophy papers, etc. And people who can’t do that are not going to get into the program. I would hate to see a bioethics program that was just a little bit of law and a little bit of philosophy and a little bit of sociology, and, I don’t know, a little bit of case studies.

Swazey: What do you think is the purpose of the Masters programs. Who should they be for?

Beauchamp: Well, I think it is probably hard to capture everything that might happen with a Masters degree. Sometimes we have had people who wanted a Masters because they wanted to be able to go back to an institution where they already had a job and they wanted to be able to, say, contribute to the course in medical ethics. Maybe it is a medical ethics course and maybe it
is a course in patient/physician relationships and they wanted to teach
something about that at their university, or it could be any number of ways
in which they wanted to contribute. That is a medical school angle. One
of the interests that some people have - I don’t happen to be involved with
this group - is teaching bioethics in high school. We have had a number of
high school teachers around who would like to take a Masters degree,
which would give them, in their world, a quite nice credential to do that
sort of thing.

Swazey: Populations that already have their degree and they are doing something...

Beauchamp: That is correct. Almost all of them already have a job.

Swazey: What about students right out of college? Some programs admit them and
others don’t.

Beauchamp: I may as well be honest. I don’t think that is a credential to anything. I
suppose you could say, well, why can’t they then go on to teach high
school?, and I suppose they could but it doesn’t work that way somehow.

It is the high school teacher who has been, say, a science teacher, has been teaching biology, who got these interests and knows what they want to do with it. A kid out of college doesn’t. I am not saying no kid could, but it is unlikely.

Swazey: I think some of the kids out of college with an MA in bioethics will go on to be an ethics committee staff person or an IRB administrator or...

Beauchamp: Yeah, that is possible

Swazey: I think it is very uncertain what you are going to do with the masters if you are right out of college. But, you know, some places in all reality see that as a money maker.

Beauchamp: Yes, I have heard the directors of those programs say exactly that.

Swazey: Some people have given us two reasons for thinking about starting a PhD
program in bioethics. One, they think it would be fun, and two, they think it could be a money maker. Those are not substantive reasons for a PhD.

Beauchamp: Probably wrong on both scores. It is nice to have graduate students around for a number of reasons, but it is not “fun” to run these programs, it just keeps you away from all kinds of other things that you should be doing. And usually, if it is at the PhD level, which is what you are talking about now, it's a costly program. Money doesn't bring money.

Swazey: It is like research has gotten to be a cost center, not a profit center.

Beauchamp: Yes. Our programs are very expensive when you figure out, say, the number of undergraduates that we could be teaching, what we could be doing with them, and the money that would pull by contrast. The PhD is very expensive. It is so expensive it is almost hard to justify.

Swazey: It is really one on one.
Beauchamp: As often happens, one on three. And I don't know how many graduate seminars I have taught with 3 to 5 students.

Swazey: Let me pick up on something you said a few minutes ago about the early "embryonic" stage of bioethics or however you want to characterize it. You think the law had a lot more of an impact than religion and philosophy.

Beauchamp: I do, yes. Some people will point out - LeRoy has researched this pretty well - the early, early days of theology being involved in this and the number of theologians who were in discussion with scientists, and I don't doubt that that had some impact in very limited circles, but I think it was pretty limited circles. A few people like Joe Fletcher were able to break out of limited circles and have a wider impact. But I believe if you are talking about what subsequently happened in bioethics and the impact on society there was nothing like the law, case law. I don't think legislation was particularly important in many cases, but case law I just think was enormously important and continues to be.
Swazey: It’s interesting because Ramsey, Fletcher, McCormick are the trilogy that is always cited, but nobody really has discussed much what their enduring influence has been.

Beauchamp: I am not sure. A large part of Dick McCormick’s career unfolded when he was here. Dick is very influential on the liberal side of the Roman Catholic church but is not terribly influential outside of that. He was somewhat influential in the debate about research involving children for a few years, but even that I would call in the class of limited influence.

Swazey: Why wasn’t there more influence of people like those three?

Beauchamp: They were a little bit early in some respects. And without an audience. Joe Fletcher was really early with a lot of that stuff, and besides McCormick the other one you are thinking of is Ramsey.

Swazey: Right.
Beauchamp: I think *The Patient as Person* did have a certain impact, and Ramsey had
an impact in places like Hastings. I was on a number of task forces with
him in, as we called them, the early years. He was a very idiosyncratic guy
in a lot of ways, very idiosyncratic. McCormick probably had the best
sense of speaking to public policy. I don’t think the other two really did. I
don’t think they were public policy kinds of characters. And so they were
like a lot of academics who built up this world of publications and
influences, etc., but I don’t think it stretched very much beyond that. The
kind of thing that I think had enormous power is a case like the *Quinlan*
case. One *Quinlan* case is worth, in terms of influence, all of those early
“pioneers”, just to coin a term for present purposes, all of them put
together and it is not even close. I think the *Quinlan* case is one of those
fairly rare events, although we have had a number in areas of bioethics. It
is one of those fairly rare events where there wasn’t a lot of anticipating it
for some reason, and here suddenly it was on us and then it had this
enormous impact stretching up to *Cruzan*. In many respects I think it
determined through its impact what was going to happen in *Cruzan*. So
that is the kind of perspective that I am taking. It doesn’t in any way
denigrate the work of Ramsey and McCormick and Fletcher, all of whom I
admire in many ways, but I just think the influence was....
Swazey: I must say I do wish that younger people coming into the field, and people in the Masters programs, at least read something like *The Patient as Person*.

Beauchamp: Well, yes, though I'm not sure what they read.

Swazey: We have looked at syllabi for some Masters programs and it is mostly 1980s-on publications.

Beauchamp: I guess that isn't surprising. Yes, it would be nice to have something of the history of the field, not just the kind of history that Rothman and Jonsen have written, but landmarks. When Ruth and I were doing the informed consent book this was one of the most interesting parts of the research that we did, with a look at some things that I think were landmarks that virtually nobody recognizes as landmarks. We just haven't gone to them and concentrated on them.

Swazey: What about the social sciences in bioethics?
Beauchamp: What about them?

Swazey: Well, what is their relationship with bioethics?

Beauchamp: I think what people who have trained in the social sciences and have now gravitated perhaps to more general bioethics will tell you is that it is important work in its own right, and it is interesting work in its own right and there is no reason why that shouldn't be the case. They were trained and they do find it interesting, etc. I think what happens, though, more generally is that the field is thought of as a tool in bioethics. It gives you the data to support certain claims or theses that you want to make, and if - this sounds too negative, but I do think there is an awful lot of it -- if the data supports you, good, I want to cite that study or that set of studies that was done for the Commission, or whatever. And if it doesn't support you it tends to get ignored unless all you are doing is just sort of laying out what the data implied. And a lot of times I think people are mystified by the data but still think they are important. We see some of that at the present time - I think about the data on physician assisted suicide coming out of Holland. Some of us are a little bit mystified and some of it looks
familiar and some of it certainly helps us see where the problems are, and
maybe some of it helps us see also where things are being done right. To
take an analogous case - the very preliminary kind of data that was
published last month in the *New England Journal of Medicine* about
Oregon is going to accumulate and is very likely going to be determinative
about how things go in that area. You might say, now wait, is it the data
that is determinative or the practice as well? It's really the two together.
There will be published reports, and as I see it, we are just on the cusp of
how this whole thing is going to develop. And what happens in Oregon,
how the reports go of what is happening in Oregon, are going to determine
what happens in Alaska or Maine or Florida or wherever the next place is
going to be. So to that extent I think the data that are generated by social
sciences are potentially of enormous importance, and that is the way in
which I think many of the people in the field think of it. They think of it
as a kind of tool that will give you information to support arguments, that
will help you see what is going wrong and what is going well.

Swazey: But I think, for example, of the fact that there was an enormous social
science literature in the 50's, 60's, 70's about death and dying which really
wasn't cited or used by bioethicists, and as I read the literature now on, for
example, transplantation, it isn’t used, though Fox and Swazey are
sometimes cited. So, I wonder how much bioethics is really drawing on
the social sciences?

Beauchamp: I am sure a lot of it falls in the cracks. I have no doubt about that. These
are enormous disciplines. I mean, to take psychology, which probably I
know best, it’s 10 times the size of philosophy, there is a huge amount of
stuff and there is a fair amount of it that has some kind of implication or
other for bioethics, and increasingly so. Bioethicists don’t tend to read
psychology journals. On the other hand, the way databases are going
nowadays they are going to be much more exposed to information about
these studies, at least abstracts. You can’t not be if you do any database
research at all, which we all have to do. And, you know, if you are talking
about pre-Kubler Ross times, that wasn’t possible. On the other hand, the
question of knowing about it is one thing, reading it is another, precisely
because of this phenomenon of being able to read abstracts and read
second-hand reports, etc.

Swazey: Right, but I am also thinking about your comment that a lot of people in
bioethics don't feel a need to master the area they're working on. And, to me, if you are working in genetics you need to know a little bit about the technicalities of medical genetics, but you also need to know more about genetic services and genetic counseling and privacy issues and all those other studies that come out of that.

Beauchamp: Well, there are two kinds of questions. If you don’t know that much about the methodology that was used in the study, are you competent to use it in what you are doing? That is one kind of question. Another I think pretty important question in bioethics is that there are a lot of people, some reasonably important figures in the field, who claim to be doing empirical work of the social science sort but who have no social science degree. They generalize, as it were, from their empirical training in another area. They got interested in this, sometimes they hook up with social scientists and sometimes they don’t, but they claim an expertise that I think sometimes they don’t have and they publish articles.

Swazey: I have had a number of philosopher-bioethicists say to me that they do empirical research as a philosopher, and I don’t understand what they
mean. I am not a philosopher. I took philosophy courses in college, but I
am not a philosopher and I don't understand what a philosopher does as
empirical research.

Beauchamp: I don't know what that means unless there is some kind of a
methodological claim being made. Willard Quine, for example, who is
perhaps the most influential American philosopher at the present time, did
make these claims that method in philosophy is basically a scientific
method. And he had reasons for saying that, so you could make something
out of that. It is a genericized idea of a scientific method, and Quine is
particularly close to the positivists. But in any event, I think philosophers
ought not to make that claim. Certainly not people who are in normative
work because it is just highly confusing. People who do normative ethics
just are not doing scientific research. They may be doing research in some
reasonable sense of research but they are not doing scientific research,
certainly not in my sense of science. Now, I am a philosopher and I do
scientific research but it has nothing to do with anything that you are
talking about or that bioethicists are interested in. I do textual
bibliography. It is a part of my work in Hume studies. I had to learn
textual bibliography and how it works and how to use computers to do it
and it is purely scientific. Not only is it purely scientific, it gives you
objectivity, as I argue with some of my colleagues who believe there isn’t
such a thing as scientific objectivity, which, as you know, a lot of people
believe nowadays. This gives you perfectly objective answers. It gives
you 100% completely objective answers because what I do is analyze 18th
century texts to find what is there, what is not there, and I generalize from
it. Now sometimes I don’t convince my colleagues, but this is scientific
work, although it is not the same thing you are talking about philosophers
saying to you. I think when people make the claim you’re talking about
they are just making a category mistake or they are getting too fancy with
Quinean methodological claims.

Swazey: That helps us understand where they may be coming from. Now, let me
turn to universalism.

Beauchamp: Yeah, in ethics.

Swazey: There are a lot of topics embedded in this question, and one is how you
feel about the use of *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* as the text all over
the globe, and how applicable that approach is in all societies and cultures.

It extends into which way we should go in the debate about universal principles.

Beauchamp: Well yes, they are tied. You are now into an area that I spent a lot of time on.

Swazey: I probably should have started there but then I wouldn’t have gotten to any other topics.

Beauchamp: I actually have spent more time on this than either Jim or Ruth Macklin. Ruth has been very generous in attributing this work to me over the years. I really do believe we must have a universal base in bioethics and ethics more generally. And I think that these principles that Jim and I talk about -- not that somehow we have got a magical hold on the principles of bioethics or something like that -- but these principles, perhaps among others, although very abstract are universal. And though very abstract, as finally we have gotten even Clouser and Gert to admit, are normative and you can recognize when they are being violated. And when they are being
violated it is unethical conduct and it is not unethical conduct because this,
that, or the other society says it is, or this, that, or the other person says it
is. It is unethical conduct because it is unethical conduct by anybody,
anywhere, at any time. Now, it is not necessarily recognized by those
persons as being unethical conduct. They may think it is perfectly ethical
conduct; that is a separate question. But it is unethical conduct. Just to
take an example I used at the World Congress of Bioethics in Tokyo last
year. They asked me to give a talk on this subject and the example I used
was the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the health care component side
of it, and also women's rights. Now I am sure if you asked members of
the Taliban they would say they are a rigidly moralistic society in the best
sense. As far as I am concerned, this is immoral conduct and I don’t think
it is a matter of my ethics or American ethics -- it is something we hear all
the time. You have probably seen a number of publications out of Europe
about whether these principles are American bioethics. I don’t think it is
American bioethics. I don’t think it is my bioethics. I don’t think it is a
culturally driven bioethics. It is the boundaries of ethics, the boundaries of
morality is what I prefer to think of it as being. And if you reach over
those boundaries then you violate one of these principles and, therefore,
you engage in immoral conduct or are unethical. And I think everybody
knows that who is morally serious.

Swazey: Where do those boundaries come from.

Beauchamp: That is what morality is.

Swazey: This is sort of like asking, “how did the universe start?”

Beauchamp: Yes, it is important not to get yourself in an infinite regress, because if you say, “well they come from there or they are derived from so and so,” or however you want to put it, and then you say, “where did that come from?” you are off on some merry chase and infinite regress. And you either can’t answer the question or you wind up begging the question, and it doesn’t matter what your views are. The only way to stop that, I think, is to recognize that there just are certain features that are intrinsic to morality itself. It’s the kind of thing I think Rawls was trying to capture. He captured it in a somewhat halting and stumbling way but still in a fairly profound way when he talked about considered judgements. You have to
have some considered judgements that you find are unyielding in order to
get -- he was talking about theory construction -- to get off the ground.
And those don’t derive from your theory, they are the base of your theory,
they are that which you appeal to in the construction of your theory. It is
one of the things I tried for years to convince philosophers of, and haven’t
by-and-large done so. Philosophers think theory comes first: you get a
theory and you ground morality. It is just the other way around - it is
morality that grounds theory. It is morality that grounds everything in this
area. And then there comes these questions about “morality is relative”
and “you hold this principle and that principle” and that kind of thing that
Robert Baker has been talking under “international bioethics,” etc. I don’t
believe any of that. There are certain kinds of things that everybody who
is morally serious in any culture recognizes to be moral wrongs. We are
really making two kinds of claims here. One is an empirical claim that
anybody who is morally serious recognizes the common morality. Now,
of course, they may have some overriding consideration that comes in.
For example, the Taliban holds a fundamentalist Islamic belief that they
think overrides what otherwise would be a morally serious violation. But
apart from that, if you just identify people who don’t have some overriding
ideology, for lack of a better term, I think every morally serious person
recognizes that you owe respect for another person’s rights and that you
ought not to cause them harm unless you have some very good and
morally justifiable reason for causing them harm, and so on. I mean, this
is what it is to treat another human being morally. It requires only a basic
knowledge of morality. And I think this can all be laid out in a fairly tight
fashion and then, of course, disagreements arise. Disagreements arise as
to any number of things. I don’t deny for a moment that there is a lot
moral disagreement that is perfectly legitimate moral disagreement. What
I do deny is that there is disagreement, serious disagreement, over basic
principles. And that is what I think makes me a universalist. And I think
everything is lost if you are not. Then slavery becomes justifiable and
everything becomes justifiable, whether you try to do it through relativism
or try to do it through something else, that is what is going to happen.

Swazey: Well, I need to let you get to your next appointment. At some point I think
we may need another hour or two of your time.

Beauchamp: Yes, I am sorry I have to go.
END OF INTERVIEW