March 29, 2000. Interview with Warren T. Reich, S.T.D. Professor Emeritus of Bioethics, Department of Family Medicine and Center for Clinical Bioethics, and Senior Research Scholar, Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Georgetown University. [New title after the interview: Distinguished Research Professor of Religion and Ethics, Theology Department] The interview is being conducted by Dr. Judith Swazey at Professor Reich’s office at Georgetown University Medical Center.

Swazey: Could you tell us a little bit about your family background?

Reich: I don’t know how much depth you want, but when I was given the achievement award from the Society for Health and Human Values in 1988, I was trying to explain my background and I found myself describing how I’ve always been an outsider. As a matter of fact, this identity of the outsider applies very much to my role in the origins of bioethics and to my professional identity and activities even until today. Let me start with my family background. My mother was Irish-American Catholic from Poughkeepsie, New York; and my father was a German Lutheran from Jersey City, New Jersey. I was born in New Jersey, the third of seven children. Of course, I was born at the height of the Depression -- in 1931 -- and that was a big influence in my life and my identity. One of the effects of the Depression was the experience of being uprooted. My family moved south in 1937, because that’s where my Dad found work; and in 1938 we settled permanently in a small town in Alabama, just outside of Birmingham. The village
where we lived (called Cahaba Village, part of the town of Trussville), which had been newly built by the WPA (the Works Project Administration) was filled with people uprooted from elsewhere, but almost exclusively from the South. The idea of being an outsider was very pronounced in my upbringing there, starting in the first grade. I was from a Yankee family living in the deep South in the 1930s, which meant deep, deep suspicion, if not hatred. We were Catholic in a hostile Protestant environment where there was a lot of anti-Catholic sentiment. We had a very strong community in this small town and an even stronger community in its tiny Catholic mission community -- there was a pronounced pioneering feeling about the life. What compensated for the sense of being an outsider, aside from the closely-knit community, was the sense of triumphalism that Roman Catholicism gave us -- that we were members of the true religion and we hoped for the salvation of everybody. Of course that was particularly the Catholicism of those times. At a very young age I decided to go to religion; that is, to seminary. It was not too uncommon in those days for young teenagers to go away to what they called “preparatory seminary,” which I did in Alabama. I went to a missionary community, a group of religious who worked mostly in the home missions in isolated sections of the deep South. There I got my education in classical languages, modern languages, and the other humanities and sciences, but in an atmosphere where there was a very, very strong sense of purpose. We
shared the goals of a very high ideal of personal holiness and a committed purpose
of self-sacrificing service to others. That committed lifestyle was certainly
counter-cultural, making me an outsider to the surrounding rural people. I went
all the way through that system and was ordained to the priesthood in 1958.
Along the way there was, of course, a sense of setting things right in the world,
and the moral teachings and reflection that would be part of it; I guess I was
always interested in moral theology. I was selected to go for the doctoral degree,
even though mine was not a teaching community. It was a missionary group that
did, however, staff its own seminaries. So I was destined to be a seminary
professor. I was assigned, not asked but assigned, to get a doctorate in theology. I
was lucky, in that world structured by obedience, to be asked which branch of
theology I would prefer. I said I wanted to study moral theology.

Swazey: What attracted you to moral theology?

Reich: Well, I think it was just the combination of, first of all, theological studies, which
were fascinating, and then the moral dimension because of the practicality of it. I
think, quite honestly, I felt the appeal of moral theology because of its influence. It
was still the era of the casuists; and because they were casuists, the most
important theologians in America had enormous influence. If there was ever a
moral problem you asked either Francis Connell, or John C. Ford, or Gerald Kelly, those three. Their “responses” were like pronouncements ex cathedra: you might not agree with them, but you had to pay attention to them. This fascinated me! I never aspired to being a public casuist myself; but the fact that moral theology dealt with complex questions such as the exotic scientific development called “the pill” that was developed in the fifties by John Rock and others really fascinated me. How do you resolve all these problems? The fact that moral theologians could do that in six paragraphs, so to speak, backed up by deeply-rooted principles and beliefs was just fascinating, partly because it was very contemporary.

Swazey: Was it relatively unusual in that mission-based education to have someone as focused on moral theology, even for an outlier?

Reich: Oh yes! I was an outlier even there, even in my own community or group because most of them were assigned to pastoral work and missions, and I never was, I always pursued higher education.

Swazey: Was it the Jesuit order?
No, it’s a small American order whose short title is Trinity Missions; it has a longer name but it is generally known as Trinity Missions.

What did you see yourself doing at that point in your education, when you were in seminary?

As I mentioned, we went where we were told, which resulted in downplaying personal goals. My only assumption was that I would finish my degree and come back and teach in the major seminary, teach moral theology to seminarians, which is in fact what I did when I finished my studies in Europe. I didn’t have any specific goals beyond that; but I’m sure I began developing some fascinations that would later influence my choices.

Did any of your siblings go into religious work?

Yes! And none stayed, as of course I did not. A younger brother and a younger sister, they both entered the same order. My brother was seven years younger so I never overlapped with him: I would’ve taught him except that he left the seminary after about six or seven years. And then a younger sister became a nun in the order; she left when her temporary vows expired. You see, those were the 1960’s.
They were very turbulent times; and while the moral turbulence of those times
helped give rise to bioethics, as I see it, it also had a deep impact on the lives of
these two younger siblings of mine. I’m talking about the upheaval they went
through -- and of course I did too in my own way.

Swazey: What did your father do?

Reich: My father was a foundry machinery salesman; as a young man he had been a
foundryman. He attended a technical school in Boston; and with the help of my
mother, who always pushed him into new areas and was his spokesman, so to
speak, he got a position as a sales representative for foundry machinery and
supplies in ten southern states. He was a traveling salesman. He was hard-
working; he built up a very solid business and laid a solid foundation. He is now
deceased. My brother, who has now had the business for about fifty years, has
made it into a large successful international enterprise.

Swazey: Your mother was very hard working and had a full-time job with seven kids!

Reich: She had a full-time job with seven kids, but what we tend to forget in our family is
that she worked in the office as well; she worked half a day at least, and in that
capacity she did a lot to help dad get his business organized. And like I said, she wrote promotional letters for dad, who was too shy to be self-promotional. She wrote to companies and said, “My husband is capable of such and such and so and so;” and it paid off. Mom was an extraordinary person: She was proud of herself as a woman, with the cleverness and ingenuity that she got, in part, from the women’s movement of the early part of the 20th century. She was extremely intelligent, very attentive, supportive, and funny. She and Dad developed a unity of faith that spread itself in our family.

Swazey: You said you decided at an early age to go into religion; was that because of your upbringing in the small Catholic community?

Reich: Yes, I think so. A lot contributed to it, as you said, in the small community. The priests we had came from a mission band; in other words, they lived in the city and they traveled like nineteenth-century “circuit riders” did, except not on horseback. They would go from town to town to say mass. They would visit maybe three or four towns on a single Sunday. Our home was a stopping place for them; eventually it became a very friendly gathering-place. It was not what you call a typical parish. It was a small, closely-knit community. What you found in it was friendship and loyalty; it was closely-knit stuff. Of course that informal,
homey contact with priests influenced me. I was attracted by the extraordinary
personalities and the joviality and sense of purpose that the priests had.

Swazey: So you went on to get your STD.

Reich: Exactly, yes. I first went to the Catholic University of America and got the STL,
the Licentiate of Sacred Theology, which is a European and ecclesiastical degree.
I felt very fortunate because I studied under a very prestigious person; his name
was John C. Ford, S.J. He was a monumental figure in many ways and I think a
great intellectual. He doesn’t have a great reputation now because in the final
years of his life he became a bitter conservative in the birth control debate, but he
truly was an intellectual giant. You know, Judith, I was just thinking, I don’t
know if you’ve seen on television lately about Pope John Paul II’s recent visit to
Israel and how some Jews have criticized him for not condemning Pope Pius XII’s
silence about the Holocaust and the German persecution of Jews. Well, when I
was studying under John Ford in the late 1950s, there was an extremely popular,
best-selling book called The Deputy, or in some translations it was called The
Vicar. It was a semi-fictitious account of Pius XII and very negative, very
condemnatory of him.
Swazey: That became a play didn’t it?

Reich: Yes, it did indeed. It became a play and was performed on stage, or maybe it was written as a play...I remember reading it but I don’t recall its literary genre. In any case, I talked to John Ford about it; and as it turned out, the first thing I ever published was a long letter to the editor of a journal, disagreeing with the book and defending the idea of giving Pius XII the benefit of the doubt. I got real excited about this because it was a public issue, and a controversial issue about the church. I talked to John Ford about it and I showed him this little piece I had written, telling him I didn’t know what to do with it. He said, “Well, my brother-in-law is Dan Herr, publisher of a leading Catholic intellectual journal called The Critic; I’ll get it published in the very next issue.” I thought, “Wow, this is instant access...power.” It got published. Some years later I met a journalist in Rome, who said, “I read your piece and boy, was that conservative, defensive. I thought, yes, it probably was. I was like a boy, I was recently ordained and I was like a boy defending my Pope. [Laughter] How things have changed, and yet they haven’t. Less than ten years later I would become embroiled in an international controversy, challenging papal moral authority, and now, over forty years later, the question of Pius XII’s opposition to Nazi atrocities is still a big issue! So that was my first publication.
When you were getting your STL did you know at that point that you would be sent on for your STD?

Yes, I found out that year that I would. I chose as the topic for my STL thesis, "The Pill". It was the most recent dispute in Roman Catholic ethics. I did an in-depth study of what was going on there. Ford liked it and then I said to him, "I need advice. I'm going to be getting a doctorate in moral theology, where should I get it?" And he said, "Well, I suppose it's disloyal of me not to recommend the university where I am a professor, The Catholic University of America, but quite frankly, I think you can do better. I think you should study with the best moral theologian in the world -- his name is Josef Fuchs, a Jesuit teaching at the Gregorian University in Rome." I said, "Oh! All right!" I asked my superior and he said yes. So I went to Rome. Interestingly, at Catholic University one of my professors, a very, very distinguished intellectual historian, was Johannes Quasten, a priest and a Patristic scholar -- early Christianity and Christian archaeology were his field. He was a refugee from the Nazi era. In fact, he had done some underground intelligence work, so to speak, for Pius XII; he smuggled out information about the dangers of the Nazi era from the Vatican to England. I consulted with him and he said, "Oh, that's good. You go there and you study with Fuchs. Do you know German?" I said, "No." He said, "You must learn
German if you study with a German professor, no matter where, you must learn German.” He said, “You'll have no problem because it's in your blood.”

Swazey: And? Did you have any problem?

Reich: No, I didn't. I guess I have a facility for languages. I had to learn Italian just before going to Rome, so I took a five-week course in Italian which made me confident about the structure of the language, its pronunciation and basic vocabulary.

Swazey: Looking at your CV you certainly have worked in and spoken in many languages, which I envy.

Reich: Yes, and I've retained it. I've retained it even without using it. Quaster had been right: I needed to use German because I was working with a German professor. In Rome I just went to the offices of the Goethe Institute and looked in their handwritten looseleaf binder listing instructors and picked one, a graduate student studying mathematics at the University of Rome. He became my German instructor once a week in Rome. I studied under Fuchs, a wonderful, wonderful man. In German language they have the term “doctor-father” and that's what he
was, he was like a father to me. He was an inspiring man and a very brave person.

He brought Roman Catholic ethics into a new era, beyond authoritarianism and beyond some of the rigid limits of natural law theory. He was opening it up constantly but always remained loyal to and in dialogue with the Church and the Vatican, which means he suffered because he left himself exposed at that juncture out of his sense of loyalty to the church. But he had loyalty to intellectual integrity too. So I learned a lot from him. In my very first meeting with him we of course spoke Italian -- I'm an American and he's a German and we were speaking Italian! I thought that was neat. I told him I wanted to write on some topic related to the Pill. He said, "Ah yes, here is your topic, in Thomas Aquinas." (Of course a lot of Catholic theology was based on Aquinas; and writing dissertations on Aquinas was considered at least safe and maybe necessary.) Fuchs continued: "Aquinas says that the purpose of sexuality is for the good of the species. What does that mean? Write a dissertation on that." I thought, Oh, that's interesting, where do I start? He handed me his book, published in German, which was called The Sexual Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas, a very tightly-written, scholarly work. He recommended other books in German, so my charge was to immediately start doing research in German sources. I wasn't too encouraged when I found out that my German instructor couldn't read Fuchs's book! I thought, what does this mean for me? That became my doctoral
topic: Procreation for the good of the species, or the meaning and ethics of
procreation in Aquinas and what it might mean for today. I brought in the Pill and
so forth. In the end I had an interesting dissertation committee: Fuehs; and
Sigmond, a Hungarian Dominican professor of demography across town at the
University called The Angelicum, named after the angelic doctor, Aquinas. A
third advisor who influenced me a lot was Pedro Beltrao, a Brazilian Jesuit and
sociologist interested in the sociology of family and fertility, a very brave and
forward-looking person. Then I had a Polish theologian whose name was Mruk, a
refugee Jesuit from Poland, at a time during the Cold War when Americans had
little access to East Europeans. So you talk about my later role in the
development of bioethics -- without my knowing it I had this enormously
interdisciplinary team and an interdisciplinary project at a time when
interdisciplinarity was not the vogue!

Swazey: It was international as well as interdisciplinary.

Reich: It was very international and very interdisciplinary, it really was. My other
professors were from France, Spain, and Germany. And of course ecclesiastical
education in Rome was very international, because Rome was regarded as the
center-point of the world. Now at the same time there was enormous ferment
going on in Rome, because of theological controversy stirred up through
distribution of unpublished -- one might almost say underground -- pre-conciliar
tracts. This was prior to the Second Vatican Council that would end up
revolutionizing the world view, the vision, and in many ways the ethics of Roman
Catholicism. Anticipating the Second Vatican Council, Catholic intellectuals of
all stripes privately disseminated tracts written, usually, in Italian and French.
Romans in the Curia, the highly-placed cardinals, referred to the “fog” that had
come across the Alps to Rome, referring to ideas that emanated from the German
biblical movement that was creating a whole new wave of theological thought that
ran counter to Roman thought. It was the first time I had ever felt the entire
environment charged with intellectual conflict. That experience led me to think in
terms of the world being divided into transalpine and cisalpine world views --
terms that are found in Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*. [NOTE TO ED.: transalpine and
cisalpine are correct spellings, as is capitalized Alps.] You know -- a world view
from beyond the Alps conflicting with a world view from “this side,” that is, the
Roman side of the Alps. That’s what this intellectual explosion was all about, and
it really was an explosion because for the first time in about 400 years people
were saying what they had not dared to say before and it resulted in an upheaval
and a revolutionizing of the whole way of regarding religion and morality and
everything else in “our culture.” I was there in the midst of that, not fully
appreciating where it was all going, but now I know that it was probably
introducing me to modernity and post-modernity at the same time! And because I
sympathized with the transalpine world view, I became more of an outsider.

Swazey: An incredible time for you.

Reich: It was an absolutely incredible time! You couldn’t imagine a more fascinating
time! I went to Germany to take a language course my first summer, which
would’ve been 1960, came back and met with my professor, Fuchs, who
immediately started talking to me in German. Then he asked me if I would like a
post-doctoral fellowship at a German university of my choice. He said, “I have
been asked by the Ambassador of Germany to the Holy See to select one person
from all the graduate schools of Rome to be the recipient of this scholarship.” I
checked with my superiors and I said, “Yes! I’d like to do that!” So after finishing
my course work, but before finishing the dissertation, I went off to Germany.

Swazey: Heidelberg?

Reich: No, I went to Würzburg, and there again, you talk about revolutionary times, there
things were very open. You mentioned in your opening comments how
philosophers in America have done such a splendid job of avoiding continental
discussion. I think there is a deep distrust there, because continental philosophy
has talked about human experience, human emotions, and the human being itself.

This is what German theology was starting to do around 1960. The professor I
chose to study with, that was recommended to me, was a very open-minded man
by the name of Alfons Auer; he’s remained a dear friend of mine. Right now I’m
afraid he’s slipping but he is still alive, he’s been retired many years, and a very,
very brave person. He argued that theological ethics must be autonomous, using
human experience as its starting-point. He suffered because of those views. Most
secular Americans have difficulty knowing what it means to be intellectually
brave. Do you know what I mean? To make enormous sacrifices for intellectual
growth, for progress towards truth and discovery. I’ve tried to highlight that in
some of my writings, including a recent article that I wrote about André Hellegers.

Anyhow, Alfons Auer is one of those people. As it so happens, both of those
professors of mine, Fuchs and Auer, as well as a number of other people I knew,
were appointed by the Pope to the famous Papal Commission on Birth Control in
the 1960s. That, of course, was a major, major turning point that in my view
epitomizes the influence of religious ethics on the origins of bioethics, because it
was such an important, far-reaching, world-wide dispute over a matter of intense
practical importance, on an everyday level for people’s sexual life, marriage, and
health. So I knew a number of the members on the Papal Commission and followed it closely. I think it finished its report around 1967, after I had been teaching for about five years. In fact I ended up with the archives of two of the members, who gave them to me. So that was another background that influenced me in many ways, especially in the way I would henceforth regard moral debate.

Swazey: After Europe you came back and taught at the Trinity Seminary and Catholic University.

Reich: Exactly.

Swazey: What got you to the Kennedy Institute as it was being created? What got you into bioethics? Obviously you now have a history with the debates over the Pill and so forth in terms of biomedical elements.

Reich: You’ve pinpointed the right thing. I’ll just tell the honest story because most of us like to say that our careers went from success to success, and from promise to achievement; but mine didn’t. I hit a bottom in terms of opportunity from which I didn’t know where things would turn. The turning-point began in 1967 at the Catholic University of America, when the university attempted to fire a professor
by the name of Charles E. Curran, who's quite well known now, a priest from the
Rochester, New York diocese -- who, by the way, had studied in Rome and I
knew him there. He studied under another famous German, Bernhard Häring,
whom I also got to know quite well. Charlie was the one who arranged for me to
be invited to Catholic University to join the faculty there as a professor of moral
theology. In 1967 they tried to fire him because it had been complained that he
published and taught some things on birth control in disagreement with the
Church's teaching. They simply dismissed him -- they did not renew his contract
-- without giving adequate explanation. Charlie is an extremely alert and clever
person, and a person of high integrity. I remember after he was called in to speak
with the president of Catholic University, who was a bishop, Charlie was able to
present evidence that the president was proceeding in an autocratic fashion,
without offering justification. The entire faculty of the university walked out,
upon seeing this violation of a colleague's rights and the threat to academic
freedom. They went on strike. The mobilization of the entire university against
high-handed ecclesiastical authority was unheard of because blind loyalty to
authority was the standard. At the same time, those were the 1960's and a year
before the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the period of questioning the
moral standards of institutions. Cardinal O'Boyle of Washington, D.C., the ex
officio chairman of the board of trustees of the university was furious over the
strike, but powerless. He had to negotiate. They reinstated Curran with a
promotion. The following year Pope Paul VI issued his Encyclical *Humanae
Vitae* upholding the old doctrine condemning birth control, rejecting the findings
of the Papal Commission that had recommended the opposite. Everybody in the
world knew what the Papal Commission recommended because all of its
documents had been leaked. At that point I was in Austria and Germany on a
vacation with friends. I somehow got word from Charlie, signed a statement of
dissent, and helped organize the dissent network. That was the turning point in
my career. The turning point occurred when I signed a very simple statement that
this teaching of the Pope is not final, definitive, and absolutely binding on the
consciences of all Catholics. It was an appeal for further dialogue and so forth.
Eventually 350 or so theologians in America signed this statement. But because I
was in Europe I was able to collect the statements of the various bishops’
conferences of Europe; many of them also disagreed with the Pope! When have
you ever seen this happen in the history of the Church! All these statements
saying what Paul VI has issued is not fully credible. I got all these documents in
French, German, Spanish, Dutch and brought them back and was able to translate
them. But the board of trustees of the university tried to fire all twenty of us
professors who had signed this statement. We got one of the leading law firms in
the country to handle our case pro bono. We had a trial that lasted an entire year.
I say a trial, because it was very much like a trial, with charges that made the
stakes very high; defense testimony from all of us; and four powerful law-firms.
More accurately, it was a hearing, an academic hearing. The university
administration was forced, against its preference, to have a hearing. The hearing
board consisted of five professors, none of whom was a theologian, which was
appropriate. The person who chaired it was a very quiet, soft-spoken woman, a
WOMAN being appointed eventually to instruct the bishops, in a sense. What a
rare event! She was a classicist and medieval literary scholar. They had a
theologian sitting in as an expert witness to the commission of inquiry and he was
fair; he was a Dominican, Gerald Van Ackeren. In the end, the Commission
found in our favor. Put simply, we were found not to have acted irresponsibly as
academic professors of theology, when we disagreed with the pontiff, even though
we were teaching in a pontifical university. Our dissent was judged to be
legitimate, because we used scholarly historical sources to back up what we said,
and so on. I was up for promotion and tenure at that point. Somehow I got the
promotion to associate professor. But a new president had come in, the first
layman, and he, against university norms and standards, got me eased out. So
there was a high attrition rate. They were determined that they were going to
make life hard for the people who had won this cause.
Swazey: Others of you got eased out too?

Reich: Almost everybody, one way or another. Many chose to leave due to the unpleasantness of staying in such a hostile environment. Even I would not have stayed, I don’t think, even if I had been given tenure, because by this time I had a great aversion, a deeply uncomfortable feeling about the ecclesiastical environment. In fact I ended up leaving the priesthood within a year or two after that. So that was the turning point. You asked about my access to the new field of bioethics. I looked around for a new job and wrote a letter to a hundred colleges or so and only got a nibble or two. I had to have something quickly. Things looked very bad for me because I knew I was going to leave the priesthood, which means all my security was gone -- the security of having the means of support and the security of a career. Yet, as a dissenter, how many Catholic colleges or departments of religion would want me? A dissenting, ex-priest, theological ethicist. It was a rough time. But André Hellegers, who you know established the Kennedy Institute at Georgetown University, with inspiration, ideas, and funding from the Kennedy Foundation, invited me to come and be part of the Institute at its founding. His call came out of the blue, when things looked very desperate for me.
Swazey: How did this happen? Why did he contact you?

Reich: I guess because my life-journey intersected with his. André was a Dutchman who had this really brilliant, lively mind. He was an obstetrician/gynecologist who then became a fetal physiologist and then a demographer who had become Director of the Center for Population Research at Georgetown. He went to a professional meeting and heard me make some comments. It was the Society of Christian Ethics, which was probably, when you think about it, the only professional society for ethics in America. I mean, what other organization was there? Philosophers didn’t know ethics, and Jewish scholars did relatively little work in ethics (there was only one book in medical ethics in the Jewish tradition at that time). So the Society of Christian Ethics had a session on population that year. A professor made a presentation and he asked if there were any comments. I made a series of about eight comments, criticizing his methodology. Héllegers heard me. I found out a couple of years later that André, following that meeting, asked Charlie Curran, “Who is this Warren Reich guy? I’m very impressed by the comments he made about population ethics.” After that André and I got to know each other better, and we talked some. Then he called me in the spring of 1971 and said, “I think I’m getting a grant from the Kennedy Foundation to start something called a Bioethics Center at Georgetown University. Do you think
you’d be interested in coming?” He explained he had money only to bring people
there for one or two years.

REICH: So I said, “I’ll get back to you in a month.” I thought, “Gosh! This is great! A
job! Maybe there’ll be a future there!” I called him back and said, “Yes! I’ll
come.” So I was the first scholar to be appointed to the Institute, along with
LeRoy Walters, who was fresh out of graduate school. In fact, I already had a
connection there. I had been a dialogue partner with Paul Ramacy, my colleague
in the Society of Christian Ethics, the previous year when he was visiting fellow at
Georgetown; and my good friends and colleagues Richard McCormick, Charles
Curran, and Stanley Hauerwas were scheduled to come later that first year. By the
way, I think there was something of a self-fulfilling element in my appointment to
the bioethics center. The fact of the matter is that for about seven or eight years I
had this in mind. I had been thinking: “Look, I have written a dissertation on
population ethics. Georgetown University, which is Catholic but has connections
to the secular world, has a Population Center...maybe someday they would need
an ethicist and then I would be at a full-fledged university, which is where I want
to be and not just at a seminary.” I actually had this Georgetown connection in
mind! I was not savvy about how to make things like that happen. I was a pretty
naive priest kind of scholar. But this was my wish, and lo and behold, that’s what
happened! André gave me an unanticipated call, and there I was! I started out
editing a book but quickly decided I wanted to do a more substantive project. By
November of that year -- within just a few months -- I had come up with an idea
for a major project and gotten one significant person to agree. It happened this
way: I thought, "Something very new is happening here. We're using the word
"bioethics", which is clearly a new field. What is it and how big is it? It's at least
as big as medical ethics," I thought, but as I saw it (not all the other colleagues
saw it that way) it reached way beyond medicine to many other areas in the life
sciences. I thought: "What bioethics will need is a reference work, a basic,
standard work that will pull together what we know from the sciences, ethics, and
other fields of learning that can be used as the basis for defining the ingredients of
the field." I've written some articles about those origins. About how I couldn't
persuade André Hellegers initially about the value of my idea. I knew Dan
Callahan -- I had known him for a number of years, so I called him at the Hastings
Center -- he had just started Hastings a year or two before -- and I said, "I want to
do something that's going to be a reference work in bioethics, can you sponsor it?
Can I come there to do it?" He said, "Well, Warren I'd love to have you here but
we have tiny, tiny quarters. I can take you on for a year. I can probably offer you
some sort of a salary, but not beyond a year and no more space or staff, or
anything." I thought, "That's not enough. I can't do it that way." There was only
one other institute and that was the one in Houston called the Institute of Religion
where Ken Vaux was located, and Ken was doing some things in the new medical
ethics. I knew one of the visiting fellows there, a Benedictine moral theologian,
so I called him and he said, “Yea, come on down and I’ll introduce you to
people.” I went down to Houston and spoke to the director and I got the same
answer, “We have a visiting fellows program, we’d be delighted to have you for a
year. That’s all we can offer you, one year, no more space or institutional
support.” I knew my project would need more than that, so I came back and had
several more conversations with André, and finally it clicked with him. Finally he
saw that this was a good thing to do. I wrote a proposal and got the basic grant
from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Sargent Shriver, Chairman of
the Institute’s board, was the one who suggested the Endowment as source of
funding and made the initial contact. André got the matching grants, and I got the
NEH extension grant. The rest was history: I planned and directed the creation of
the Encyclopedia of Bioethics, collaborating with a great group of area editors and
staff editors.

Swazey: It’s a little more than the handbook that you were initially modestly thinking of.

Reich: Yes, it was a question of modesty, that’s the word. But even when I had thought
in terms of a "handbook" I was thinking of the German "Handbuch" which is
often multi-volumed. I always intended it to be thorough and comprehensive, but
in those days the word "encyclopedia" wasn't used that much for special fields of
learning. Now you have the *Encyclopedia of Gardening*, the *Encyclopedia of
New York City*, and hundreds of other special encyclopedias. But in those days
there were not too many special encyclopedias. In the conversation with André,
when he caught on to the idea and he said let's do it, he added: "By the way, you
are describing an encyclopedia." I said, "Yes, I think so; but I was hesitant to call
it that." He said, "You *should* call it that -- that's what it is."

Swazey: It seems to me that if you look, as I have, at the original subject headings for the
first *Bibliography of Bioethics*, and compare it with the contents of the
*Encyclopedia*, that the *Bibliography* is much more medically restricted.

Reich: It certainly is.

Swazey: You have a much broader bioethics and life science contents. To what extent do
you think those two interacted, or didn't, in defining the scope of bioethics over
the years?
Reich: I've never thought of it as interaction. I don’t think there was much. The Kennedy Institute model was to bring in people who are capable and let them do their thing. We certainly talked to one another. Each of us would present documentation from our projects for comment at our weekly Tuesday conferences, and I certainly consulted with the resources of the bibliography project, for example, to establish my own terminology and some resources for the Encyclopedia. Those were the advantages of doing a project like the Encyclopedia of Bioethics at an Institute like the Kennedy Institute. But it was also clear to me that the Encyclopedia and the Bibliography were proceeding on very separate tracks. There was a basic disagreement on the scope of the field. I disagreed with the scope established by the Bibliography of Bioethics, which was really twofold: the ethics of the physician-patient relationship, and the relationship between researcher and subject. Later they tackled on a third area, health care distribution. I thought these indeed were core issues but by they by no means defined the scope of the entire field. So without making a fuss about it, I disagreed with the scope established by the Bibliography. I took a very different approach, a much more inclusive approach.

Swazey: Which scope would you say has most characterized the field? Maybe that's too vague a question.
Reich: Well, no, that's an excellent question. I think that the narrower scope has tended to define the field. From the start I conceived it more broadly, and I remain convinced of the importance of proposing the broader vision, and so does Dan Callahan. He and I have had some conversations about this in recent years. Dan, too, advocated a broad approach to bioethics from the start. Do you remember the initial title of his Institute? It was the Institute for Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences. He dropped that title because it was so clumsy, he told me, but it embodied exactly what he wanted to say. So he and I independently advocated the same perspective, although we didn't interact all that much. Because of the Beauchamp-Childress book and many other things, bioethics became the ethics of biomedicine, meaning taking care of patients and research issues with a few other issues tacked on. I believe that in the general mentality of most of the people who call themselves bio ethicists this is generally what the field has meant in a dominant way. But there have always been other voices. For example, all the associate editors or area editors of both editions of the Encyclopedia agreed with my proposal that all issues of ethics and the life sciences should be included if the Encyclopedia was going to properly shape and represent the field. In more recent years, you have a small group of people who have picked up on this notion of global bioethics, which has had an extremely difficult time defining itself because of the Potter legacy. Potter is still alive and he is pushing for his own particular
vision of things there, and there have been other people too who have pushed in other directions to open it up.

Swazey: Although I think global bioethics, at least more recently, has meant not the environmental thrust of Potter as much as universal bioethical principles: the view that Beauchamp and Childress or some version of principilism is applicable every place at all times and in any culture, which I don’t think was Potter’s....

Reich: No, that’s right. Potter meant something very, very different. He was looking for the welfare of the globe, and he approached it, as you probably know, from the scientific point of view and a broadly moral point of view. But still, I’m just saying there have been some people, a few of whom have been inspired by him, who see global bioethics meaning an environmental concern. But of course, there is also the meaning that you’re talking about which entails exporting American principle-based bioethics to the whole world. The strange thing about that, to switch over to that subject, is that it’s not only been strongly exported because of American influence and American publications, but it’s been imported quite vigorously by scholars in many other countries thinking, “Hey! This is the approach! This is the way of getting around our local problems in our own local culture,” whether it be Italy, or France, or Japan. I’ve had a lot of activities in
different countries myself over the years, and I've noticed abroad a strange
combination of identifying their own approaches to bioethics while also espousing
the rather thin but dominant U.S. approach.

Swazey: A lot of those people have studied here, haven't they? The importers?

Reich: Not necessarily, in the sense of earning an advanced degree in this country. They
may have attended the Kennedy Institute Intensive Bioethics course, or courses
elsewhere in the U.S. Some bioethicists in other countries have earned degrees
here; but regardless of that, many have just latched onto the American way and
said, "This is the voice." I have my difficulties with that, I always have. I've
acknowledged the importance of all these principles and this approach, but in my
view of what ethics is about, the use of the principles is a minority element. And
even then it has to be closely related to what is called meta-ethical questions of
meaning. That's just how I see it. It's happened over the years as I've lectured in
Europe, how often Europeans say, "You are one American we understand.

[Laughter] You sort of speak our language." I guess that's because I've never
been strongly principle-based; and my advanced studies oriented me towards
questions of "moral anthropology," an orientation commonly found in Europe that
is congenial with the idea of seeking meaning in moral discourse.
Swazey: You're not an analytic philosopher by any stretch.

Reich: That's right, that's right. I could choose to be if I wanted to, like other people with religious training, Childress, Jonsen, and others did become. But that wasn't my vision of things, so I didn't. But I think it's going to come to the point where the globalization of American bioethics is going to lead people to see the American approach to bioethics as a drawback.

Swazey: Because?

Reich: Because it is so limiting a vision and it also has the effect of silencing the very people who imported and translated into their language and use it. They are by that very act silencing, so to speak, their own moral legacies and traditions. Not without benefit! There's a way, for example, in which practical ethics in Germany over the 1950's, 60's, and 70's, into the 80's needed a fresh, new look because for one thing -- and I don't mean this as hyper-critical; in some ways I guess I am German -- but they were just so enamored of grand theory that they couldn't address concrete problems in a practical way. Principles have helped them move beyond grand theory. But now they are moving beyond principism.

I'm concerned about excessive American influence in international bioethics, and
I occasionally discuss this; but my real work right now is working on care. I'm working on a project that's never been done before, like the Encyclopedia had never been done before. I'm doing a history of the idea and practice of care in the western world. I like to show how this idea has arisen independently in different cultures. For example, just yesterday I got an invitation from Frankfurt to be a speaker at the Academy for Ethics in Medicine; this is the medical ethics group in Germany. I enjoy digging out literary and philosophical ideas of care and saying, in so many words, "You have a moral tradition that you may not be aware of."

And I say, "This idea of care has enormous depths in the German moral psyche, as it does in the European, and as it has in the Middle Eastern tradition for several thousand years and here's why, and here's where you find it in German literature, and here's the spillover into German religion, and here's the spillover into German medical ethics." It's a vision of things many of them have not heard, and it interests them greatly....

Swazey: You're still a teacher.

Reich: Maybe that's it. I like doing that. In some respects I'm doing what I didn't have too much of a chance to do here. I've always been a professor in the School of Medicine, and quite frankly it's not a great challenge to teach medical students
because they generally put so little stock in the importance of ethics. It is important bioethical teaching, but for me it is not sufficiently stimulating for exploring new fundamental ideas. So I enjoy when I can do lectures like that. I don’t critique American bioethics directly, but at certain times I may say this: that’s it’s too limiting because it squelches the search for meaning.

Swazey: You said earlier, very briefly, that most American philosopher-bioethicists have never had any interest in Continental philosophy. Is it lack of interest? Lack of training or knowledge? A combination?

Reich: I think it’s due to several things. My impression over the years is this: That American philosophy, by and large, has been so analytically based, whether it’s in Hume, Mill, Kant, and other classical writers, and so oriented towards concepts and analysis of concepts and the analysis of the language used in formulating concepts, that it is deeply suspicious of another approach that is so totally different, namely the phenomenological approach of Continental philosophy where emotion matters, experience matters, and even linear progress of experience from pain to joy, from anguish to happiness. In other words, Continental philosophy is more likely to acknowledge that there can be motion in the moral life and not just static ideas; and analytic philosophers often seem
deeply suspicious that this is really not philosophy, or it's not the right kind of philosophy.

Swazey: They view it as non-rational.

Reich: Right, that's probably the more direct way of saying it. There's also been a linguistic problem: most Americans don't have much of a mastery of foreign languages, and to do Continental philosophy well, I think you need to know some Continental languages. With analytic philosophy you could pretty much restrict yourself to British and American thought, so American philosophers were generally handicapped in that regard. Many of them could not read Husserl, Heidegger, etc. I think that has continued to be one of the big factors. But I see more of an upsurge of interest now by, let's say, card-carrying philosophers as well as other highly intelligent people working in ethics and medical humanities who simply have turned to those sources. They're in a minority but it's a voice, and there's some real scholarship. Now in Encyclopedia of Bioethics, because of my experience of dissent where I came to be deeply involved personally in being silenced, not having a voice, I was passionate about giving voice to people who didn't have a voice in the field. So for continental philosophy we got Richard Zaner to write on phenomenology in the first edition; and that was sort of a token
voice, but an important voice. But by the time we did the revised edition in the early 1990s, I saw things differently. For example, notions of health and disease that function at a philosophical and sociological level really undergird a lot of American bioethics. These concepts had become basic philosophical and sociological tools of the field. But some of us began thinking: How do these ideas shape our thinking? In the revised edition 1995 of the Encyclopedia of Bioethics, we had the usual articles on the philosophy and history of the ideas of health and disease. But then some of us began thinking: “That’s not enough because none of these articles connects with the experience of health and the experience of disease. We need an explicitly Continental, that is to say, phenomenological, hermeneutical understanding of health and disease.” So we asked Drew Leder of Baltimore to prepare the article on the experience of health and disease. We put it side-by-side with the other articles on concepts of health and disease, so they would be in dialogue. The reader could, if they chose to, see the shortcoming of the merely conceptual approach that might not bridge to the experience of those who were sick or ill, or well. As for my own role in this, I was trying to keep those voices in there.

Swazey: I guess that’s why to some of us...at least me, I’ll narrow it to myself... American bioethics has seemed very sterile because it doesn’t have that lived-in experience
or reality. It doesn’t deal with suffering, and meaning, and the human condition.

It’s not part of the discussion because it’s “non-rational” and it doesn’t capture

most of what it means to be....

Reich: Well, that’s why I drifted...not drifted, but extended my own personal interest to

what is called medical humanities, I don’t know if you picked that up but....

Swazey: Yes, that’s one of the questions I had for you.

Reich: I started a national seminar in narrative bioethics. It placed ethics, literature, and

the health professions in dialogue. People in medical humanities have been doing

what a number of philosophers -- whose work at times, as you’ve said, seems

awfully sterile -- have opted not to do. Effectively, medical humanities has

expanded philosophy in our times. The medical humanities people are sometimes

literature-trained, sometimes they are sociologists or historians, some of them are

trained in philosophy, some in religious studies. For some of us, it meant

developing a sense of morality and ethics from the perspective of narrative. So

that voice has increasingly been there in the past twenty years.

Swazey: It’s interesting that when you talk to people in medical humanities they tend to see
philosophy as within that umbrella. When you talk to at least some of the analytic philosophers, they’re very separate worlds.

Reich: Yes, that’s true.

Swazey: Which I find fascinating. You have medical humanities and you have philosophy. There are still so many tensions, I think, between the analytic philosophers and the medical humanities people. It’s a fascinating divide.

Reich: Yes, it is. But, you see, there has been an enormous political struggle in the field, as I guess there is in every field. I’m talking about the politics of the academe of bioethics, which I have been involved in at various times. One sees the struggle in the various separate societies that have been established. Should I comment on the politics of bioethics from an academic point of view?

Swazey: Oh yes! It’s part of the field’s history.

Reich: Yes! The first professional society was the Society for Health and Human Values, that tended to be medical humanities as it’s called now. Its predecessor was Ministers in Medical Education. Ed Pellegrino, Al Vastyan and others were
involved in the SHHV. I led a putsch at an SHHV meeting and it got people extraordinarily upset. I say "I"; it was Al Jonsen and I and maybe ten other people. We were convinced that the Society was not sufficiently scholarly and philosophical; we thought many of its sessions were too soft. In other words we thought there was need for more rigor in ethical analysis which would appeal to philosophers. The interests and needs of philosophers were not being met. But frankly, there were political as well as intellectual factors. People who were doing significant work in the field never, ever had a chance to reach the inner sanctum of this Society, which was controlled by a certain number of ministers and doctors involved in an "old boys" network. We wanted to expand the leadership base of the Society, to include scholars who were relegated to the fringes. So at an annual business meeting I read a statement that said a dozen of us have met and are going to form a new society, anybody interested please meet me afterwards. The president of the Society, a fine physician-educator, realized -- so he acknowledged afterwards -- that this can split the Society wide open, on the spot. So he took control of the meeting. Some of the old-timers accused the twelve of us of disloyalty, whereas we were trying to improve academic standards but couldn't get the leadership to hear us in any other way. So the president got a grant to conduct consultations on the future of the Society. I was the spokesman for the rump group. We ended up making an accommodation, by forming a new Society
within the Society. It was called something like, the Institute for Professors of Bioethics and Medical Humanities, something like that. The word “professors” focused the new entity on academic research. Then we negotiated on how we would share program and so on and so forth. And that served for a while to satisfy both wings, but then the really hard core analytic philosophers that came along later just didn’t want to have anything to do with these medical humanities people; these were people like Dan Brock and Dan Wikler in particular, and a few others. They did, in fact, form a new organization that was going to have more philosophical recognition; but they presented a confused image when they invited life science corporations to have representatives on the board of the learned society, called the American Society of Bioethics. I thought it was like avoiding one fringy thing by buying into another; but in spite of those politics, the scholarly standards did improve. Still, after relatively few years of existence, they merged with two other societies to form the new, amalgamated American Society of Bioethics and Humanities. So there’s always been this tension. I think the new Society is a pretty happy combination, but it remains to be seen whether all the special interests will be served well.

Swazey: I think some of the people in humanities still think they’re getting the short end of the stick, but time will tell.
It's got a strange name. The name alone indicates the discomfort in the combination. Look at it. The American Society for Bioethics and Humanities. Humanities? All of humanities? Why didn't they use the term "medical humanities," which is an academically accepted and recognized term? The strangeness of the terminology seems to imply an uncomfortable attitude toward the medical humanities.

I think that's why some of the people in medical humanities think that they are tacked on.

Yes.

I've heard complaints that the phone at central headquarters is answered, "American Society of Bioethics."

Ooooh,...

Do we live here too? Well, the politics aren't going to go away as long as there is money and jobs; they'll be competing.
Reich: Yes, I agree.

Swazey: Talk to me some about the roles of religion and moral theology in bioethics over the years.

Reich: I didn’t have a single thought about what to say to you today, nothing prepared, but coming over here I had one thought: I want to tell Judith the ivory tower experience. People probably don’t have that experience today, but I did when I came here. It was a strange anomaly – to be called Senior Research Scholar in Bioethics (eventually I suppose I was the first person to carry the permanent title of Professor of Bioethics), while being aware that I had just moved out of theology’s ivory tower. Theology had its own language; and ethical solutions were conceived within the culture of a specific religion. The application of theological principles to practical contemporary problems was a kind of literal application that had its own religious history. You know, I would have hesitated to admit it then, but in an important sense, moral theology was far removed from the trenches; and its authority accentuated the distance. The attitude existed in Catholic moral theology: “We have figured out an answer and we will tell you what it is, together with the kind of authority the answer carries.” This was definitely not the result of dialogue. And then all of a sudden, I left that world and was surrounded, on a full-time basis, by the enormous problems that helped usher in bioethics, like research abuses, test tube babies,
and deliberate non-treatment of handicapped babies. André’s vision was that these
problems were so complex that biologists and ethicists had to be brought together not just
for an occasional conversation, but on a permanent basis. Regular, systematic exchange
of ideas and methods was the only way to go. But the ivory tower didn’t work that way.
His model of a permanent task force grew out of his experience being deputy director of
the Papal Commission on birth control. Commission members took up residence in
Rome for daily dialogue and interaction over a long period of time. Theologians and
scientists both changed their views as a result of this dialogue. André said that model had
to be permanently recreated in a university that would invest in the model. He said: What
we did for two years has to be made permanent. I didn’t know initially how long I would
be in this new world of bioethics; but I did know that there was an enormous personal
experience of having left the ivory tower. I saw new rules emerging that did not govern
moral thought in the ivory tower. It became more important to draw on whatever
knowledge we had, of all kinds, while listening and learning what were the problems,
how they were perceived, and what the new -- or neglected old -- ways of thinking about
them in ethics were to be. So however you interpret that, moving from the ivory tower
was a dislocation -- the deliberate intellectual dislocation of 1970-71. There also was an
abandonment of moral authoritarianism. I don’t think I was excessively authoritarian, in
fact, I challenged moral religious authority almost from the start, but I nonetheless was
influenced by it and this was my environment. If there’s not a higher moral authority
there, then is all moral authority called into question? Probably...probably. Where is it going? one had been asking in the 1960s. Who knows? So anyhow, that’s one aspect of answering your question. The relationship of theology and religion in this break, this transition, which not everybody experienced, the churches haven’t totally experienced. Different people have said different things about the role of Religion in bioethics, and Al Jonsen has written his book on it, on the origins of bioethics. It’s a good book. It also has a limited perspective: Jonsen himself acknowledges that.

Swazey: It’s very autobiographical.

Reich: Understandably so. It needed to be written. It’s a very useful book, but of course he misses some things. There is need for more critique of the field. We need to do more evaluation, for example, of the shortcomings of both the original theological orientation of the field and the current philosophical orientation. It’s often said that theological ethicists started the field of bioethics. Dan Callahan had a PhD in philosophy but his debates in the Catholic community had a big role in shaping him towards bioethics. The others were Paul Ramsey and Joseph Fletcher and Dick McCormick; there were those three, and then, of course, Al Jonsen and others who were trained in theology and religion. Jonsen, in his book, pointed out that philosophers came along, and with that more analytic use of
principles, characterized by the *Belmont Report* and so forth. By the way, I heard
Renée and your colleague Carla give a very interesting paper at the University of
Virginia, where they chronicled the twentieth anniversary meeting of the *Belmont*
Report. The paper I want to get from that conference is the one by Karen
LeBacqz, because from what you reported she was the sole dissenting voice at the
Belmont anniversary conference, in the way she criticized the vision implicit in
the original *Belmont Report*. We need that kind of critical evaluation of the
progress made in bioethics.

Swazey: Yes.

Reich: That's the point I got, at least. I'm going to ask Karen for a copy of the paper. I
suspect I will agree with her. Besides, I'm not so sure it is accurate to say or
imply that the theologians did not use principles or rules, and that they were
introduced by philosophers later on. People tend to overlook the role of James
Gustafson, a master theologian who shaped the field of bioethics and did use rules
and principles.

Swazey: Jim wrote quite a bit.
Reich: He wrote quite a bit and he’s an extremely intelligent person.

Swazey: We spent a wonderful day and a half with him last June in Albuquerque.

Reich: Oh, that’s great! I’ve corresponded with him out there. He wrote some papers before Beauchamp and the original Belmont report in which he used philosophical analytical categories. Of course, it is clear that when the philosophers began formulating bioethical arguments based in rules called principles, they did it in a much more focused and critical way. My point is that the dividing line was not so sharp. If you look back at the intellectual culture of the 1960’s ethics was predominantly religious ethics. What was the number one internal debate in religious ethics in the 1960’s, exactly when bioethics was coming about? It was the debate of norms versus circumstance or situation. Absoluteness of norms versus relativity of norms to the particulars of the decision making circumstance and so forth. This was an enormous debate! What was it about? It was about principles! Principles and rules! What are they? But especially, how binding are they? It was in a theological context, but Western theology, particularly Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, has for a long time been strongly philosophically oriented. It’s used philosophical categories. In the Catholic tradition, natural law was fundamental to ethics; but natural law was presented as
a "lex rationis," a rational law. The marriage of theological ethics and
philosophical ethics was accomplished in the 13th century with high scholasticism.
So when you talk about a dichotomy of religion, which is supposedly some
etheoretical thing out there, and philosophy, which is more rationally rigorous, it
doesn't hold. Regardless of how you view this supposed dichotomy between
theological and philosophical ethics, I think Karen LeBacqz was right, at least as
paraphrased by Renée and Carla, when she said that it is unfortunate -- for the
field of bioethics -- that philosophers don't read theological bioethics. On the
contrary, theological ethicists certainly read philosophy.

Swazey: Karen said to the philosophers, "I do all the time...you don't!" She was very
pointed. She was great!

Reich: She's courageous. And she's right: it would be preferable if bioethicists could be
more comprehensive.

Swazey: The other delightful part of the Belmont Conference was listening to Tom
Beauchamp and Al's somewhat different historiographies of the writing of the
Belmont Report, and that really got funny!
Reich: Did Al feel as if his role was being belittled or something?

Swazey: Yes, by being challenged by Tom’s account of who drafted what and when. It was terribly funny for those of us who know all those people and who know the days of the Belmont Report; I guess to young people that must seem like ancient history, but it seems sort of like yesterday.

Reich: Yes!

Swazey: Let’s talk some more about religion and bioethics. One thing we’ve been asking people about is how much lasting influence they think people like Ramsey, McCormick, and Joe Fletcher have had? They clearly were important progenitors, but have they continued to have an influence in the development of bioethics?

Reich: No, I don’t think so. I don’t know what other people have said, but I don’t think they have.

Swazey: Because?

Reich: Times go on! Issues change. The origins of their world views are not honored in
today's world view for ethics. We're in a post-modern era where the great claim
to authenticity is not to have a world view. So, in a sense, they are deprived of
their legacy, or their legacy is nullified by the current post-modern assumption
that any world view is even worth listening to. The debates then were the debates
of that era. Now what I hope for, and I'm going to be urging as I did in the paper I
gave recently in Charlottesville at a conference on Religion and Bioethics, is that
it is soon going to be time to look back, for historic reasons, and have graduate
students truly study the work of Paul Ramsey. Ramsey was an intellectual giant,
and the way in which he pursued a lot of these issues is highly informative and,
depending on your view of history, could be very significant for today as a
historical set of documents. So I think he and Fletcher will be studied from that
perspective. Dick McCormick as well, but Dick was quite different from those
other two because of the way he extracted insights and principles from theological
ethics and used them to develop his version of a public ethics for the secular
world. McCormick wanted to be heard and listened to in the secular world. I'm
sure his background in casuistry and practical ethics influenced him in that way.
He served on several commissions, especially the second federal commission, and
was able to have an impact because of the way he moved from an in-house
theological approach to the development of a public ethics. For example, in 1973
he wrote an article on defective newborns in which he formulated what was really
a new norm, or set of norms, in a sense growing out of the religious tradition he knew but translating it and reformulating it in a way that the secular world would understand. So I guess I’m saying he was a little more directly plugged in. He knew the game of policy and played that game of policy maybe a bit more than Ramsey did. But do I see people quoting him today? Not a whole lot. So he was enormously influential, but I guess those leaders no longer have the influence today.

Swazey: If you’re a moral theologian do you have to translate into secular terms to have any currency in bioethics now?

Reich: Oh yes! You formulated the question in an interesting way. I think you said, “If you are trained in moral theology...” The question is: What is the discipline of people who are trained in theological ethics or religious ethics and who function in a predominant way in bioethics? Here you have to make a big distinction. You have certain theologians, religious scholars who have stayed very squarely within the world of theology. They consider themselves scholarly theologians. Stanley Hauerwas, for example, has been an enormously important theological figure in our times, including many topics and areas of bioethics, medical ethics, such as pain and suffering, and children, and mental retardation, a lot of very important
issues. But especially in his fundamental questions he's the one really who
reintroduced virtue theory in modern times. McIntyre is regarded as the one who
did it, but really Stanley Hauerwas preceded McIntyre and then the two of them
were friends who began influencing each other. But Stanley has been in that first
group and he would tell you, "I am a theologian. I am not an ethicist. I am not a
bioethicist."

On the other hand, at the conference in Charlottesville, and this is
instructive in a sense for your question, I was placed on a panel: there was a
Jewish scholar of bioethics, Muslim, and then myself. When I was invited I said
to Jonathan Moreno, "I'm not really competent to speak for Christian ethics
because for thirty years I haven't been a practitioner of that discipline; but I'm
very interested and would like to speak on whether or not secular bioethics needs
religious bioethics today. The examples I give will be from Christian ethics,
which might kind of balance off a little bit what other people say." He said,
"Fine, great, that's what we want." But when the panel came around I didn't
really fit in because the Jewish person said, "Here's how Jewish bioethics works." The Muslim scholar said, "Here's how Islamic bioethics works." And I didn't
say, "Here's how Christian bioethics works." But when I introduced myself I
justified my approach by explaining who I am. I said, "I was a moral theologian
but starting in 1971 I became an ethicist-bioethicist. My field is ethics. I regard it
as a secular field but I’m not secularist. The word ‘secular’ comes from the word ‘saecularis’ and from the noun ‘saeculum’, which means ‘of this age’ or ‘of this era’, in other words, the era of this world but not ‘other worldly’ and not the ‘world beyond.’” And so I am secular and to you I would say, I think a number of people trained in theology and religious ethics might be regarded that way, not secularist but secular. The question starts in our experience; we use language that by and large we can understand in a secular way, words that do not depend on revelation to be understood; and we apply that language to practical issues of today. Secular, understood in this way, would in fact be congenial to many, if not most, religious scholars because of the way religious ethics has developed, especially in the last thirty years since bioethics started. So one of the points I made there is, if you think that theological ethics had to step aside, which it did, it not only was marginalized historically. It had to be marginalized because it did not speak a language that could be used in secular society without adaptation. Nonetheless, what religious ethics has become in the last thirty years is something very, very different, and I don’t think the world of ethics and bioethics at large know about some of the radical changes that have occurred in religious ethics/bioethics. So we need to reassess how religious bioethics relates to philosophical bioethics, because I think both have changed, and mainstream bioethics may not know how religious bioethics functions.
So yes, to answer your question, you have to speak in secular terms and think in secular categories, when the basic vision and ideas are shaped by the world of religion. The intellectual world whereby religion interfaces with bioethicists’ concerns has changed and is changing so radically that however they may have split off and had to be marginalized thirty years ago, they need to reacquaint themselves with each other today. I think it’s needed.

Swazey: Do you think people in bioethics, and here I’m referring primarily to the analytic philosophers, grasp the analysis you were making?

Reich: Some may, but I don’t think it is widely appreciated. I don’t think so, because so many of the scholars don’t give it any thought. Theological ethics is still marginalized today, and I don’t think the marginalizers know or appreciate what’s going on intellectually. That leads me to a question about the relationship between the two. I know it’s a very provocative question. Are bioethicists who are not well versed in the religious approach to bioethics intellectually illiterate in bioethics? Now, when I say “intellectually” obviously they may be intellectually brilliant, capable and so forth. The prior question is: How does a body of knowledge relate to our world, the world of practice that bioethics is all about, to the world of people who are worried about vision, worried about problems,
worried about public policy, and all the rest? In order to answer that question you
turn to a bioethics scholar and say, “Tell me what there is to know about this
problem.” That is when the scholar requires literacy in his or her field, which
means to be able to communicate and articulate, to translate, if you would, this
body of knowledge to this public and to other scholars. A scholar is functionally
illiterate when he or she doesn’t know the major sources of knowledge for the
field. We need to think about that -- about what would be required for literacy in
the field of bioethics. If, as is so often said, ethics has two legs, one in moral
philosophy and the other in religious roots, can you be literate with a knowledge
of only one of those legs? One of the things that’s led me to this question is my
experience as editor-in-chief of The Encyclopedia of Bioethics, both editions. As
you know they are two totally different editions; one reviewer said the second one
is misnamed, it should not be called “a revised edition,” it should’ve been called a
“new edition” because it was new. Now, you know I had a very thorough review
process; five people reviewed every article. It was not too unusual to find
manuscripts submitted by leading philosophers who so grossly misstated the
religious ethics that they set out to refute, that they showed themselves to be
illiterate on that point. My view is they had every right to critique, evaluate, or
discard the religious-based arguments, say they belong on the pile heap of
antiquity or whatever. If they want to disprove it, fine, but at least state it
accurately. They didn’t. Sometimes it took repeated recommendations to get a
competent statement of the religious argument. Just from an intellectual point of
view, I think this points to something serious. I think this goes back to an
intellectual tradition in philosophy that sees itself as separate from and aloof from
much of philosophy that is discounted because it is regarded as falling outside the
canon of authentic philosophy. Now I think a lot of what happens in reflective
discourse outside of professional philosophy is in fact philosophy. You know the
debates about Emerson and Thoreau, for example, were they philosophers? Of
course not! They’re writers, not philosophers! But now you have philosophical
scholars saying, “No, they are philosophers. It’s just that they sometimes speak in
literary language and everyday language, but they are philosophers.” So too with
theologians; theologians are very often philosophers, even in the more specific
sense of writing in the dominant language of today’s scholarly philosophy. Yet
because of this strong intellectual tradition since the Enlightenment, theological
and some philosophical discourse is segregated out of currency, and that
segregation is accepted. So that’s why I offer my methodological argument
about bioethical literacy.

Swazey: Are there people you can think of besides Stan Hauerwas whom you would say
are major moral theologians who have stayed in moral theology?
I was thinking of that before, in the break, that this is a whole category of people we tend to overlook. If you take a look at the initial visiting scholars in the first year or so of the Kennedy Institute, those scholars included Stanley Hauerwas, Charles Curran, Gene Outka, and other religious scholars. Curran is well known as a Catholic theologian partly because of his position of dissent on some matters, but he happens to be a devoted Christian scholar who still does a lot of teaching and writing in contemporary medical ethics. Since he has been at SMU his work has blossomed in a new way; and it continues to be important. If you look at the SMU website for ethics, you will see how his work fits into that of many other scholars at that university. Of course, he would probably not be called a bioethicist, he’s a Catholic moral theologian. Another person who has been around a long time is David Smith of Indiana University, who trained under Paul Ramsey. Margaret Farley is someone else in this category. She has made good contributions, including to the original edition of the Encyclopedia. She wrote the massive article on sexual ethics, a highly competent review and critique of the entire field. In the revised edition she revised it very substantially in the light of feminism. She’s an important contributor to medical ethics and a trainer of medical ethicists; but probably because she retains her identity as a theologian at Yale she is not widely read.
Swazey: I think about a younger generation and Karen Lebacqz is one of the few names that comes to mind.

Reich: Yes, but she's not younger. She was a member of the original National Commission and that's why she was at the Belmont Revisited meeting. Yes, Karen certainly identifies herself as a religious studies scholar, a religious studies scholar. I regard her as one of the really brilliant early bioethicists; and because she has been doing this now for thirty years, she is regarded as an elder stateswoman. But how widely are her works read? For that matter, among younger people, somebody I just got to know last fall was Stephen Pope at Boston College. His writings are very definitely in the theological tradition; but anyone who is interested in making sense of ethics in a post-Darwinian period misses something crucial if he/she doesn’t study what Stephen has written on the ranking of love for children, other relatives, friends, etc., in light of what evolutionary thought has to say about parental care. Other competent younger people working in this field include Diana Fritz-Cates and Barbara Andolsen. My point is that the work of these people has to be respected and fostered because it contributes to the expansion of knowledge in ethics and bioethics. The usual approach is somewhat different; it's the representational approach that says religious ethics is important for panels, to show the diversity (and the puzzling lack of agreement among!) all
these sectarian communities -- Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and now increasingly
Islamic. Period.

Swazey: The Noah's Ark principle.

Reich: Yes. It's the view that they're out there, and they'll complain if we don't give
them a voice, so we give them a voice on a panel. If they have any political clout,
we'll take it into account, like fetal research or something. That's the politics of
bioethics; and that's fine, it has to be that way. But I don't see how the
intellectual community can be satisfied with that. At least for myself, I see the
driving force as the search for knowledge, search for truth, search for wisdom.

We need these religious fields because they represent serious knowledge and it's
based in traditions that have value -- even if not absolute value -- because a lot of
their knowledge has been struggled over and refined and adapted, and so forth. I
was also thinking... In the 1960s some of the first ecumenical, interdisciplinary
panels ever assembled were done less for show and more for the search for
knowledge, as I see it. I think it was in 1966 that I was part of a Veterans
Administration traveling ecumenical medical ethics lecture team. It was really an
interesting experience because it was a novel kind of intellectual dialogue, by
specialists in the only kind of medical ethics there was in those days, at least for
the most part. The panel consisted of Rabbi Emmanuel Jacobovitz who you know
became Chief Rabbi of Great Britain; Harmon Smith of Duke University Divinity
School, a Protestant theological ethicist, and myself, then a professor of Roman
Catholic moral theology. We were asked to pick a topic and they flew us around
to California, South Dakota, New Orleans. When you think about it, especially
historically, it was a very interesting group. It was really a good experience.

Swazey: I noticed that was done for the hospital administration.

Yes, that was the setting. But of course, the people who attended were the doctors
and staff. I remember talking about Franz Kafka’s story of the beetle. It was my
way, even then without training in phenomenology, to try to get inside the
interiority of people, which Catholic theology didn’t do too well. Ethics needs
this. Of course I didn’t know where it was all going to go, but I got a lot of
response. People wanted to know about searching for moral meaning through
metaphor. It was interesting.

Swazey: Also it reflects your later interest in medical humanities.

Yes!
Have you characterized yourself as a bioethicist over the years?

Oh yes, very much so. Like I say, I used that term in my professorship, professor of bioethics. I think there are very, very few professors of bioethics with that title in this country, even now. The linguistic question is interesting. When Al Jonsen had his Seattle meeting, the birth of bioethics, it was very important historically. It brought all these people together to reminisce, but what struck me was he used the word “bioethics.” Jim Childress doesn’t use the word “bioethics,” he uses “biomedical ethics” and he means that. Al Jonsen himself was a professor of “medical ethics” at the University of Washington. Few people have used the title “professor of bioethics”; yet all those people gathered together in Seattle under the title of bioethics. It’s interesting, from a cultural perspective, how the word bioethics signals the gathering of a field without being used to describe many of the activities of the field. So yes, I consider myself a bioethicist.

So how does one come to be defined as a bioethicist? Is it partly self-definition?

Well, when I started the bioethics program in the Georgetown Medical Center in 1977, the chairman -- Bob Huntley, the Chairman of the Department of Community Medicine -- asked me what title I wanted and I said, “I want to use the
word ‘bioethics’.” At that time there had been relatively little discussion of standards for defining bioethics, so there was some creativity in shaping the field. You know the intervening debates about competency for bioethics and what constitutes a bioethicist, so I won’t go into that. By now we all agree that somebody who’s had a few courses in sociology of medicine or the history of medicine or the ethics of medicine and who says, “I’m a bioethicist because I’m a member of a bioethics committee and I give talks on bioethics” scarcely qualifies. I don’t have much wisdom to add to that point, Judith. But what I would like to say is that the question of the identity and qualifications of a bioethicist should be regarded in reference to the stages that bioethics has experienced and will experience. Andre Hellegers said -- I think I quoted this in one of my articles about him, and he had real vision on this -- “In the first generation, ethicists, that is professors of religious and philosophical ethics, are training people in a new discipline or field of learning called bioethics, and then bioethicists have replaced the ethicists who trained the bioethicists” -- like Al Jonsen has “replaced” Jim Gustafson. “Nonetheless, the bioethicist will continue to need the ethicists, which is to say the theologians and philosophers, as resources.” He also said, and this was foresight, “The next phase will be where the bioethicist will then train physicians and nurses and others to become specialists in clinical ethics. The more general bioethicist will continue to be needed as a resource in training the
clinical ethicist.” Now in terms of that kind of taxonomy, I guess I have a foot in all three areas, but for many years I have been regarding myself as a resource person for others who specialize in areas that I would participate in only occasionally. And to be a useful resource person for bioethics, I’m continually returning, and now much more so, not only to the history of philosophy and theology but really to the history of ideas. When I publish this work on care, the history of the idea of care, I intend it to have the effect of offering a vital resource for theological and philosophical studies, and bioethics and clinical ethics as well. Although I’m competent in bioethics and certain aspects of clinical ethics, I regard myself mostly as a transitional figure because I’ve happened to have been around for those three phases, and I am looking beyond these stages to further specializations and methodological changes that need to be stimulated just a little bit, but without my necessarily being a major player in them. I think that’s how I would go about defining myself as bioethicist. And what is a bioethicist more generally? Well, I would hope: somebody who meets the credentials of knowledge and mastery of the relevant knowledge of the field of bioethics and can teach it, and can instruct and advise on it.

Swazey: How do you feel about the graduate degree programs in bioethics?
I have mixed feeling about it. I think, first of all, it’s a very positive sign. If you have graduate programs that proves that there is a field of learning; and good graduate programs tend to strengthen and perpetuate a discipline. However, I don’t regard bioethics as a major discipline like law, philosophy, theology. But it is a major field of study that’s interdisciplinary in character, strongly rooted in those disciplines that pay attention to normative and pre-normative reflection. So it’s a positive sign because those programs prove the existence of a field and the vitality of the field. What I’m worried about is too much specialization, which comes back to my term of “literacy.” Bioethicists who don’t know enough about theological and philosophical ethics and its roots, who don’t know enough about behavioral disciplines where bioethics in fact is shaped may not be literate in their own field. It certainly doesn’t suffice just to learn to speak to the behavioral notions of professional conduct and professional activities, and to let bioethics be shaped by those considerations. On the other hand, I’m afraid that the social and behavioral dimensions of bioethics are not emphasized enough. In general, I’m a little bit worried that graduate studies in bioethics are becoming too technical, too specialized, not sufficiently grounded. It’s like going to a technical school in some senses. I’m also worried about the elimination of foreign language fluency from bioethics and virtually all PhD work in ethics and its parent disciplines, philosophy and theology. Sure people in other countries are increasingly using
English, but you can’t rewrite Schopenhauer, Hegel, Kant, or Levinas. The idea that you’re never exposed to the inner thinking, which really is contained uniquely in the original language, modern or ancient, makes the higher education just a little thin, I feel.

Swazey: A final question is whether you think bioethics has relatively neglected some of the more macro social justice issues of health care access and those types of things. As I mentioned, other than people like Norm Daniels....

Reich: Oh, I go much further than that. I think bioethics has massively neglected not only macro issues, but micro issues. It’s neglected universal issues and particular issues. I’m very, very disturbed by this. There seems to be a canon of questions that are repeatedly addressed, and within this canon there is a mentality that fails to reflect a sufficient range of human experiences on which bioethics ought to build. But I’ll comment on the macro issues. Norm Daniels has done very significant work, of course, but before that there were some people talking about distributive justice and health care almost from the very start. In the Kennedy Institute, one of our first visiting scholars was Gene Outka, Professor from Yale Divinity, and during his time at Georgetown in the early ‘70s he wrote one of the first articles on justice in health care.
Swazey: It’s a classic paper, and I used to assign it in my bioethics seminars at BU.

Reich: Did you? It was very important. There was only a trickle of interest in the macro issues initially, there wasn’t a huge amount of literature. So it’s sort of been around but not a lot of people have paid attention to it, partly because the bioethical discussions invested so little passion in it. Distributive categories address the question of need for health care, but from most of the ethics literature you’d never know that millions of people suffer and die because of lack of care.

We are partly insulated from the passionate dimensions of the problem by the linguistics of the macro issues of distribution. We use certain analytic terms, for example, distributive justice; but in a theological way it was more politically aware. The terminology in that context was imbued with the political dimensions of government; and it was linked with social justice. But as I see it, the analytic philosophical approach to the macro issues of distribution did not assume those social commitments and social environments. So although the question of macro distribution got on the agenda, it wasn’t sufficiently rich to hold attention. So yes, I’m agreeing with you that some of these macro issues like distribution have been neglected. When I came to doing the second edition of the Encyclopedia I felt that part of the problem was found in the language of distribution. Distribution is a biased term, it assumes you’ve got a certain body of resources, and the only
relevant question is: On what basis do you distribute them to members of our society who possibly could use them? I changed the language of the question itself to the word “provision” because that word conveys better the idea that there are people who are agents, people who provide, and the word “provision” at least opens the question that maybe we ought to provide. The very question of distribution in no way raises the question whether we ought to provide; it restricts itself to the question of what system of distribution is fair and just -- an essential question, but a limiting question. So yes, the discussion and the question itself need to be expanded.

Swazey: Who has set the canon of bioethics? Whose canon is it?

Reich: I think that you would just have to say the leading literature, the most influential literature in the field.

Swazey: To what extent has it been set by the interest of the polity of Congress?

Reich: Oh, I think a lot. Let me tell you a story. Some years ago Stanley Hauerwas -- for whom I have a lot of respect; he’s very bright, very non-standard; I sometimes check out ideas with him -- he was offered a professorship in theological ethics
and mental retardation at the Kennedy Institute. He turned it down. Later on I
asked him why he turned it down. As I recall, he said he refused to be
intellectually engulfed by the policy environment of Washington which shapes the
bioethics of the Kennedy Institute so strongly. He thought it would turn him away
from the kind of ethics he thought he ought to pursue. I sympathize with that. I
agree with him. In fact, I see it not just as a personal preference for people like
Stanley; I see it as a structural problem for the whole field of bioethics. Andre
Hellegers used to say that the Kennedy Institute was prominent mostly because of
its location -- on the Potomac River, just up the street from the Capital. In that
setting, the task of bioethics, he said, was to “put out fires,” meaning political
fires. Now I think this is extremely important; it’s ethics in the public service, it’s
the public use of ethics. But it’s had a feedback effect whereby an ethical issue is
not judged to be a relevant or important issue worthy of being addressed unless it
arises from a politically, legally, socially controversial issue in which the body
politic might take opposing and contrasting points of view. This setting, this
preference has the effect of excluding vast other issues that are not encapsulated in
the political debate. I should stop on that point!

Swazey: I’m glad I asked you this question!!
Reich: I feel very, very strongly about it. Let me give you another issue that I feel very strongly about. But again, this is only an example, it’s not that I see it as the only thing that should be talked about. I’m talking about children. When do bioethicists talk about children? They don’t! I did a literature search recently for a paper I was writing, and found that between 1995 and 1999, a five year period, documents that were published in bioethics about children were...I forget the exact number but let’s say 640 dealt with children. How many of them dealt with something other than consent of, or on behalf of the child for therapy and in research? Only about 18 or 20. Look what you’ve got! You’ve got hundreds of thousand of children dying every year in Iraq because of the U.S. and U.N. embargo, and Cuban children also suffer for the same reason. I think the isolationist mentality of America has created a strongly isolationist notion about bioethics and what’s relevant for bioethics. Yet why should starving children be excluded from macro questions of “distribution” or “provision”? Quite frankly, the autonomy-based character of our bioethics excludes children. It excludes inarticulate people, and uneducated people, and people who are too young to have the ability to speak for themselves, who might have advocates speaking on their behalf, and who might not. But bioethics tends to identify issues deserving attention on the basis of who speaks most articulately and most loudly, and I worry that sometimes applied bioethics and clinical bioethics gives the solutions
of bioethical problems to the articulate, those who can marshal arguments most
forcefully and convincingly. Where is our principle of vulnerability? I'm glad to
see that in Europe and in some other places people are starting to talk about
vulnerability. It's a wonderful word because it is so revolutionary. Simply to ask
the question of vulnerability is to reveal moral problems, moral values, and moral
ways of living that had been concealed. You talk about beneficence and
autonomy, those two dominant principles: they are very abstract. They don't get
into the interiority of those who are affected by service or those who administer
help. Vulnerability...the word itself makes it very difficult to avoid the experience
of being exploited, of being neglected, of being abandoned, which happens so
too often to children. Or, by contrast, too much is demanded of children. Anyhow,
this is just one example of the ways in which bioethics, because of its structure,
because of its mentality, because of its language and even its principles, has
encouraged the exclusion of really major issues. One could add to this the entire
question of suffering and compassion, which massively affects people of all ages
and categories. It, too, is neglected because it has to do with experiences that are
not readily addressed by the standard answers, answers couched in terms of a few
principles. I think bioethics needs a renovation, a new approach that pays
attention to the central question: How do I or we live a good life as a response to
the morally troublesome questions that life addresses to us? So I'm very disturbed
by the limited scope and depth of bioethics. I'm not trying to discard my own
field. A lot of really excellent, important stuff is being done in bioethics; but yes,
I'm bothered by those aspects of the practice and theory of bioethics.

END OF INTERVIEW