



A Dangerous Confusion

What pro-life critics of the COVID vaccines get wrong

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what instances in your day-to-day life do you find yourself “materially cooperating” with evil as part of the large economic and political systems we live within? Have you taken any steps to mitigate your cooperation (i.e. stopped buying products from a certain company, stopped eating meat, started making donations to a particular nonprofit, etc.)?

2. Does the fact that an evil act eventually produces good—i.e. cells from an aborted fetus lead to life-saving medical research—change its moral status?

3. How should we reckon with our appropriation of “past evil” (for instance, the institution of slavery, which produced generational wealth)? Because the past is past, Cloutier argues that we should be most concerned with avoiding perpetuation, or the “facilitation of ongoing injustice.” How might we avoid perpetuating the past evil of slavery?

4. “Pro-life advocates should focus on the real problems and not get distracted by condemning new life-saving vaccines that have nothing to do with the perpetuation of abortion,” Cloutier writes. What are other problems that pro-life people should concern themselves with, in bioethics and elsewhere?

5. Cloutier warns that “desensitization” to evil can “give scandal” to Christian witness. How should Catholics (especially liberal Catholics) avoid desensitization to the evil of abortion?

6. Cloutier poses two questions: Do the COVID-19 vaccines pose any problems traditionally associated with cooperation? (He answers “no.”) And do the vaccines somehow bear the stain of individual and societal sin? (He answers “yes.”) How do you answer these questions?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Daniel K. Finn, “What Can You Do?” October 2018: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/what-can-you-do>

The Editors, “Abortion & Performative Politics,” June 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/strutting-fighting>

M. Cathleen Kaveny, “Appropriation of Evil: Cooperation’s Mirror Image,” May 2000: <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/61/61.2/61.2.4.pdf>

Gilbert Meilaender, “Gene Editing: Promise & Peril,” April 2017: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/gene-editing-promise-peril>