

DISTORTIONS OF THE WILL

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Oddly, the national dispute over abortion is not a discussion about abortion at all. The First Family's gingerly treatment of the issue is typical. Mr. Clinton told us at the Democratic Convention: "I'm not in favor of abortion, but I am pro-choice, strongly." Ms. Rodham Clinton recently mused: "These are such difficult questions: Where does life begin? Where does it end? But most important is: Who decides?" Their rhetoric reflects the peculiar lot into which the abortion conversation has been parked. In the Casey decision (1992), the Supreme Court argued that the abortion issue concerns the freedom of each individual to determine the meaning of life,ⁱ a position awarded some metaphysical raiment by Ronald Dworkinⁱⁱ and Laurence Tribeⁱⁱⁱ in The New York Times. Their voices are part of a chorus which for a generation has chanted that the key values in the abortion dispute are subsets of freedom: liberty, autonomy, self-determination and the omni-present "choice." In this libertarian framework – libertarian until you ask who is going to pay for the abortion – the object of the choice disappears. The question of what abortion is, and the crucial question concerning whether abortion is in fact the killing of an innocent human being, fades, as insignificant.

The troubling reduction of the abortion issue to a matter of sovereign choice indicates a distortion of the will which informs much pro-abortion rhetoric. In this logic, the will is perfectly autonomous, i.e., free to decide whether to refuse or to undergo an abortion, regardless of the presence or absence, wealth or poverty of the reasons which motivate the decision. In this perspective, the will is immune from gathering evidence to justify its choice to itself or to a reasonable other. The autarkic will fabricates its choice according to its own design, whether rational or whimsical, in an empire of privacy impervious to external critique, let alone regal restraint. The necessity of the will to identify and adhere to the good in its manufacture of decision is banished by the will itself.

This divinization of the will has not only reduced the abortion debate to irrational hymns to choice. It increasingly informs the euthanasia controversy, where Dr. Kevorkian, among others, informs us that this is simply a tussle over patient autonomy.^{iv} One of the tasks confronting philosophers opposing the pro-abortion agenda is a systematic critique of the concept of will which undergirds the approach to human life issues engineered by proponents of abortion and euthanasia. A complementary task consists in offering an

alternative account of the will, in which the decision of an individual is shaped by evidence regarding the act of abortion or euthanasia, especially the evidence regarding the act's status as a species of unjustified homicide. Two philosophical traditions in particular can provide resources for an account of the will open to the claims of human life to respect. The first, drawn from scholastic anthropology, underlines the subordination of the will to the intellect in moral action. The second, rooted in intuitionist moral theory, evokes the affections of sympathy which characterize the mature will. Although opposed on certain points, both approaches to the will can shape a more respectful posture of the moral subject toward the human other than our current voluntarism would have it.

Thomistic Sources

One of the summits of the scholastic theory of the will emerges in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, especially in question 82 of the first part of his Summa Theologica.^v Aquinas recognizes the dignity revealed by the deliberation of the human will: "We are masters of our own actions by reason of our being able to choose this or that."^{vi}

However, Aquinas insists that the will chooses only the means to the end, not the moral end or good in itself.^{vii} For Thomas, the intellect must guide the will in the moral agent's apprehension of the good to be pursued.

Although Aquinas recognizes a close inter-relationship between intellect and will in human deliberation,^{viii} he underscores the primacy of the intellect. He describes the subordination of the will to the intellect in the determination of moral action to be undertaken or refused. "The intellect moves the will, because the understood good is the object of the will."^{ix} Aquinas insists that the intellect provides the very condition for human choice by identifying the good to be desired and realized. Otherwise, anarchy erupts. "We must stop at the intellect as preceding all the rest. For every movement of the will must be preceded by apprehension, whereas every apprehension is not preceded by an act of the will."^x Even the eruption of grace into the moral life must be conceived as a strengthening of the intellect, and not simply of the will. "The principle of counselling and understanding is higher than our intellect – namely, God."^{xi}

Aquinas recognizes that the intellect's guidance of the will is often fragile. By necessity, the will adheres to happiness as its final end.^{xii} However, the trait of necessity weakens as the will, instructed by the intellect, seeks to embrace contingent goods conducive to authentic

happiness, i.e., the actualization appropriate to a rational animal:

There are certain particular goods which have no necessary connection with happiness, because without them a man can be happy; and to such the will does not adhere of necessity. But there are some things which have a necessary connection with happiness, namely, those by means of which man adheres to God, in whom alone true happiness consists. Nonetheless, until through the certitude produced by seeing God the necessity of such a connection be shown, the will does not adhere to God of necessity, nor to those things which are of God.... It is therefore clear that the will does not desire of necessity whatever it desires.³³

In shaping the inclinations of the will, the intellect exercises the patient work of identifying and weighing appropriate goods in the moral agent's cultivation of authentic happiness.

Aquinas's account of the will tutored by the intellect indicates possible avenues for the contemporary conversion of the will in the abortion arena. The tasks of the intellect in guiding the will are multiple.

First, the intellect must identify life itself as a supreme end for the will's desire. It is essential that life must not be relegated to a coequal partner in the bag of human values. The foundational quality of life requires affirmation. The choice of values such as freedom of health is conditioned by the very existence of the being who chooses or is chosen. To refuse the priority claims of existence itself is to assault the foundation of other values, to engage in an act of suicide and nihilism. The pedagogical task of the intellect in the abortion domain is not only to unmask direct abortion as a brutal assault upon the primordial value of life. It must also shape the will to incline toward life as the **sine qua non** of all other goods and to reverence existence itself as the sovereign given. This is the intellectual work of vision.

Second, the intellect must form the will by a focused identification of the specific value of human life. Obviously, part of this work involves the persistent, pain-staking presentation of certain biological facts that much of American society refuses to hear. Such facts include the data on human conception and human gestation – the pre-cise moments of the first heartbeat, the first brainwave, the first movement within the mother's womb. While such facts alone may not persuade the moral subject to shun abortion, they focus the subject on the detailed act of abortion itself, its destruction of a complex human

being, rather than imprisoning the will in itself through the language of "choice" or in evasion under the veil of "fetal matter."

Philosophically, the formational task of the intellect operates on a more subtle level. It must evoke the distinctive dignity of the human person at each stage of development. Following Aquinas, this can be done by demonstrating the spiritual character of intellect and will, our distinctive power to think and to choose. In the abortion debate, however, it is crucial that this recognition stress the historical and social dimensions of human dignity. The historical argument identifies the radical continuity between the 41-year old philosopher I now am, the 20-year old poet I once was, the screaming (so I'm told by my parents) infant I once was, and the unique embryo I was in the womb of my mother. It also establishes the link between the conscious, argumentative professor I now am and the comatose patient I may be in fifty years or, if a truck runs me down in New Haven, in a day. In our work of inclining the will toward respect for human life, it is crucial to shape this respect as inclusive of each stage of the development of an individual in the human community. The promise and trace of the mature adult must enter the circle of respect and protection.

The Thomistic account of the will provides a tool for understanding the nature of education against abortion. Enclosed in itself, the will can only move in arbitrary and destructive patterns. Open to the goods identified by the intellect, the will can shun abortion as a destruction of the most basic good. Pro-life pedagogy must engage in the patient work of converting the will through identification of the good of life and detailed information on how radically and specifically abortion violates this human good.

Intuitionist Sources

The British intuitionist tradition can provide other resources for situating the will in a posture open to the claims of the vulnerable, especially the nascent child in the womb. The eighteenth-century intuitionists argue that it is a 'moral sense,' rather than reason itself, which accounts for the human agent's moral awareness and which provides the background for the agent's determination of right and wrong action.^{xv} Two leading intuitionists, Lord Shaftes-bury^{xvi} and Francis Hutcheson,^{xvii} contend that the will is guided toward the object of its choice through certain moral affections, roughly representing variations of altruism.

The intuitionists sketch the specific emotions which arouse

the will to deliberation and choice. Shaftesbury underlines a fundamental sympathy by which humans are inclined to treat others with kindness:

It is scarcely to be conceiv'd, that any Creature should be at the very first so ill, and so curst a nature... [that] as soon as it comes to be try'd by objects, have no one passion of Goodness toward its kind, no foundation in its Temper of either pity, love, succorableness, or the like; ... that it should as soon as it comes to be try'd by rational objects, as of justice, generosity, and other Virtue, have no inclining Affection, no kind of liking toward these, or dislike toward what is on the contrary side cruel, horrid, base, villainous, or the like, but so as to be absolutely indifferent towards any thing of this kind.^{xvii}

For Shaftesbury, the moral life arises in immediate passions of attraction or repulsion toward moral objects. Primary among these moral affections is a somewhat laicized charity, an immediate movement of love toward the other, especially the members of one's own species,^{xviii} and a spontaneous desire to assist the other in need. The presence or absence of this matrix of sympathy distinguishes the mature moral agent from a radically defective one.^{xix}

Shaftesbury recognizes that this fundamental affection of sympathy does not attain its object, the other in need, without difficulty. Following one's affection toward others often involves a sacrifice of one's private interests:

It is certain also, that a Creature having such affections as these towards the common Nature, or System of the kind, at the same time that he has those other affections toward the private Nature or Self-System (as in the case of self-preservation self-support and maintenance) it must happen that in following the first of these Affections, the Creature must often contradict and go against these latter; as in the instance, so often before us, where the love to the young makes every other affection toward private good give way, and causes a total neglect of self-interest or concernment.^{xx}

Unlike his *bête-noire* Thomas Hobbes,^{xxi} Shaftesbury does not believe that self-interest can explain our moral judgments. However, Shaftesbury does acknowledge the conflict between affection for self and sympathy for the other which repeatedly provokes moral crisis and which is only slowly mastered by the wise moral agent.

Shaftesbury's intuitionist approach to the will provides several paths for our current struggle against abortion. It is easy to dismiss Shaftesbury's identification of sympathy toward members of one's own species as the infallible sign of the collapse of the moral agent. Few

actions destroy such basic sympathy as the personal or collective decision to destroy the child in the womb.

One minor episode in our current abortion dispute illustrates the mechanics of suppressing this sympathy. This is the political sin of actually showing pictures of the human fetus. On last election eve, David Brinkley decided to show tasteless political ads from the recent campaign. But he remarked that he couldn't show the most tasteless of them all, which used photographs of aborted fetuses. He looked as if he had just bitten into a ripe onion. It is striking that in several recent court injunctions against pro-life demonstrators,^{xxiii} bans have been placed on using pictures of the fetus visible to employees or clients of abortion clinics. On my own campus this year, several students vehemently objected to anodyne pictures of healthy fetuses on the grounds that such images would disturb women who had undergone abortions or discourage women seeking them.

The intuitionist account of the will's operations can illumine the suppression of the image of the human fetus. When the spectator recognizes the humanity of the nascent child, a fundamental sympathy and desire to protect arises. The image of the child's head, arms, legs, thumb-sucking seizes the agent's heart and imagination more effectively than a thousand philosophical arguments. Similarly, the testimony of women who have undergone post-abortion trauma^{xxiii} and of health-care workers who have renounced abortion^{xxiv} strongly touch the sympathy for the nascent child and the repugnance toward the death of the innocent which lie at the heart of our moral affectivity.

Pro-life philosophers often conceive their task as de-dramatizing the abortion controversy by substituting rational argument for emotive reaction. There is a danger, however, in obscuring what the intuitionists clearly perceive: that the will's movements involve moral emotions which precede and enclose practical reason. The image of the nascent child and the anecdotes detailing the horror of abortion serve a central role in arousing the sympathy which informs the will in its choice of action. While much of our combat against abortion involves the careful tools of reason, part of our work is to enlarge the circle of human sympathy to include the child in the womb. Part of our critical work is to evoke the moral danger of a society which has blindly suppressed its instinctive love toward the child in the womb and, increasingly, toward the disabled infant and the comatose patient. This conversion of the will in its emotive penumbra rightfully involves the media of image and narrative in the service of sacrificial sympathy toward the endangered other.

Conclusion

The scholastic and intuitionist accounts of the will can ground our moral and political efforts to awaken the conscience to the claims of the child on the eve of birth. If the will is guided by the intellect, the evidence of human identity from conception until natural death can rightly shape the will's inclinations. If the will is moved by affections of sympathy, the sights and sounds of abortion's victims can sway the will into repugnance toward this practice. The great difficulty remains the argument as to why the will should be affected by any evidence at all and why the will should evince any sympathy whatsoever, in an era when the will, especially in the abortion arena, is simply free to choose what it wants. The demythologization of the sovereign will is crucial, if the pro-life case is even to be heard. Only a will vulnerable to the evidence of reason and to the stirrings of empathy can be open to conversion to a posture of reverence before innocent human life.

NOTES

5. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (hereafter abbreviated as ST), I, q.82, "The Will," in Anton Pegis, ed., Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas (NY: Random, Modern Library, 1948) 361-367.

6. ST I, q.82, a.1 ad 3.

7. Cf. ST I, q.82, a.2.

8. Cf. ST I, q.82, a.4.

9. ST I, q.82, a.4 c.

10. ST I, q.82, a.4 ad 3.

11. ST I, q.82, a.4 ad 3.

12. Cf. ST I, q.82, a.2 c.

13. ST I, q.82, a.2 c.

14. Cf. W. Hudson, Ethical Intuitionism (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1967) 18-22.

15. Cf. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, In Two Discourses. Introduction by Joseph Filonowicz (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimile Reprint, 1991).

16. Cf. Francis Hutcheson, Illustrations on the Moral Sense, ed. Bernard Peach (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard, 1971).

17. Shaftesbury 43.

18. Cf. Shaftesbury 84-85.

19. Cf. Shaftesbury 102-104. 20. Shaftesbury 85.
21. Cf. Filonowicz 11-14.
22. Cf. "Florida Judge" in The Wanderer (May 6, 1993) 8.
23. Cf. David Reardon, Aborted Women: Silent No More (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1987).
24. Cf. Bernard Nathanson, The Abortion Papers: Inside the Abortion Mentality (NY: Frederick Fell, 1983).

1. For a trenchant critique of the Court's liberty doctrine, cf. Russell Hittinger, "Et Tu, Justice Kennedy?" in Crisis 10/8 (1992) 16-22.
2. Cf. Ronald Dworkin, "Life Is Sacred: That's the Easy Part," in The New York Times Magazine (May 16, 1993) 36ff.
3. Laurence H. Tribe, "On the Edges of Life and Death," in The New York Times Book Review (May 16, 1993) 1ff.
4. Cf. Jack Kevorkian and Paul Kurz, "Medicide: The Goodness of Planned Death," in Free Inquiry (Fall 1991) 14-18.
5. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (hereafter abbreviated as ST), I, q.82, "The Will," in Anton Pegis, ed., Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas (NY: Random, Modern Library, 1948) 361-367.
6. ST I, q.82, a.1 ad 3 in Pegis 363.
7. Cf. ST I, q.82, a.2 in Pegis 363-365.
8. Cf. ST I, q.82, a.4 in Pegis 365-367.
9. ST I, q.82, a.4 c. in Pegis 365.
10. ST I, q.82, a.4 ad3 in Pegis 367.
11. ST I, q.82, a.4 ad 3 in Pegis 367.
12. Cf. ST I, q.82, a.2 c. in Pegis 364.
13. ST I, q.82, a.2 c. in Pegis 364.
14. Cf. W. Hudson, Ethical Intuitionism (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1967) 18-22.
15. Cf. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, In Two Discourses. Introduction by Joseph Filonowicz (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimile Reprint, 1991).
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