

*The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia
of Philosophers in America*

From 1600 to the Present

Edited by
John R. Shook

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Cornelis de Waal

PELLEGRINO, EDMUND DANIEL (1920–2013)

Edmund D. Pellegrino was born on 22 June 1920 in Newark, New Jersey, and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He received a BS degree, honoring in chemistry, from St. John's University in 1941. He then attended the New York University College of Medicine, earning the MD in 1944. After internships, residencies, research fellowships, and hospital positions during 1944–59 in New York and New Jersey, and following service in the Air Force as a physician and flight surgeon (1946–48), he became a professor of medicine at the University of Kentucky (1959–66) and at the SUNY Health Sciences Center at Stony Brook, New York (1966–73),

where he subsequently was appointed Dean of Medicine, and chairman of the Health Sciences Center. Having transitioned to administrative roles, he then was Chancellor of the Center for the Health Sciences at the University of Tennessee (1973–75), and President and Chairman of the Yale University–New Haven Medical Center in Connecticut (1975–78).

In 1978 Pellegrino became Professor of Clinical Medicine and Community Medicine at the Georgetown University School of Medicine, and later that year was named President of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., a position he held until 1982. Thereafter he was named John Carroll Professor of Medicine and Medical Ethics at Georgetown, and also became the director of its Kennedy Institute of Ethics in 1983. In 1989 he shifted his administrative duties to Director of Georgetown's Center for the Advanced Study of Ethics (CASE). In 1991 he founded the Center for Clinical Bioethics within the Georgetown University Medical Center and served as its first director. Stepping down from directing the Center in 1996, he returned to clinical and educational roles as John Carroll Professor of Medicine and Medical Ethics from 1996 until retiring in 2000 as Professor Emeritus, although he remained an active presence at the Center. Pellegrino was appointed as Chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, serving President George W. Bush's administration from 2005 through 2009. Following his tenure at the Council, he returned to Georgetown to re-assume direction of the Center for Clinical Bioethics through 2012. In 2013 it was renamed the Edmund D. Pellegrino Center for Clinical Bioethics in his honor. Pellegrino died in Bethesda, Maryland, on 13 June 2013.

Pellegrino was among the first professors of medicine to teach advanced courses in medical ethics, while at the University of Kentucky in the late 1950s, and he remained

at the forefront of philosophy of medicine and medical ethics for sixty years. In 1969, Pellegrino was a founder of the Society for Health and Human Values, which later became the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, and served a term as its president. He was the founding editor of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, and published many books and hundreds of articles.

Pellegrino's immense stature in medical ethics, moral philosophy, and the medical humanities was amply recognized in many ways. He was a fellow of the American College of Physicians, a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a Hastings Center fellow, and a distinguished fellow with The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity. The recipient of many honorary degrees, he also received the Beecher Award for Life Achievement in Bioethics from The Hastings Center, the Benjamin Rush Award from the American Medical Association, and the Abraham Flexner Award from the Association of American Medical Colleges. His prominence was not due to academic achievements alone. He helped to found Washington Archdiocesan Health Care Network for the poor in 1984; he hosted the visit of Pope John Paul II to Catholic University of America in 1979; he served on UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee, and in 1994 he joined the advisors of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life. Befitting his Catholic service, he was the recipient of University of Notre Dame's Laetare Award in 1998, perhaps the highest honor for Catholics bestowed in the U.S., and he received the John Carroll Society's 2013 James Cardinal Hickey Lifetime Service Award.

Pellegrino argued that a robust philosophy of medicine is essential to define both the responsibilities borne of its practice, and the moral and therapeutic agencies of the physician.

According to Pellegrino, the primacy of the patient's good underlies the goals and practices of medicine, and serves as the fiduciary bedrock of the doctor-patient relationship. In 1979, he published two seminal works: "Toward a Reconstruction of Medical Morality: The Primacy of the Act of Profession and the Fact of Illness," and *Humanism and the Physician*. Successive works, often co-authored with David Thomasma of Loyola University Chicago, defined the philosophy of medicine, the act of medicine, the covenantal basis of medicine as profession and practice, and the importance of key moral and intellectual virtues of the physician for the clinical relationship. These virtues include fidelity to trust, benevolence, effacement of self-interest, compassion, intellectual honesty, justice and prudence. In *A Philosophical Basis of Medical Practice* (1981) and *For the Patient's Good: The Restoration of Beneficence in Health Care* (1988), Pellegrino's foundations concerning the 'telos' and ultimate ends of medicine yield four essential goods to be promoted by this doctor-patient relationship: the biomedical good, the good according to patient's choice(s), the good of the patient-as-person, and what the patient regards as ultimately good (inclusive of religious values), in ascending order of importance.

The physician's ethical compass may be fixed on the patient's medical well-being, as virtue ethics demands, yet physicians are increasingly constrained by demands of multiplying social interests. The medical profession experienced dramatic stresses from broader society as the twentieth century proceeded, arising from legal regulations protecting the patient as a citizen, financial considerations regarding the patient as a consumer of insurance and government funds, and corporate interventions regarding the doctor as an employee to be managed. What shall happen to the very idea of medical ethics, if health care professionals cannot reliably

act accordingly? Pellegrino's profound meditations on such questions started early in his career. In addressing medicine as a profession, he developed systematic, masterful investigations into the commoditization of medicine, medical paternalism, ethico-legal tensions and conflicts, and ethical relativism. At the core of his arguments was his postulation of a fundamental philosophy of medicine, which served to structure and inform ethical constructs and conduct within the experiential situations that encompass the attending doctor and the ill patient.

Dismissive critics faulted Pellegrino's emphasis upon virtue ethics and adherence to formulaic moral doctrines from a single denomination, despite his efforts to situate the virtues as aspects of individual agency, and to ground moral doctrine in humanistic ways. Admiring critics such as Robert Veatch argued that medicine has become a social contract, influenced by polyglot ethical values, and clinical bioethics could not be entirely grounded on such a narrow (and somewhat antiquated) basis as a "covenantal" relationship of a dutiful doctor and a vulnerable patient. Despite such criticisms, Pellegrino's seminal contributions have been regarded as establishing a philosophical basis of the medical profession, the good of the patient, and key virtues important for the practicing physician. Taken together, his high ethical expectations for the practices of medical care and medical professionals remain a worthy and philosophically challenging standard.

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