One could desire a sovereign method for resolving all of one's ethical conflicts. This would be a system that gives a single, decisive directive for or answer to all dilemmas, an answer that demands unanimity because its reasons always do or because the logical construction of the method is itself unquestionable. One could plausibly argue that both classical utilitarianism and the demand for universalizability (as in Kantian ethics) aim to fulfill this desire for unique and universally accepted directives. Fortunately or unfortunately, the desire seems doomed to frustration. For there are good, rich arguments against the possibility of ever realizing this wish [1].

Still, one might hope for a weaker, though unified method. Such a method would give a definitive answer for many dilemmas and, perhaps, leave others untouched. Recently, it has been alleged that some philosophers take this position by making autonomy the center of their ethical theory and drawing one definitive answer to a dilemma. Howard Brody ([2] pp. 190–1) seems to make this charge against Tristram Engelhardt [3].

Abandoning the quest for a perfect method, one could have a lesser goal and seek a method constituted by a cluster of ideas, insights, rules and principles—a method that does not have the definitive power of those sketched above and even lacks much in the way of justification that could be offered for its defense [4]. There is a growing literature that takes this position.

Apart from the longing or hunt for any sort of method, one could want and hunt for a methodology for ethics. Among other things, a methodology might include the following: having an approach to sorting dilemmas into kinds, generating and refining methods of resolution, addressing whether a method ought to be held to providing one answer in all cases or only to suggesting a set of solutions and acknowledging that there is no one right answer.

When one is seeking either a method or a methodology in ethics, one is doing philosophy. That is, thinking about ethical problems and thinking about thinking about ethical problems are both philosophy. The former may be more "applied"
than the latter, but both involve commitment to logical explorations of ideas and principles traditionally considered in the province of philosophy. However, the ethos of philosophy prescribes that a person should not do one without sometimes getting around to the other. Anyway, by both history and bent, philosophers would seem to be mandated to be reflective about what they do and the tools they use.

The call for papers from which this issue of *Theoretical Medicine* arises asked for essays on method, methodology and moral decision making. The responses brought a set of essays diverse in their conception of what this means.

The essay by Thomasine Kushner, Raymond A. Belliotti and Donald Buckner identifies a major statement of methodology in meta-ethics— one associated with John Rawls and Norman Daniels— and applies it to generating a method to apply to a case of managing an endangered newborn. One could say that the Rawls/Daniels approach is a prominent position on methodology in the literature of contemporary ethical theory. It is, of course, not without its critics. Nevertheless, it is valuable to see authors use it in method development and decision making. It is interesting to have their effort so that we can test or explore what entails what — for example, whether one can accept their methodology as rational or even “best” but reject their method, or whether one can subscribe to both their methodology and method and still reject their management decision because of differences about some key concepts or weights assigned to values.

The essay by Albert Jonsen focuses upon a different methodology and method. In recent years, Jonsen has been articulating a defense of casuistry. Taking this as a methodology, Jonsen attempts two tasks: to advance his defense of casuistry and to generate details of a method. Again, there is the interesting possibility that one could be largely convinced that this methodology and method are very valuable (even best?) and yet think that Jonsen uses them in ways one could reasonably resist.

The essay by Benjamin Freedman employs a method with only a fragment of a methodology. It is avowedly a work in progress. It shows how work in progress can be very valuable (even “deep”) and still lack much explicit methodological background. Freedman’s primary methodology could be said to be one of hunting for the justification for the course he believes to be right by critiquing positions that are available in the literature and finding one (some?) that he thinks are right. The issue is when, if ever, care givers should disclose confidential information when a patient puts others at risk of HIV exposure. The care with which Freedman examines justifications for his approach is very helpful and may be worthy of being thought of as a methodology. Still, one could allege his methodology is too empirical — too dependent on finding literature to critique or endorse. Readers could worry that good arguments about confidentiality are eluding them and that one or another that got away could