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Introduction

Commonsense tells us *something* about what Christian ethics *may* look like. For Christians, certain things are fixed, for example, about God (Gen. 1.1; Ps. 18.30; Ps. 50.6; Ps. 116.5; Jn. 1.5), the Fall (Gen. 3), and Christ's life, death (Matt. 27.32–56), and resurrection (Matt. 28.1–10). Moreover, in his social teaching, Christ commands: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22.37–40). Thinking together creation, God's self-revelation, and Jesus's social teaching, Christians are instructed: “[b]eloved, since God loves us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 Jn. 4.11–12). Despite the grammar of creation and commandment to love one another, however, there is seemingly intractable disagreement on how best to understand Christian ethics in its normative and practical dimensions.¹ For example, what normative theory (if any) should be used to articulate the Christian ethical life? What sorts of demands (and what difference) do Christian commitments make when confronted with one or another practical dilemma?²

¹ For an analytically minded overview of these debates, see Outka (1972).

² Whereas the debates in normative and practical ethics in philosophy departments are dominated by consequentialists and deontologists, the situation in Christian (and religious) ethics is different. Because of the work being done by Joseph Fletcher and Richard McCormick, much mid-twentieth-century Christian ethics was concerned with what is variously called casuistry, situational ethics, or procedural ethics. Since the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981), however, a sea change has occurred, with various Christian ethicists, for example, Hauerwas (1983), O'Donovan (1994), and Porter (1990), focusing on narrational and virtue ethics. Whereas many earlier ethicists were concerned with the implications of Christian commitments for practical dilemmas, virtue ethicists are concerned with what it means to live an authentically Christian life. On this change, see Hollowell (2015, 4–8). This observation neither suggests that virtue ethicists are unconcerned with practical dilemmas nor suggests that work in Christian practical ethics is no longer being done.

In addition to making pioneering contributions to just war theory and medical ethics, the Protestant social ethicist Paul Ramsey (1913–1988) argued that Christian ethics should be construed in deontological terms.³ In his classic introduction to Christian ethics, *Basic Christian Ethics* (1950), Ramsey writes: “[c]ertainly Christian ethics is a deontological ethic, not an ‘ethic of the good’” (116).⁴ Commenting on the intellectual relationship between Christian ethics and religious ethics, Stanley Hauerwas reaffirms that Ramsey interprets Christian ethics as deontological. He writes, “Princeton *is* Ramsey (Ramsey the critic of culture, not, as I will later suggest, Ramsey the theological ethicist) leading his troops into battle under the flag that displays the deontological symbol. The task of the ethicist is nothing less than recovering and developing a normative ethics sufficient to save the moral capital deposited by Christianity, by this means rescuing what is left of Western civilization from the barbaric relativists and utilitarians” (1997, 64).

Thus, Ramsey and others understand that Ramsey views his ethics, that is, Christian theological ethics, as deontological. In the context of his early writings, however, Ramsey’s characterization of the deontological nature of Christian ethics is frustratingly difficult to navigate. While he emphasizes in *Basic Christian Ethics* certain themes, for example, God’s righteousness, Christology, and neighbor-love, the analytic distinctions Ramsey attempts to make aren’t sufficiently stark, leaving his arguments and claims ambiguous.⁵ But when approaching in his later writings one or another practical dilemma, whether in just war theory or medical ethics, Ramsey clarifies why and how Christian commitments inform deontological moral reasoning. In this chapter I will treat *Basic Christian Ethics* as the foundation for appreciating

³ For further information on Ramsey’s biography and assessments on his contributions to ethics, see, for example, Johnson and Smith (1974), Johnson (1991), and Ramsey (1994, vii–xxv).

⁴ Hereafter, references to Ramsey (1950) will appear in-text as BCE; references to Ramsey (2002) will appear in-text as PP.

⁵ For example, in one of his earliest publications, John Rawls reviews Ramsey’s *Basic Christian Ethics*. After noting the vagueness about the criterion Ramsey draws upon for Christian ethics, Rawls writes, “I fail to see how Christian ethics, on Mr. Ramsey’s interpretation, either transcends what is vaguely called natural law, common sense, and other ordinary ways of reasoning, or how it adds anything to these when we are concerned with how to make (not motive for making) just decisions where, as nearly always, there is more than one neighbor” (1951, 5; cited in Gregory 2007, 202n32).

Ramsey's understanding of Christian ethics. Then through briefly examining his later writings on the physician-patient relationship, I will clarify why and how Ramsey argues in favor of a Christian deontology.

For religious ethicists, what is at stake in revisiting and reexamining Ramsey? I am motivated to do so for the following interrelated reasons. First, Ramsey was a major thinker in twentieth-century Christian ethics. I analyze and evaluate his arguments here in order to show his continuing relevance not only for work in Christian ethics but also for normative religious ethics.⁶ Second, while much recent work in contemporary religious ethics has turned to the thick descriptions of everyday religious practices,⁷ I want to illustrate how one prominent religious ethicist thinks through and brings to bear his religious commitments when confronted with pressing moral and political dilemmas.⁸ And third, given the consonances and dissonances between religious and non-religious ethics, there is a lack of dialogue between those whose work is in religious ethics and those whose work is in philosophical ethics.⁹ I want to explore how Ramsey's distinctive theologically inflected deontological views may be usefully put into conversation with contemporary (non-religious) deontologists, highlighting the ways in which such conversations may challenge particular convictions.

⁶ A few recent books, Carnahan (2010, 2017) and Hollowell (2015), have focused on the implications of Ramsey's thought for practical ethics, especially politics and war. I view my effort here as complementary to theirs: I want to make clearer Ramsey's normative commitments such that they may be fruitfully retrieved to think about Christian ethics in general and such issues in particular.

⁷ See Bucar and Stalnaker (2012); cf. Ranganathan and Clairmont (2017).

⁸ On the continuing importance of studying canonical figures in the history of religious ethics, see Lewis (2014).

⁹ For example, "justice" is a topic of attention for both moral and political philosophers and religious ethicists. But whereas religious ethicists have been attentive to work in moral and political philosophy, Paul Weithman notes, "philosophers have been far less ready to return the favor by attending to work in religious ethics and moral theology—despite the fact that some of this work expresses deep reservations about liberalism and about rights in particular. If these reservations do attract attention, it is too often perfunctory and ends in dismissal without any serious attempt to come to grips with the deeper motivations of the criticism. The results are misunderstanding and missed opportunities to converse across disciplinary boundaries that are far more permeable than disciplinary literature sometimes suggest" (2009, 179).

Christian theology and Christian Ethics

Like many other Christian theological ethicists, Ramsey aims to explicate an account of ethics that is comprehensive, including both *deontic* (i.e., what we are obligated to do) and *evaluative* (i.e., what is good) language. To do so, Ramsey emphasizes the centrality of love, holding that it is the “ground floor” of Christian ethics (BCE, 115n14). The relationship among God, God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and humanity, more-over, provides an account of neighbor-love. On the relationship between God and ethics, Ramsey writes:

Religious conviction concerning God’s dealing with man affects the basic meaning and content of biblical ethics. God has something to do with the very meaning of obligation; he is no merely external threat standing behind morality. The ethics of Jesus, for example, cannot be understood without some understanding of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and the prophets, the God of the people of the covenant. Biblical writers do not view ethics naturalistically as rooted in human nature or in the social environment, or abstractly in terms of some generalizations about human values. They view ethics theologically as rooted in the nature and activity of God. As a consequence, man’s relation to God was thought to be of vital importance, not simply *for* ethics, but *within* ethical theory itself. (BCE, 1)

The most salient feature of this ethics is its theocentric orientation. On such an account, one’s first and greatest love is for God. God expresses God’s love for all people, and, in turn, people willingly reciprocate this love by loving God back. This relationship doesn’t simply affect the basic content and meaning of the Christian ethical life; rather, it is the source of the Christian ethical life itself.¹⁰ One expresses one’s reciprocal and obedient love for God through faithfulness, humility, reliance, trust, gratitude, thankfulness, and glorification of God. Gratefulness and thankfulness to God, Ramsey avers, describes how “Christians think of themselves standing in relation to God” (BCE, 129).

¹⁰ In contrast to Ramsey, consider William Frankena’s interpretation of the two great commandments. For Frankena, the first great commandment is a religious one while the second is a moral one (1963, 44–45). For Ramsey, there is an intimate connection between the first two commandments, with the first great commandment being lexically prior to the second, whereas for Frankena the two can be distinguished. I highlight this conflicting interpretation because (i) Ramsey and Frankena were contemporaries and (ii) Frankena made important contributions to the study of all branches of ethics.

Following from one's love for God is one's love for others. More specifically, because one loves God first and greatest, then one rightly loves one's neighbors. Since God loves each and every person, everyone is therefore "irreducibly valuable prior to his doing anything in particular."¹¹ How one should act in relation to one's neighbor, Ramsey writes:

may be summed up in the principle: To each according to the measure of his real need, not because of anything human reason can discern inherent in the needy, but because need alone is a measure of God's righteousness toward him. Such justice or righteousness is primarily neither "corrective" nor "distributive," as in the Greek view, but "redemptive," with special bias in favor of the helpless who can contribute nothing at all and are in fact "due" nothing. To the contrary, his stake in the community, the very fact that, although an alien or a forgotten man, he comes in effect to belong or still belongs to the community, this depends on "justice" being done. (BCE, 14)

In contrast to Greek accounts motivated by desert or communitarian accounts delimited by membership,¹² Ramsey holds that the love of neighbor always obtains; it is, to use contemporary deontological language, pre-institutional and unalterable. Since God made from one blood "all nations to inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17.26), everyone is a member of the human moral community and counts as neighbor. In reading and interpreting Ramsey, now, the tasks are to explicate analytically and normatively how to understand neighbor-love.

¹¹ Outka (1972, 10).

¹² On the distinction between Greek philosophy and Christianity, Ramsey writes, "[t]he full particularity of neighborly love, finding the neighbor out by first requiring nothing of him, should not be reduced to universal brotherhood or the cosmopolitan spirit. This is stoicism, not Christianity" (BCE, 94). And on the distinction between communitarianism and Christianity, Ramsey comments on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10.25–37). In the parable, the lawyer asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" In response, Jesus inverts the question, asking the lawyer, "[w]hich ... was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" "What the parable does is to demand," Ramsey writes, "that the questioner revise entirely his point of view, reformulating the question first asked so as to require neighborliness of himself rather than anything of his neighbor" (BCE, 93).

What does neighbor-love require?

What does neighbor-love require? More pointedly, Ramsey himself asks, “how does one prove himself neighbor?” For Ramsey, one’s commitment to neighbor-love is understood as “biblical justice.” On this understanding, Christian ethics isn’t concerned about doing justice; rather, it is concerned with the *kind* of justice one does. Since neighbor-love is the ground floor of Christian ethics, Christians are called “to be a Christ for our neighbors” (BCE, 21). To understand the import of this claim, Ramsey distinguishes between Christian ethics and religious ethics. On the one hand, Christian ethics is *about* Jesus; such an ethics is normative upon whom we are and how we ought to act. On the other hand, religious ethics simpliciter concerns the ethics *of* Jesus; that is, such an ethics only provides a descriptive account of what Jesus is claimed to have preached.

What does it mean, though, to be a Christ for our neighbors? Ramsey makes several interrelated points about what such a commitment requires, each of which emphasize an overflowing love for the neighbor regardless of their identity. First, interpreting Rom. 5.6–10, Ramsey writes, “[w]ith this as a prototypical divine love, then as a consequence love for the helpless, the quite ungodly, the wholly unrighteous, those who are still sinners, and love for the enemy, because essential determinants in the nature of Christian love” (BCE, 20). Second, neighbor-love is “intended to apply in a world in which there is striking, hostility, persecution, and oppression.” This ethics isn’t for the Kingdom of God, “where there presumably will be no more blows on the cheek, no more impression into military service, nor need for borrowing” (BCE, 31), but rather for our fallen one. And third, Christ’s teachings implore “non-resisting, unclaiming love, overflowing love even for an enemy, unlimited forgiveness for every offense, giving to every need, unconditional lending to him who would borrow” (BCE, 34). Just as Christ directed his love toward each and every human being, so too must we direct our love toward all. Moreover, love for the enemy in the particular “provides a crucial test for the presence or absence of regard for the neighbor for his own sake” (BCE, 99).

Following this description about the overflowing love for neighbor, the normative demands of Christian ethics aren’t supererogatory. Additionally, Christian ethics is perfectionist. Because God “disinterestedly cares for all

... we see here plainly the source of the *strenuous perfectionism* in the teachings of Jesus, the origin and foundation of love so absolutely free as his, yet so absolutely

demanding” (BCE, 16; emphasis added). He adds that Christian ethics is an “ethics of perfection which cuts man to fit the pattern, not the pattern to fit man” (BCE, 85).¹³ Ramsey further holds that “Christian liberty, it may be affirmed, cannot transcend moral law known by practical reason and sensitive conscience,” as well as “[w]hether or not there is actually a natural morality inscribed in every human heart, this much is certain: this law also Christian ethics transcends” (BCE, 83, 84).¹⁴ Despite making clear that Christian ethics is demanding and perfectionist, however, there are tensions here that Ramsey himself makes difficult. What exactly are the tensions?

The first tension concerns the perfectionist nature of Christian ethics. On standard deontological views, perfect duties describe specifically what one ought to do; moreover, these duties don’t admit of any exceptions. Imperfect duties, however, aren’t specific—the individual moral agent is given leeway about when and how he or she fulfills them; moreover, these duties do admit of exceptions.¹⁵ For Ramsey, then, what counts as perfect?

The duty to love the neighbor? If this is the case, Ramsey’s protean description of neighbor-love needs to be significantly sharpened. The second tension is closely related. Given Ramsey’s emphasis on practical reason and sensitive conscience, how should we reconcile the commandment to love one’s neighbor and how might we discern through practical reasoning the nature of that commitment? While Ramsey repeatedly emphasizes that neighbor-love is demanding (e.g., strenuous, overflowing) and expansive (i.e., each and every person counts as neighbor), he doesn’t specify what decision procedure the Christian should use to

¹³ Cf. Frankena, who writes: “[m]orality is made for man, not man for morality” (1963, 139). Cf. Matt. 12.1–8.

¹⁴ Cf. Jackson (2003, 10), for whom neighbor-love is “a metavalue, that virtue without which one has no substantive access to other goods, moral or nonmoral.”

¹⁵ Cf. Kant on hypothetical and categorical imperatives. In the *Groundwork*, while formulating what counts as a categorical imperative, Kant distinguishes between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. “When I think of a *hypothetical* imperative in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain; I do not know this until I am given the condition. But when I think of a *categorical* imperative I know at once what it contains. For, since the imperative contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law, while the law contains no condition to which it would be limited, nothing is left with which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such; and this conformity alone is what the imperative properly represents” (Kant 1996, 73; emphases original).

counts as neighbor), he doesn't specify what decision procedure the Christian should use to discern what neighbor-love practically demands.¹⁶

These tensions, however, don't seem to concern Ramsey. For him, Christian love ultimately turns on total non-resisting love of neighbor. Moreover, "[i]n place of rules for conduct, instead of 'the law' which Christianity entirely finishes, *comes not irregularity but self-regulation*" (BCE, 78; emphasis added). The Christian self-regulates through being "unconditionally bound to their neighbors" (ibid.). By acting on one's love for neighbor, one not only overcomes becoming overly self-regarding but is also freed from any prevailing laws or customs.¹⁷ Christian ethics is thus a totalizing and omnivorous ethics—"[e]verything is quite lawful, absolutely everything is permitted which love permits" (BCE, 89). Following from Christ's example, the ethics of love commits the Christian to loving each and every person, regardless of the person's identity. To be sure, Ramsey's characterization of the ethics of neighbor-love resonates with some contemporary analytic distinctions. First, his ethics is *individualist*: one's love for the neighbor tracks the particular needs of the particular neighbor. Second, it is *universalist*: not only is each and every person one's neighbor but also one is to love the neighbor prior to the neighbor doing anything in particular. And third and finally, it is *generalist*: neighbor-love isn't delimited to one's friends, co-religionists, or other special relations.¹⁸

¹⁶ On establishing decision procedures in ethics, Rawls asks: "[d]oes there exist a reasonable decision procedure which is sufficiently strong, at least in some cases, to determine the manner in which competing interests should be adjudicated, and, in instances of conflict, one interest given preference over another; and, further, can the existence of this procedure, as well as its reasonableness, be established by rational methods of inquiry?" (1999b, 1). To establish such a procedure, Rawls holds, "we are concerned with discovering reasonable criteria which, when we are given a proposition, or theory, together with the empirical evidence for it, will enable us to decide the extent to which we ought to consider to be true so in ethics we are attempting to find reasonable principles which, when we are given a proposed line of conduct and the situation in which it is to be carried out and the relevant interests it effects, will enable us to determine whether or not we ought to carry it out and hold it to be just and right" (1999b, 2). David Little (1974) attempts to explicate Ramsey's decision procedure. I will turn to his attempt later.

¹⁷ On the distinction between (improper) selfishness and (proper) self-love, see Adams (1999, 137–138).

¹⁸ In offering this characterization, I borrow and improvise on Thomas Pogge's (1992, 48–49) tripartite definition of moral cosmopolitanism. Cf. Outka (1992).

Neighbor-love and Christian Faith

To further explicate an ethics of neighbor-love, Ramsey relates ethics to faith, a relationship he neatly packages under the heading “faith working through love.” On the relationship between ethics and faith, Ramsey writes, “[f]aith working through love is concerned only to show what *love* is and to discover the neighbor’s needs, not to demonstrate that it itself is faithful” (BCE, 136; emphasis original). Faith working through love is important because one may criticize Christian ethics as being fundamentally self-centered: one acts for the neighbor fundamentally out of self-interest, that is, in order to prove oneself to be faithful. For Ramsey, however, “Christian love does not *claim* good works; it *gives* them. Christian faith does not seek its own salvation, even salvation by faith, for *faith is effective in love which seeks only the neighbor’s good*” (ibid.; emphases original). The distinction between the critic’s view and Ramsey’s is “between trust in works out of concern for one’s own eternal welfare and trust in works out of concerns for the needs of another. This is the *pons asinorum* of Christian ethics” (BCE, 138).¹⁹ Given that one’s God-relationship affects the meaning and content of Christian ethics, faith working through love collapses the distinction between religious duties, on the one hand, and moral duties, on the other. Instead, all duties are fundamentally religious.

In collapsing the distinction between moral and religious duties, Ramsey’s account gives rise to another tension: namely, between Christian love and (secular) justice. “The righteousness of God and the justice of men,” Ramsey writes, “are ordinarily distinguished in the Bible”:

God’s righteousness acting in judgment is regularly designated by the word *tsedeq*, while human justice formulated by judgments in courts of law and given in informal custom is the primary meaning of *mishpat*. To comprehend the depth and scope of the biblical notion of “justice,” it is necessary first to *distinguish* these two kinds of justice—God’s judgmental righteousness and human justice—and then to *relate* them decisively together, so that the meaning of God’s righteousness acting in judgment (*tsedeq*) becomes normative for human justice (*mishpat*). (BCE, 4)

¹⁹ For a textually grounded exploration into the relationship between neighbor-love and heavenly treasure, see Anderson (2014).

On these terms, God's righteousness provides the "measure of true justice for all human justice" (BCE, 5). For Ramsey, biblical justice should be understood as "what we today call justice *permeated* by the character of God's righteousness" (BCE, 10). In the ambit of religious ethics, then, is there any analytic or normative distinction to be made between love and justice? Or is the distinction between the two only noticeable between religious and non-religious ethics?

Following H. Richard Niebuhr (1956), love requires:

rejoicing over the existence of the beloved one; it is the desire that he be rather than not be; it is longing for his presence when he is absent; it is happiness in the thought of him; it is profound satisfaction over everything that makes him great and glorious. Love is *gratitude*: it is thankfulness for the existence of the beloved; it is the happy acceptance of everything that he gives without the jealous feeling that the self ought to be able to do as much; it is a gratitude that does not seek equality; it is wonder over the other's gift of himself in companionship. (35)

Consistent with love, (secular) justice does demand that we honor our positive and negative duties to our neighbors. But for Ramsey, love goes much further. The demandingness of love and justice permeated by God's righteousness *prima facie* outstrips (secular) justice in intensity and extensity, with Christian ethics standing in "decisive relation to Jesus Christ for the strenuous measure taken of human obligations" and contrasting with both humanism and an ethics that doesn't historically relate to Jesus (BCE, 23). While we find Ramsey again emphasizing the strenuous and distinctive character of Christian ethics, he has neither sufficiently explicated why Christian ethics should be conceived as deontological nor provided a decision procedure through which Christians might deliberate about practical matters.

Neighbor-love and the Foundations of Society

While he hasn't yet established Christian ethics as deontological, Ramsey nonetheless relates neighbor-love to the foundation and maintenance of society. On its most basic level, Ramsey's social ethics reflects what contemporary philosophers call *contractualism*, a form

of deontological moral and political reasoning. Ramsey's contractualism isn't akin to Hobbesian varieties according to which parties socially cooperate only insofar as it serves each party's own rational self-advantage. Instead, following liberal thinkers like John Rawls (1999a) and T.M. Scanlon (1982, 2003),²⁰ Ramsey might be seen as recognizing the moral symmetry that obtains among members of a social community.²¹ "In order to create and maintain community of persons, or to evoke and sustain personality in community," he writes, "much more (and more intentionally) than in economic exchange it is necessary that each seek not his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (BCE, 235). Note that Ramsey doesn't say that "each not seek *only* his own good." On this modification, though, one would equally regard (i.e., afford neighbor-love) to both the self and to the neighbor. More importantly, Ramsey further strikes against Hobbesian rational self-advantage when he writes, "[o]nly an element of concern for the other person *for his sake* creates a community among men" (BCE, 238). This emphasis tracks the notion of reasonableness (i.e., that we each recognize the moral symmetry between and among us and aim to act in accord to such symmetry) that characterizes contemporary contractualism.

Given that God's righteousness sets the standard for neighbor-love and therefore affects how we found and maintain society, we need to appreciate the distinctions that may arise for example. Our society is an agrarian one. Aaron and Beth are both farmers. Neither Aaron nor

²⁰ In developing his own version of political contractualism, Rawls writes: "[m]y aim is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant" (1999a, 10). Scanlon's contractualism focuses on the moral domain. However, his view "is close to John Rawls's as presented in *A Theory of Justice*," with differences arising "mainly from Rawls's concentration on the justice of basic social institutions" (1998, 375n1).

²¹ On the distinction between Hobbesian and Scanlonian contractualism, see Kumar (2001). Hobbesian accounts of moral reasoning, on the one hand, "take as their intended audience those who initially do not take themselves to have an interest in complying with moral standards, and tries to show how it is that compliance with moral standards better advances an individual's non-moral interests than non-compliance with such standards." Scanlonian contractualism, on the other hand, "is in no way concerned with presenting non-moral reasons [...] to those who do not recognize moral standards to be authoritative guides to proper reasoning and conduct, as to why it is in their interest to adopt such standards as authoritative. It is a characterization of moral reasoning that is firmly in the tradition of taking as its intended audience those who already recognize morality to be authoritative for them in their practical deliberations" (2001, x). Cf. Rawls (1999a, 211, 1996, 146–148).

between Christian and secular contractualism. On this distinction, consider the following Beth can till their respective land on their own. So, it is rationally advantageous for both that they help one another farm the other's land. In doing so, each promotes his or her own good and the good of the other. But this situation can radically change. For some reason—for example, Aaron has more children or acquires a new piece of machinery—he can now farm his land independent of Beth's help. On Hobbesian accounts of rational self- advantage, he no longer has reason to help Beth farm her land so that she, in turn, will help Aaron farm his land since he can now farm it on its own. What's the moral cost involved in this revised situation? Beth's conditions haven't changed, and so she won't be able to farm her land on her own. Consequently, her crops may go to waste and, more pressingly, she will suffer financially. For Rawlsians and Scanlonians, this revised situation is morally problematic. For these thinkers, there are moral reasons why, even after his situation changes, Aaron should help Beth. Beth's claims on Aaron, for these thinkers, require Aaron's consideration of Beth's reason- able interests. On this contractualist view, there isn't a reasonable basis according to which Aaron may reject Beth's claims for help farming her land. Aaron is morally required to help Beth.²²

There is only so much overlap, however, between Ramsey's and the Rawlsian- Scanlonian accounts. There is salient overlap given that both emphasize concern for the other for the other's own sake, that is, over and against extending concern for the other only insofar as the other brings about benefits to the self. Owing to its theological foundation, however, Ramsey's account proves more demanding.²³ He argues that proving one- self neighbor-loving gives the loving agent strong reasons to “elect *himself* to the position of victim” (BCE, 240). What are the implications of this view for the farm example? First, one's moral reasoning shouldn't take the form of Hobbesian rational self-advantage. Second, like in the Rawlsian-

²² On the distinction between selfishness and self-love in light of demanding obligations to the neighbor, see Ranganathan (2012, 666ff). What remains unclear, for Ramsey and other commentators, is the *extent* to which Aaron is required to help Beth. For example, what if helping Beth bankrupts Aaron? Or *nearly* bankrupts him? Outka (1972, 268) holds that equal regard doesn't require equal treatment. But to my mind, he doesn't provide a sufficient criterion for determining the limits of neighbor-love.

²³ On the demandingness of Scanlonian contractualism, however, see Ashford (2003); cf. Kumar (2003) and Parfit (2011, Chs. 15 and 22).

Scanlonian account, one's neighbor's reasonable demands require that one help one's

neighbor farm his or her land when there's no utilitarian benefit or rational advantage for one. That is to say, neighbor-love needs to be "extended as far as possible to include within *his own* good the good of all the men to whom he is actually bound whether he recognizes it or not" (BCE, 241). But third, there is a sharp distinction to be drawn. Requiring that one elect oneself to the position of victim, Ramsey's account seems to entail, would require overriding one's own moral status in one-to-one interactions. Thus, if one only has the ability, for whatever reason, to farm either one's own land or one's neighbor's then one should farm the neighbor's land.

This conclusion, however, conflicts with one's commonsense moral intuition. Specifically, in one-to-one cases, one is morally permitted—if not obligated—to prefer one's status and welfare to another's.²⁴ Given that people stand in moral symmetry with one another, one's status and welfare count as much as another's. On Rawls's account, for example, people have the basic liberty to the integrity of the person. Such a basic liberty is "inalienable":

any agreement by citizens which waives or violates a basic liberty, however rational and voluntary this agreement may be, is void *ab initio*; that is, it has no legal force and does not affect any citizen's basic liberties. Moreover, the priority of the basic liberties implies that they cannot be justly denied to anyone, or to any group of persons, or even to all citizens generally, on the grounds that such is the desire, or overwhelming preference, of an effective political majority, however strong and enduring. The priority of liberty excludes such considerations from the grounds that can be entertained. (Rawls 1996, 365, cf. 1999a, 3)

For contemporary deontologists, this inalienability trades on the idea that there is a *separateness between persons*. Why does the separateness between persons matter? For Ramsey, recall that Christian ethics is a deontological ethics and not an ethics of the good. Conversely, utilitarianism is a normative theory whose *telos* is the maximization of the good. Whether one should perform one or another action depends on whether that action maximizes the good.

²⁴ On partiality toward oneself in one-to-one cases, see Miller (2009).

Following such reasoning to its logical end, “the violation of the liberty of a few,” Rawls notes, “[may] be made right by the greater good shared by many” (1999a, 23). Given this commitment, “[u]tilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons” (1999a, 24). Given that Ramsey *is* committed to a deontological ethics, though, he needs to provide two explanations. First, he needs to explain *how* his Christian deontology in general takes seriously the separateness of persons. Second, he needs to explain *why* the interests of others (i.e., the maximization of the greater good) may permit overriding one’s own interests.²⁵ At the very least, the conflict between the separateness of persons and electing oneself to the position of victim points to a class of cases in which a direct contrast may be drawn between the demands of neighbor-love and (secular) deontology.²⁶

Further Specifying Ramsey’s Deontological Decision procedure

Thus far, I have sketched in a preliminary way Ramsey’s account of neighbor-love. For Ramsey, God’s righteousness and Christ’s social teaching lend themselves to a particularly demanding social ethics. Christians are to be a Christ for their neighbors, sacrificing themselves for their neighbors when necessary. I have noted further how his Christian deontology shares features with contemporary moral and political contractualism. Now, drawing from David Little (1974), I want to tease out further features of Ramsey’s decision procedure. More pointedly, I highlight the (implicit or explicit) considerations that Ramsey invokes and attaches to his deontological view. Once I have done so, we will be better positioned to understand how Ramsey moves from Christian reasoning in general to Christian deontology in particular.

In reading Ramsey, Little looks at how Ramsey relates neighbor-love, justification, and morality. On Little’s reading, to provide justification requires doing three things. First, one must identify the scope of people who might be affected by one or another action. Little calls

²⁵ Elsewhere, in his discussion of the use of force and self-defense, Ramsey does qualify (or restrain) this reading. See BCE, 177. As I discuss elsewhere in this chapter, though, discerning the criterion Ramsey draws upon remains difficult.

²⁶ For further discussion about the separateness of persons, especially as it relates to debates between consequentialists and deontologists, see Nagel (1970, 142), Nozick (1974, 33), Rawls (1999a, Ch.1), and Scanlon (1982).

this “situational relevance”: in interpersonal-moral contexts (e.g., the farm example considered above) an action may affect only one or a few individuals while in institutional-political contexts (e.g., war) it may affect many. The second thing one must do is “validate” one’s actions, that is, reflect on “a hierarchy of increasingly general and abstract rules and principles, and, finally, to an ultimate basic principle(s) or standard(s)” (140). For Ramsey, this basic validating norm is neighbor-love. In contemporary philosophical terms, Ramsey is a *monist* rather than a *pluralist* about values: when deliberating about what to do, neighbor-love is the *only* value to which an agent turns. Neighbor-love “functions as the ultimate logical justification (standard of validity) for the lower-order principles, rules and particular judgments” (140). And the third and final phase of justification is the “vindication of a moral position”: “how one perceives and is convinced of the particular validating norms he has adopted (along with the procedures for relating and applying norms)” (141).

Further attention needs to be paid here to Ramsey’s account of validation. I noted above that the neighbor-loving agent self-regulates through being bound to his or her neighbors. On Little’s interpretation, neighbor-love thus has *discretionary* and *formalistic* sides. On the one hand, neighbor-love is discretionary because it is, at least in certain cases, inexpressible in the form of principles; it is neither fully determinate nor calculable. On the other hand, and in other cases, neighbor-love is expressible in principle; it is formal and determinate, “yielding certain principles and rules—like order, justice, and law” (149). But how to think together the discretionary and the formalistic? As I explored earlier, Ramsey doesn’t “elaborate or clarify very well the precise character of these basic notions. Nor does he elucidate very successfully the relations among the specifying principles, nor between each of them and agape” (146). For Ramsey and Little, however, the discretionary and the formalistic do establish some things for the neighbor-loving agent. The formalistic side serves to establish the *outer limits* on an action. Once these limits are established, the loving agent is at his or her discretion to act for the sake of the neighbor. But in the absence of a formal decision procedure, Little notes, “the teleological task is ‘systematically indeterminate’ and incalculable. That means that in the matter of teleological judgments, rational certitude must give way to some other kind of intuitive or possibly religiously inspired certitude” (148). What still needs to be resolved, then, is reconciling Ramsey’s deontological ethics with the indeterminateness of neighbor-love.

Neighbor-love and Deontological Constraints In the Physician-patient Interaction

In an effort to articulate Ramsey's deontology in the terms of neighbor-love, I now turn to his writings on medical ethics. I focus specifically on Ramsey's views about physician-patient interaction, highlighting his conception of the "patient as person."²⁷

Before turning to his writings about medical ethics, consider how Ramsey understands Christian ethics to relate to medical ethics. In prefacing *The Patient as Person* (2002), he writes: "[t]his, then, is a book *about ethics*, written by a Christian ethicist. I hold that medical ethics is consonant with the ethics of a wider human community," with medical ethics being "only a particular case of the latter" (PP, xlv). "The moral requirements governing the relations of physicians to patients and research to subjects," he adds, "are only a special case of the moral requirements governing any relations between man and man" (PP, xlv-xlv). For any and all relations, though, there is "the ethical question": "[w]hat is the meaning of the faithfulness of one human being to another in every one of these relations?" (PP, xlv). He also comments on his commitments to moral and religious premises:

I hold with Karl Barth that covenant-fidelity is the inner meaning and purpose of our creation as human beings, while the whole of creation is the external basis and condition of the possibility of covenant. This means that the conscious acceptance of covenant responsibilities is the inner meaning of even the "natural" or systemic relations into which we are born and of the institutions or roles we enter by choice, while this fabric provides the external framework for human fulfillment in explicit covenants among men. The practice of medicine is one such covenant. (PP, xlv)

Given his commitments to upholding covenantal responsibilities in general, then, Ramsey aims to think through and explicate what such responsibilities entail in the context of medicine, including "how to show respect for, protect, preserve, and honor the life of fellow man" (PP, xlvi).

²⁷ This section draws on Ranganathan (2017). Several paragraphs are repeated.

In prefacing his argument, Ramsey also addresses a concern advanced by his interlocutors: namely that, in approaching moral dilemmas, the theological content of his arguments disappears.²⁸ I have earlier discussed that Ramsey views medical ethics to be a particular case of ethics more generally. In the specialized case of medical ethics, one's general ethical commitments are specified to address the particular problems that medical interactions and research present. Moreover, he adds that he will "not be embarrassed to use as an interpretive principle of the Biblical norm of *fidelity to covenant*, with the meaning it gives to righteousness between man and man" (PP, xlv). But he also notes that "this is a not a very prominent feature" in his argument "since it is necessary for an ethicist to go as far as possible into the technical and other particular aspects of the problems he ventures to take up" (PP, xlv). While noting his commitments to the covenant responsibilities, he doesn't simultaneously claim that such commitments also entail strict distinctiveness between Christian and non-Christian views: "in the midst of any of these urgent human problems, an ethicist finds that he has been joined—whether in agreement or with some disagreement—by men of various persuasions, often quite different ones. There is in actuality a community of moral discourse concerning the claims of persons" (PP, xlv).

Following these clarifying notes, how does Ramsey approach problems in medical ethics, and how does his approach clarify his deontological commitments? The physician, Ramsey writes, "makes decisions as an expert but also a man among men; and his patient is a human being coming to his birth or to his death, or being rescued from illness or injury in between. Therefore, the doctor who attends the case has reason to be attentive to the patient as person" (PP, xlv). Underwriting the relationship between the physician and patient is a more basic relationship, that is, one between members of the covenanted community. Recall that, in order to found and sustain society, Ramsey holds that individuals seek not their good but the good of others. Such concern for the other person, whether in social relations in general or in medical ethics in particular, fosters community among people.

Privileging the person, he notes, does not permit the physician to overstep his or her

²⁸ On this criticism, see, for example, Hauerwas (1995), Engelhardt (2014), and Bishop (2014). For further reflections on the relationship among Ramsey, Christian ethics, and medical ethics, see McKenny (1995) and Sulmasy (2014).

bounds in the treatment of the patient. Therefore, privileging the person delimits what may be done in the course of treatment. In deontological terms, there exists a priority of the right to the good. There consequently must be, Ramsey says, “a determination of the rightness or wrongness of the action and not only of the good to be obtained in medical care or from medical investigation” (PP, 2). To ascertain what is right, the physician is required to get consent from the patient. The consent requirement reflects the “canon of loyalty” between the physician and patient. For Ramsey, consent isn’t reducible to a brute libertarian contract, according to which whatever is consented to may be done. He instead suggests viewing the relationship between the physician and patient—who he calls “joint-adventurers”—as a partnership. In seeking consent, we find Ramsey emphasizing elements found in contractualist reasoning—for example, the moral symmetry between individuals and the priority of the right to the good.

On Richard B. Miller’s reading (2003, 243), the heart of Ramsey’s emphasis on informed consent is found in the following passage, wherein Ramsey fully explicates what he means by a “canon of loyalty” in medical practice:

[a]ny human being is more than a patient or experimental subject; he is a *personal* subject—every bit as much a man as the physician-investigator. Fidelity is between man and man in these procedures. Consent expresses or establishes this relationship, and the requirement of consent sustains it. Fidelity is the bond between consenting man and consenting man in these procedures. The principle of an informed consent is the cardinal *canon of loyalty* joining men together in medical practice and investigation. In this requirement, faithfulness among men—the faithfulness that is normative for all the covenants or moral bonds of life with life—gains specification for the primary relations peculiar to medical practice. (PP, 5)

Since it is a partnership between the physician and patient, Ramsey adds, “consent is a continuing and repeatable requirement” (PP, 6). What’s more, the patient must also be in a position to make “reasonably free and adequately informed consent.” His emphasis on consent takes seriously the moral and epistemic claims people make on one another. Ramsey terms these claims “faithfulness-claims.” “An informed consent alone,” he avers, “exhibits and

establishes medical practice and investigation as a voluntary association of free men in a common cause” (PP, 11).²⁹

Ramsey continues to develop (and emphasize the importance of) consent in his discussion of medical experimentation on children. One cannot subject a child to an experimental procedure, he says, “when there is no possible relation to the child’s recovery” (PP, 12). Thus, consent safeguards against a child being reduced to a test site, an epistemological apparatus, that is used to serve medicine’s advancement. Moreover, the child that must benefit from an experimental procedure must be the child being subject to that procedure—not some abstract future child (PP, 13). But a child isn’t sufficiently formed as an agent such that he or she is able to consent on his or her own. So, it is the child’s parents who must consent on the child’s behalf. The parents must be in a position to reasonably consent to one or another procedure. The child’s parents must therefore shoulder particular burdens:

A parent’s decisive concern is for the care and protection of the child, to whom he owes the highest fiduciary loyalty, even when he also appreciates the benefits to come to others from the investigation and might submit his own person to experiment in order to obtain them. (PP, 25)

In his comments about experimenting on children, Ramsey highlights that, like all other people, children are recipients of God’s love and are therefore irreducibly valuable. Children must always be treated as neighbors—that is, as ends-in-themselves (PP, 35)—and never merely as instruments. Like Bishop, Ramsey seems alive to the idea that medicine may tend, especially in experimentation, toward turning children from subjects into objects. But his emphases on consent and fiduciary loyalty aim to foreclose such a move.

What can we discern from Ramsey’s discussion of physician-patient interaction? Like other contractualist normative theories, Ramsey’s characterization of physician-patient interaction emphasizes the importance of the parties consenting to one or another procedure. In this instance, consent might be recognized as properly neighbor-loving. Since the physician

²⁹ On his view, there is only one exception to expressed consent: when the patient is in extreme danger and cannot explicitly consent, for example, when the patient is comatose or otherwise unconscious (PP, 7).

recognizes his or her relationship with the patient as one that is continuous with a relationship between members of the moral community, the physician recognizes the patient as neighbor. That is to say, the physician takes seriously the patient's moral status as neighbor. This recognition is mirrored, moreover, on the permissibility of experimentation on children. One needs to treat the child as neighbor, with any procedure directed toward the child's own being and well-being. Moreover, through seeking consent, we find the determinate limits of neighbor-love: the physician may not override the patient's own values in prescribing one or another course of action. And in general cases of physician-patient interaction and experimentation on children in particular, seeking consent as joint-adventurers takes seriously the separateness of persons by avoiding maximizing some state-of-affairs in which the patient lives but their values are overridden.

Conclusion

I believe we can succinctly state Ramsey's Christian deontological account. At its simplest level, Christian ethics holds that one has a duty (moral, religious) to love one's neighbor. More pointedly, one is *always* to love the neighbor. Thus, neighbor-love is *perfect*, lending itself to an especially demanding characterization of deontology. Insofar as he or she is commanded to love the neighbor, the Christian must only deliberate about how to carry out this duty. Based on the farm example, Ramsey's account holds that, in one-to-one cases, one is to prefer the neighbor's welfare to one's own. Neighbor-love lends itself to loving the neighbor over and above one- self. For Ramsey, such a self-abnegating ethics isn't problematic; rather, it simply reifies his ethics as normatively and practically demanding, with love fostering the Christian toward perfection. Such a self-abnegating ethics does, however, conflict with the views of many contemporary philosophers. Moreover, given Ramsey's reliance on the principle "all is permitted that love permits," we are faced with some prima facie interpretive problems. For example, should we evaluate actions by whether or not they're *maximally* neighbor-loving? Such an evaluative stance would lend itself to a consequentialist characterization of Christian ethics. Ramsey dispels this characterization, however, through his repeated emphasis on the priority of the right to the good. Freed from any prevailing law or custom, the mutability of neighbor-love, which on some possible interpretations may easily lend itself to consequentialism, is directed and delimited by covenant fidelity. The ways in which

covenant fidelity informs Ramsey's Christian deontological decision procedure are fully explicated in the context of his medical ethics. Following from the covenant, one can't violate the moral status of another, regardless of whatever benefits may be produced. As joint-adventurers, we recognize our moral symmetry as persons and the necessity of consent this symmetry entails. The fixity of perfectionism and, especially, the priority of the right to the good therefore establish Ramsey's ethics as deontological.³⁰

³⁰ For comments on earlier versions of this chapter, thanks to Jason Heron, Chip Lockwood, Rich Miller, Jamie Pitts, and Sam Kessler.

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