

Abortion, Bioethics, and Personhood: A Philosophical Reflection

Francis J. Beckwith

Francis J. Beckwith is associate professor of philosophy, culture, and law at Trinity International University. He has published over fifty articles and twelve books including the award-winning *Politically Correct Death: Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights* (Baker, 1993). His most recent book is *Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life* (College Press, 2000).

Abortion is the issue that first brought evangelical Christians and other cultural conservatives into the arena of bioethics. Although today bioethics is dominated by other issues that are perceived as more pressing, the answer to the philosophical question lurking behind abortion—Who and what are we?—turns out to be the key that unlocks the ethical quandaries posed by these other issues. After all, if human persons ought not to be either subjects of research or killed without justification, and if the fetus from conception is a human person,¹ then embryo experimentation, abortion, and cloning² are *prima facie* morally wrong.

However, some bioethicists have attempted to deal with the issue of human personhood by either sidestepping it or making a distinction between human beings and human persons, putting the fetus in the former category but not the latter. In this paper I will address both attempts.

Sidestepping the Issue: The Failure of Neutrality

Some bioethicists seek to sidestep the question of personhood by suggesting a neutral posture toward it. They maintain that bioethical decisions can be made apart from answering this question. Take, for example, the 1994 recommendations of the National Institutes of Health Embryo Research Panel, a body consisting of bioethicists across many disciplines including philosophy, theology, law, and medicine. Formed in 1993, this panel was

commissioned to make recommendations about what types of research on the embryo prior to implantation and outside the woman's uterus (*ex utero*) are appropriate or inappropriate for federal funding. The main ethical concern for the panel was the moral permissibility of creating human embryos for the sole purpose of experimenting on them. After hearing thousands of hours of testimony by experts on all sides of the debate, the panel concluded in its final report that some research was acceptable for federal support, some warranted further review, and some was unacceptable. But what is remarkable is how the panel attempted to sidestep the issue of personhood, apparently believing that it was possible to make policy without addressing it. In the first 300 words of the report's executive summary, the panel writes that "it conducted its deliberations in terms that were independent of a particular religious or philosophical perspective."³ Yet, the panel supported federal funding of research on the preimplanted embryo on the basis that "it does not have the same moral status as infants and children" because it lacks "developmental individuation . . . , the lack of even the possibility of sentience and most other qualities considered relevant to the moral status of persons, and the very high rate of natural mortality at this stage."⁴ Clearly, despite its earlier disclaimer that it would propose recommendations "independent" of any perspective, the panel affirmed (and argued for) a policy that is, by its own admission, *dependent* on

a philosophical perspective, for it was employed by the panel to distinguish between those beings who are and who are not members of the moral community of persons. This is not a neutral perspective.

Courts have been no more successful at sidestepping the question of personhood, even though they claim (and perhaps even believe) they have successfully accomplished it. Consider, for example, Justice Harry Blackmun's often-quoted comments from *Roe v. Wade*: "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate."⁵

Hence, the state should remain "neutral" and not take one theory of life and force those who do not agree with that theory to subscribe to it, which is the reason why Blackmun writes in *Roe*, "In view of all this, we do not agree that, by adopting one theory of life, Texas may override the rights of the pregnant woman that are at stake."⁶ Thus for the pro-life advocate to propose that non-pro-life women should be forbidden from having abortions, on the basis that individual human personhood begins at conception or at least sometime before birth, is, according to the Court, a violation of the rights of non-pro-life women.

But the problem with this reasoning is that it simply cannot deliver on it what it promises. For to claim, as Justices Blackmun does, that the Court should be "neutral" and not propose one theory of life over another, and that the decision to abort should be left exclusively to the discretion of each pregnant woman, is to propose a theory of life. For such a proposal

has all the earmarks of a theory of life that legally segregates fetuses from full-fledged membership in the human community, since it in practice excludes fetuses from constitutional protection. Although verbally the Court denied taking sides, part of the theoretical grounding of its legal opinion, whether it admits to it or not, is that the fetus is not a human person worthy of protection in this society.

Thus, the Court actually did take sides on when life begins. It concluded that the fetus is not a human person, for the procedure permitted in *Roe*, abortion, is something that the Court itself admits it would not have ruled a fundamental right if it were shown to the satisfaction of the Court that the fetus is a human person: "If the suggestion of personhood [of the unborn] is established, the appellant's case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [Fourteenth Amendment]."⁷

But this conditional concession cuts both ways. For if, as Blackmun admits, the right to abortion is contingent upon the status of the fetus, then the allegedly disputed fact about life's beginning means that the right to abortion is disputed as well. For a conclusion's support—in this case, "abortion is a fundamental right"—is only as good as the truth of its most important premise—in this case, "the fetus is not a human person." So, the Court's admission that abortion-rights is based on a widely disputed fact, far from establishing a right to abortion, entails that it, not only does not know when life begins, but it does not know when, if ever, the right to abortion begins.⁸

Not All Human Beings Are Persons?

From a strictly scientific point of view, there is no doubt that individual human life begins at conception and does not end until natural death. At the moment of conception, when sperm and ovum cease to exist as individual entities, a new being with its own genetic code comes into existence. All that is needed for its development is food, water, air, and an environment conducive to its survival.⁹

These facts typically are not denied by those who believe that abortion should be justified at some point during pregnancy.¹⁰ What is denied, however, is that the unborn is a human *person*. And what is affirmed by these advocates is that the unborn does not become a human person until some decisive moment after conception.

Some argue that personhood does not arrive until brain waves are detected (40 to 43 days).¹¹ Others, such as Mary Anne Warren,¹² define a person as a being who can engage in cognitive acts such as sophisticated communication, consciousness, solving complex problems, self-motivated activity and having a self-concept. This would put the arrival of personhood at some time after *birth*. Still others, such as L. W. Sumner,¹³ hold a more moderate position and argue that human personhood does not arrive until the fetus is sentient, the ability to feel and sense as a conscious being. This, according to Sumner, occurs possibly as early as the middle weeks of the second trimester of pregnancy and definitely by the end of that trimester.

Although these criteria differ from each other in important ways, they all have one thing in common: each maintains that if and only if an entity *functions* in a certain way are we warranted in calling that entity a person. Defenders of these crite-

ria argue that once a human being, whether born or unborn, acquires a certain function or functions—whether it is brain waves, rationality, sentience, etc.—it is then and only then that a person actually exists. Those who defend these personhood criteria typically make a distinction between “being a human” and “being a person.” They argue that although fetuses are members of the species *homo sapiens*, and in that sense are human, they are not truly persons until they fulfill a particular set of personhood criteria.

Problems with Personhood Criteria

Although functional definitions of personhood may tell us *some* conditions that are *sufficient* to say that a being is a person, they are not adequate in revealing to us all the conditions that are sufficient for a particular being to be called a person. For example, when a human being is asleep, unconscious, and temporarily comatose, she is not functioning as a person as defined by some personhood criteria. Nevertheless, most people would reject the notion that a human being is not a person while in any of these states. In other words, while personhood criteria, such as the ones presented by Warren can tell us that a being is a person, these criteria are not adequate to declare a being a non-person: The exercise of rational thought tells us that a being is a person; when that person is sleeping, and thus is not exercising rational thought, that lack of exercise of the thought function does not make her a non-person at that time. Consequently, it seems more consistent with our moral intuitions to say that personhood is not something that arises when certain functions are in place, but rather is something that grounds these

functions, whether or not they are ever actualized in the life of a human being. Thus, defining personhood strictly in terms of function is inadequate.

In response, the abortion advocate, not wanting to abandon his personhood criteria, may argue that the analogy between sleeping/unconscious/comatose persons and fetuses breaks down because the former *at one time* in their existence functioned as persons and will probably do so in the future, while the latter did not. But this point seems to ignore the significant flaw in defining personhood strictly in terms of function. For to claim that a human being can be functional, become non-functional, and then return to a state of function is to assume that there is some underlying personal unity to this individual. Thus, it is intelligible for us to say that the person who has returned to functional capacity is the *same* person who was functional prior to being in a non-functional state and yet continued to exist while not functioning. If not, then we would have to make the absurd claim that a new “person” has popped into existence and that the original “person” ceased to exist upon the cessation of his personhood functions. If, however, we were to identify both the first person and the second person with the human organism from which these personal functions have arisen, then the human person *is* the human organism as long as the human organism exists.

Consider the following example. Suppose your Uncle Jed is in a terrible car accident that results in him being in a coma from which he may or may not wake. Imagine that he remains in this state for roughly two years and then awakens. He seems to be the same Uncle Jed that you knew before he went into the coma,

even though he’s lost some weight, hair, and memories. Was he a person during the coma? Could the physicians have killed Uncle Jed’s body during that time because it was not functioning as a person? If one holds to the personhood criteria we reviewed above, it is difficult to see why it would be wrong to kill Uncle Jed while he is in the coma. Yet, it *would be* morally wrong to kill Uncle Jed while in this state.

Suppose you were to conclude that Uncle Jed’s life is valuable while in the coma because *at one time* prior to the coma he functioned as a person and probably will do so in the future after coming out of the coma. But this would be a mistake. For we can change the story a bit and say that when Uncle Jed awakens from the coma he loses virtually all his memories and knowledge including his ability to speak a language, engage in rational thought, and have a self-concept. It turns out that while in the coma he was in the exact same position as the standard fetus, for he had the same capacities as the fetus. He would still literally be the same person he was before the coma but he would be more like he was before he had a “past.” He would have the natural inherent capacity to speak a language, engage in rational thought, and have a self-concept, but he would have to develop and learn them all over again in order for these capacities to result, as they did before, in actual abilities.

Consider one more illustration. Imagine that there are two newborn twins, Larry and Ervin. Larry attains self-consciousness and then lapses into a coma for eight years, after which he will come out. Ervin is born in a coma, never attaining self-consciousness, and will come out of it the same moment as Larry. The only

difference between Larry and Ervin is one of function—the former attained self-consciousness whereas the latter did not. Suppose one argues that it is permissible to kill Ervin but not Larry the day before they are set to come out of the coma. But this seems absurd. The difference between Larry and Ervin is functional only, not a difference in essence or nature, and thus not morally relevant, precisely the same kind of difference between the fetus and the five-year old. So, the unborn are not potential persons, but human persons with great potential.¹⁴

Consequently, what is crucial morally is the *being* of a person, not his or her functioning. A human person does not come into existence when human function arises, but rather, a human person is an entity who has the natural inherent capacity to give rise to human functions, whether or not those functions are ever attained. And since the unborn human being has this natural inherent capacity from the moment it comes into existence, she is a person as long as she exists. As theologian John Jefferson Davis writes, “Our ability to have conscious experiences and recollections arises out of our personhood; the basic metaphysical reality of personhood precedes the unfolding of the conscious abilities inherent in it.”¹⁵

Philosopher J. P. Moreland clarifies this notion when he points out that “it is because an entity has an essence and falls within a natural kind that it can possess a unity of dispositions, capacities, parts and properties at a given time and can maintain identity through change.” Moreover, “it is the natural kind that determines what kinds of activities are appropriate and natural for that entity.”¹⁶ Moreland goes on to write:

[A]n organism . . . has second-order capacities to have first-order capacities that may or may not obtain (through some sort of lack). These second-order capacities are grounded in the nature of the organism. For example, a child may not have the first-order capacity to speak English due to a lack of education. But because the child has humanness it has the capacity to develop the capacity to speak English. The very idea of a defect presupposes these second-order capacities.

Now the natural kind “human being” or “human person” (I do not distinguish between these) is not to be understood as a mere biological concept. It is a metaphysical concept that grounds both biological functions and moral intuitions. . . .

In sum, if we ask why [certain functions are] . . . both possible and morally important, the answer will be that such [functions are] . . . grounded in the kind of entity, a human person in this case, that typically can have [those functions].¹⁷

What does Moreland mean by this? First, each kind of living organism, or *substance*, has a nature or essence that makes certain activities and functions possible. “A substance’s *inner nature* is its ordered structural unity of ultimate capacities. A substance cannot change in its ultimate capacities; that is, it cannot lose its ultimate nature and continue to exist.”¹⁸ For example, a German Shepherd dog, because it has a particular nature, has the ultimate capacity to develop the ability to bark. It may die as a puppy and never develop that ability. Regardless, it is *still* a German Shepherd dog as long as it exists, because it possesses a particular nature, even if it never acquires certain functions that by nature it has the capacity to develop. In contrast, a frog is not said to lack something if it cannot bark, for it is by nature not the sort of being that can have the ability to bark. A dog that lacks the ability to bark *is still a dog*

because of its nature. A human person who lacks the ability to think rationally (either because she is too young or she suffers from a disability) *is still a human person* because of her nature. Consequently, it makes sense to speak of a human being's lack *if and only if* she is an actual person.

Second, the German Shepherd remains the same particular German Shepherd over time from the moment it comes into existence. Suppose you buy this German Shepherd as a puppy and name her "Shannon." When you first bring her home you notice that she is tiny in comparison to her parents and lacks their intellectual and physical abilities. But over time Shannon develops these abilities, learns a number of things her parents never learned, sheds her hair, has her nails clipped, becomes ten times larger than she was as a puppy, and undergoes significant development of her cellular structure, brain and cerebral cortex. Yet, this grown-up Shannon is identical to the puppy Shannon, even though it has gone through significant physical changes. Why? Because living organisms, or substances, maintain absolute identity through change. If not, then you never were literally the person you were last week (or five minutes ago), a teenager, ten-year old, three-year old, infant, or newborn. But you know that you were, even though the physical differences between you as an infant and you as an adult are considerable. In fact, this same *you* was also once a fetus, an embryo, and a zygote. To be sure, you *have* changed. But it is *you* who has changed. That is the important thing to understand. *You remain you* through all the changes. Thus, if you are a valuable human person now, then you were a valuable human person at *every moment in your*

past including when you were in your mother's womb.

Suppose the abortion advocate, in response to our case, denies that there is a substantial self that remains the same through all the accidental changes the human being undergoes, i.e., there is no absolute identity between any stages in the existence of a human being. Proponents of this view maintain that personal identity consists in a series of experiences that do not require an underlying substance that has the experiences. My "personhood" is merely a string of psychological experiences connected by memory, beliefs, and /or character as well as causal, bodily and temporal continuity. And because this continuity does not extend to the fetal stages of existence, and perhaps not even to infancy, the unborn and perhaps the newborn are not persons.¹⁹ I will call this the *no-subject* view.²⁰ What can we say in response to it?²¹

It is not clear how the unborn and newborn *are not* persons according to this view. That is to say, how does it follow that my fetal and neonatal "selves" are not persons just because they are not part of the continuity of my current psychological series of experiences? After all, I can easily imagine a scenario, similar to what happened to Uncle Jed above, in which the body that was the physical locus of Francis Beckwith existed as a continuity of a series of experiences from 1962 (two years after his birth) until 1990, lapsed into a coma, and then came out of the coma in 1992 with no sense of continuity or memory including everything he learned from 1964 until 1990. We will call the "person" that came out of the coma, Francis Beckwith_p. Now, clearly Francis Beckwith was a person according to the no-subject view even though his experiences were never part

of the series of experiences of what became Francis Beckwith_b. So, even if we grant that I was never my fetal or neonatal selves (in terms of conscious psychological experiences), it does not follow from that alone that my fetal and neonatal selves were not persons in their own right.

But perhaps I have misunderstood the no-subject view. It is possible that the defender of this view will respond by biting the bullet and making the counterintuitive claim that Francis Beckwith and Francis Beckwith_b are actually two persons, but that their fetal and neonatal selves were not persons since their existence did not consist of *psychological* experiences connected by memory, beliefs, and/or character. So, the absence of psychological experiences is enough for the no-subject proponent to (1) deny personal continuity between my current self and my neonatal self even if there is causal, temporal, and bodily continuity between the latter and the former, and (2) deny that my prenatal and neonatal selves were persons.²² Such a move, though consistent with the no-subject view, seems too high a price to pay for consistency. For it results in problematic beliefs and ignores the explanatory power of the substance view. Consider the following examples.

First, if after Francis Beckwith lapsed into a coma and before Francis Beckwith_b comes out of it, according to the no-subject view, it would not have been an act of homicide to kill the Francis Beckwith in the coma because in that state it was not part of a string of psychological experiences connected by memory, beliefs, and/or character. Yet, that seems wrong. It seems that killing Francis Beckwith while in the coma is an act of homicide. If, however, the no-subject proponent responds to this by saying that we have misunder-

stood his view and that it would be homicide to kill Francis Beckwith in the coma because there is causal, temporal, and bodily continuity between that Francis Beckwith and the ones prior to and following the coma, then the absence of a series of psychological experiences is not sufficient to say that a being is not a person. After all, there is causal, temporal, and bodily continuity between my prenatal self and my current self. Why, then, is not my prenatal self a person as well?

Second, although the no-subject view denies it, it still seems correct to say that Francis Beckwith and Francis Beckwith_b are, in fact, the same person even though the latter has none of the memories and knowledge of the former. For suppose that five years after coming out of the coma, Francis Beckwith_b unexpectedly recovers all the memories and knowledge of Francis Beckwith. Is there now a Francis Beckwith_c or did Francis Beckwith_b ever exist?

Third, because a human action involves thinking, reflection, deliberation, actualizing an intention, and bodily movement over time (e.g., proposing and carrying out a play in a basketball game, attending a four-year college for four years), and because the no-subject view denies that such human action requires an enduring substantial self, this would mean that, according to the no-subject view, the person thinking is literally a different person than the ones reflecting, deliberating, actualizing an intention and engaging in bodily movement. Even though these person-stages are strung together by experiences and bodily continuity, they are literally not the same person, for the no-subject view denies an enduring self over time.

Fourth, I have first person awareness

of myself as a unified and enduring self over time. As Moreland points out, "Our knowledge that we are first person substantial, unified, enduring selves that have bodies and mental states but are not identical to them is grounded in our awareness of ourselves."²³ This is why, for example, I may fear punishment in the future for deeds I committed years ago, have regrets for decisions in the past I ought not to have made, look back fondly on my childhood, and reflect upon what I have accomplished and whether I have fulfilled my potential.

It is clear from the above examples that the substance view, in comparison to the no-subject view, has far greater explanatory power in accounting for our common sense intuitions about personal continuity and moral obligation.²⁴

Conclusion

We have seen that the attempt to either sidestep the issue of personhood or to make a distinction between human beings and human persons fails. Concerning the latter, we have seen that because the functions of personhood are grounded in the essential nature of humanness, and because human beings are persons that maintain identity through time from the moment they come into existence, it follows that the unborn are human persons of great worth because they possess that nature as long as they exist.

No doubt much more can be said about the problem of what constitutes personhood,²⁵ but what is important to understand is that personhood criteria are riddled with serious problems and that the prolife advocate has been given no compelling reason to abandon her belief that the unborn are full-fledged members of the human community.²⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ I am using the term "fetus" in the popular sense as synonymous with "unborn." I am not using it in the technical sense of referring to the last stage in prenatal development after zygote and embryo. In other words, I am using the word fetus to refer to the unborn entity at all stages of its development prior to birth.

² In order to get to the point where science is capable of cloning adult human beings with relative ease, literally hundreds of thousands of human embryos will have to be brought into existence and then discarded. Contrary to what the public has been told in popular films (such as *Multiplicity* and *The Boys from Brazil*), cloning is not a routine procedure. For example, in the case of Dolly, the sheep cloned in 1997 by Scottish scientist Ian Wilmut, hundreds of implants were created before Dolly was produced. Thus, in order for adult human cloning to become commonplace, thousands of human embryos will have to be purposely brought into existence and then disposed of. These embryos will not be treated as intrinsically valuable human subjects, but rather, as things to be used to further the ends of science or the benefit of others.

³ National Institutes of Health, "Executive Summary," in *Final Report of the Human Embryo Research Panel* (27 September 1994), as reprinted in *Do the Right Thing: A Philosophical Dialogue on the Moral and Social Issues of Our Time*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996) 285.

⁴ Ibid. I respond to these and similar criteria in greater detail in *Politically Correct Death: Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) chapters 3 and 6. See also, Patrick

Lee, *Abortion and Unborn Human Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) chapters 1, 2, and 3.

⁵ *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. (1973) 113, 160.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

⁸ I have argued in detail elsewhere that this appeal to ignorance (i.e., no one knows when life begins), far from establishing a right to abortion, actually leads to a prolife legal position. After all, if one killed without knowing whether the entity being killed is a human person with a right to life, it would be negligent to proceed with the killing. To use an illustration, if game hunters shot at rustling bushes with the same philosophical mind-set, the National Rifle Association's membership would become severely depleted. Ignorance of a being's status is certainly not justification to kill it. See Francis J. Beckwith, "Ignorance of Fetal Status as a Justification of Abortion: A Critical Analysis," in *The Silent Subject: Reflections on the Unborn in American Culture*, ed. Brad Stetson (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996) 33-42.

⁹ The facts of fetal development may be accessed from a number of different texts. In my research I found the following to be helpful: F. Beck, D. B. Moffat, and D. P. Davies, *Human Embryology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Keith L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1977); Andre E. Hellegers, "Fetal Development," in *Biomedical Ethics*, eds. Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S.

Zembatty (New York: Macmillan, 1981); Stephen M. Krason, *Abortion: Politics, Morality, and the Constitution* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Bart T. Hefferman, "The Early Biography of Everyman," in *Abortion and Social Justice*, eds. Thomas W. Hilgers, MD and Dennis J. Horan, Esq. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1972) 3-25; *Motion and Brief Amicus Curiae of Certain Physicians, Professors, and Fellows of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology in Support of Appellees*, submitted to the Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1971, No. 70-18, *Roe v. Wade*, and No. 70-40, *Doe v. Bolton*, prepared by Dennis J. Horan, et al. (The list of amici contains the names of more than two hundred physicians), as quoted in Stephen D. Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990) 2-6.

¹⁰ This has been challenged by C. A. Bedate and R. C. Cefalo in their essay, "The Zygote: To Be or Not to Be a Person," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 14 (1989) 627-635. Their case, however, is seriously flawed, both factually and philosophically. See the following replies: Lee, *Abortion and Unborn Human Life*, 98-102; and Antoine Suarez, "Hydatidiform Moles and Teratomas Confirm the Human Identity of the Preimplantation Embryo," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 15 (1990) 627-635.

¹¹ See Baruch Brody, *Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life: A Philosophical View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975).

¹² See Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abor-

tion," in *Do the Right Thing*, 171-175. This article originally appeared in *The Monist* 57.1 (1973). Michael Tooley holds a view similar to Warren's. For a recent presentation of his perspective, see Tooley, "In Defense of Abortion and Infanticide," in *The Abortion Controversy 25 Years After Roe v. Wade: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Louis P. Pojman and Francis J. Beckwith (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998) 209-233.

¹³ See L. W. Sumner, *Abortion and Moral Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹⁴ Schwarz provides a similar example in *The Moral Question of Abortion*, 90.

¹⁵ John Jefferson Davis, *Abortion and the Christian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1984) 57.

¹⁶ J. P. Moreland, "James Rachels and the Active Euthanasia Debate," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (1988) 86.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87. For a fuller defense of this "substance" view of persons, see J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

¹⁸ J. P. Moreland, "Humanness, Personhood, and the Right to Die," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995) 101.

¹⁹ See, for example, Peter McInerney, "Does a Fetus Already Have a Future-Like-Ours?," *The Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990) 264-268; and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²⁰ This is a name coined by Lee in *Abortion and Unborn Human Life*, 37.

²¹ For a response more detailed than I can offer here, see *Ibid.*, 37-45; and Moreland and Rae, *Body and Soul*.

²²This is the position taken by McNerny in "Does a Fetus Already Have a Future-Like-Ours?"

²³Moreland, "Humanness," 103.

²⁴Why then is this view accepted by many philosophers and bioethicists? I believe that the primary motivation for maintaining the no-subject view in the face of such problems is a commitment to materialism. The dominant metaphysical view of intellectuals in the West, materialism maintains that all that exists is the physical world, that non-physical things like God, angels, natures, substances, souls, and morality do not actually exist. (Morality, some materialists argue, is *real*, only insofar as it is a social construction resulting from evolution, but it has no ontological status apart from the institutions, laws, and social contracts that have benefited human survival.) Materialist Paul Churchland writes: "The important point about the standard evolutionary story is that the human species and all of its features are the wholly physical outcome of a purely physical process. . . . If this is the correct account of our origins, then there seems neither need, nor room, to fit any nonphysical substances or properties into our theoretical account of ourselves. We are creatures of matter. And we should learn to live with that fact" (Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* [Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1984] 12). It is interesting to note that Churchland's materialism entails determinism. Given that, it is difficult to understand his instruction that "we should learn to live with

that fact." For if all my apparently free acts are determined, then there are no "shoulds." This, of course, is another reason to abandon the no-subject view.

²⁵See Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death*; Gregory P. Koukl, *Precious Unborn Human Persons* (San Pedro, CA: Stand to Reason, 1999); Lee, *Abortion and Human Life*; Don Marquis, "Why Abortion Is Immoral," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86 (April 1989) 183-202; Don Marquis, "A Future Like Ours and the Concept of Person: A Reply to McNerny and Paske," in *The Abortion Controversy*, 354-369; Moreland and Rae, *Body and Soul*; and Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion*.

²⁶There are some, though not many, who argue that the moral question of abortion is *not* contingent upon the status of the fetus. They include Judith Jarvis Thomson ("A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 [1971]); Frances M. Kamm (*Creation and Abortion: A Study in Moral and Legal Philosophy* [New York: Oxford, 1992]); Eileen McDonagh (*Breaking the Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent* [New York: Oxford, 1996]); Laurence Tribe (*Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes* [New York: Norton, 1990], ch. 6); and David Boonin-Vail ("A Defense of 'A Defense of Abortion': On the Responsibility Objection to Thomson's Argument," *Ethics* 107 [1997] 286-313). Although this is an important and influential perspective, it falls outside the scope of this essay because the purpose of this essay is to reply to those who believe that (1) human personhood

is doing the moral work in the abortion debate; (2) the unborn are not human persons; and/or (3) the issue personhood can be side-stepped. For replies to this perspective, see Francis J. Beckwith, "Personal Bodily Rights, Abortion, and Unplugging the Violinist," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1992) 105-118; Lee, *Abortion*, chapter 4; and John T. Wilcox, "Nature as Demonic in Thomson's Defense of Abortion," *The New Scholasticism* 63 (Autumn 1989) 463-484.