

RAND ON ABORTION: A CRITIQUE

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A circle, [Dagny] thought, is the movement proper to physical nature, they say that there's nothing but circular motion in the inanimate universe around us, but the straight line is the badge of man, the straight line of a geometrical abstraction that makes roads, rails and bridges, the straight line that cuts the curving aimlessness of nature by a purposeful motion from a start to an end. The cooking of meals, she thought, is like the feeding of coal to an engine for the sake of a great run, but what would be the imbecile torture of coaling an engine that had no run to make? It is not proper for man's life to be a circle, she thought, or a string of circles dropping off like zeros behind him—man's life must be a straight line of motion from goal to farther goal, each leading to the next and to a single growing sum . . .

— Ayn Rand (1957, 609)

1. Introduction

Ayn Rand was a passionate defender of abortion on demand. Indeed, abortion, not adoption, seems to be Rand's preferred solution to the problem of an unwanted pregnancy (1981, 3). Rand likens bearing and raising an unwanted child to a "living death"; it is a "horror," a "death sentence," an "impossible responsibility," which condemns "ambitious and struggling" young people "to give up their future" for "a life of hopeless drudgery, of slavery to a child's physical and financial needs" (3). Therefore, to oppose abortion on demand "is to advocate sacrifice, not for the sake of anyone's benefit [for Rand did not believe that there was anyone in the womb to benefit], but for the sake of misery *qua* misery, for the sake of forbidding happiness and fulfillment to living human beings"

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(1976, 3). As for those who do oppose abortion on demand, they are motivated not by love for the unborn, "which is a piece of nonsense that no one could experience," but by "hatred": "Their hatred is directed against human beings as such, against the mind, against reason, against ambition, against success, against love, against any value that brings happiness to human life" (1981, 3). Rand claims that *Humanae Vitae*, the 1968 Papal Encyclical opposing abortion, aims at "the spiritual emasculation and degradation of man, the extinction of his love of life" (1988b, 62).

Rand's philosophy of Objectivism has been characterized as a species of Aristotelianism.¹ For our purposes, Rand's Aristotelianism can be reduced to three points. First, in metaphysics, Rand's Aristotelianism implies the primacy of the "metaphysical" (i.e., the natural) over the "man-made" (i.e., the artificial, the conventional) (1982a, 23-34). Second, in epistemology, the Aristotelian priority of nature over convention is correlated to the priority of human *cognitive* powers over human *creative* and *volitional* powers; our cognitive powers discover the nature of reality, while our creative and volitional powers transform reality within the boundaries of nature (hence Rand's fondness for the Baconian dictum, "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed"). Third, in moral philosophy, Rand's Aristotelianism equates the human good with the actualization of our capacities for excellence. In Rand's words: "The standard of value in the Objectivist ethics—the standard by which one judges what is good or evil—is *man's life*, or: that which is required for man's survival *qua* man" (1964a, 23). Because the concept of life is central to Rand's ethics, it has been accurately characterized as "biocentric" (Rand 1988c, 10-11; Branden 1969, ix-x; Sciabarra 1995, 122). For Rand, there is ultimately no "is-ought gap." What man truly *is* is what he truly *ought* to be—which does not imply that whatever one *happens* to be is what one ought to be, for it is possible for one not fully to live up to one's humanity.

Thus far, Rand's basically Aristotelian framework would seem an unlikely foundation for a defense of abortion on demand, for the simple reason that Catholic natural law moralists use essentially the same premises to argue that abortion on demand is murder. Indeed, it is our thesis that Rand's defense of abortion on demand is inconsistent with her Aristotelian framework, and that a consistent application of Rand's basic principles yields pro-life conclusions. Our purpose in this essay is neither to defend

Rand's Aristotelianism and its pro-life implications, nor to defend abortion on demand and its philosophical presuppositions. Our concern is only to prove the inconsistency of Rand's defense of abortion on demand with her own basic Aristotelian commitments, thereby posing a choice to her followers. They can either affirm her basic Aristotelianism and drop her defense of abortion on demand. Or they can affirm her defense of abortion on demand and discard her philosophical framework. (We prefer the former option.)

2. Rand's Argument for Abortion on Demand

Rand's argument for the moral and legal rectitude of abortion on demand is simple. A "person" is a rights-bearer. Only persons have the right not to be killed. (If one believes that there are some cases in which it is right to kill a person, e.g., the death penalty, then one would have to say that a person has the right not to be killed arbitrarily, without good cause and due process.) For Rand, the criterion of personhood is simply being human. "Rights are conditions of existence *required by man's nature* for his proper survival" (1961, 182). Rand claims, however, that unborn children are not human beings, and thus are not persons, for two reasons. First, an unborn child is not an *actual* human being, but only a *potential* one. In Rand's words: "An embryo *has no rights*. Rights do not pertain to a *potential*, only to an *actual* being. A child cannot acquire any rights until it is born" (1988b, 58). Second, an unborn child is not a human being because it is not rational. "A proper, philosophically valid definition of man as 'a rational animal,' would not permit anyone to ascribe the status of person to a few human cells" (1981, 2). Since unborn children are not human beings, they are not persons in the legal sense, i.e., they do not have any right not to be killed if their parents so desire. It is morally permissible for parents to desire this, because unwanted children condemn their parents to living death, thwarting their self-realization and happiness, preventing them from living "man's life *qua* man." Since unborn children are not persons, the state has no right to prevent abortion on demand.

3. Flaws in Rand's Argument

Since Rand's standard for being a moral person, a rights-bearer, is

simply being human, the crucial premise of Rand's argument is her claim that unborn children are not human beings. If unborn children are not human beings, then they have no rights and may be aborted at will. If unborn children are human beings, then they have the right not to be aborted at will; to abort a human being at will would then be murder. Rand's argument, therefore, stands or falls with her claim that unborn children are not human beings. Unfortunately for Rand, however, the two reasons she gives for denying the humanity of the unborn are weak, mutually contradictory, and inconsistent with her own fundamental metaphysical, epistemological, and moral principles.²

First, let us examine Rand's claim that unborn children are not *actual* human beings, but only *potential* human beings. For Rand, we do not become actual human beings at conception, but only at birth.³ This position, however, does not square with one of Rand's three basic metaphysical principles, her so-called "axiom" of identity: "To exist is to be something, as distinguished from the nothing of non-existence; it is to be an entity of a specific nature made of specific attributes. . . . A is A. A thing is itself. . . . Existence is Identity" (1961, 152). Rand's claim is that "to be" is "to be something in particular," to have a determinate identity, to *actually* be something or another. Now, if an unborn child exists, it must *actually* be something; it must fall into some natural kind or another. If Rand wishes to maintain that an unborn child is not an actual human being, but merely a potential one, then we are entitled to ask: What kind of being is it *actually*? Even if it is merely a potential human being, it must be an actual *something*. What species does it actually belong to? Is it a chipmunk? Is it cabbage? Is it a seahorse?

Given Rand's biocentric approach to ethics, the natural person to ask this question would be a biologist, and the biologist's answer would be clear. The organism formed when a human sperm unites with a human egg is a new member of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*. It is a human being (Irving 1999, 27-28).

Rand might retort that an unborn child is actually just "a piece of protoplasm," and "a piece of protoplasm has no rights" (1976, 3). It is true that an unborn child is a piece of protoplasm. But it is not just any piece of protoplasm. It is a distinct organism in the early stages of its development. What *kind* of organism? If one were again to refer the

question to a biologist, the answer would be clear. What emerges from the union of human sperm and human egg is a blob of *human* cells; indeed, all humans are blobs of human cells. And by Rand's criterion, being a blob of *human* cells is all that it takes for an organism to be a person. Therefore, by Rand's own criterion, unborn children are persons, with the right not to be killed arbitrarily.

To this, Rand might retort that not all blobs of human cells are human beings with rights. In a late essay, she grants that unborn children are "a few *human* cells" (emphasis added) but then reminds us, "so are all the cells of your body, including the cells of your skin, your tonsils, and your ruptured appendix—and that cutting them is murder, according to [pro-life legislation]" (1981, 3). Rand's point, apparently, is that an unborn child is simply a part of its mother's body, and that if it has the right not to be cut out, then so do moles, hemorrhoids, tonsils, tumors, and other non-viable masses of tissue.

There are two problems with this retort. First, from a biological point of view, an unborn child differs from other unviable masses of tissue in a decisive way: Left unmolested, and barring accidents and abnormalities, it will become fully viable in approximately nine months—whereas tumors and tonsils never will. Second, from a biological point of view, unborn children are not parts of their mothers' bodies. They are distinct organisms. All the parts of a mother's body have the same genetic identity. But the child within her has a different and unique genetic identity which emerges at the moment of conception. And if to exist is to have a determinate identity, then the emergence of a new determinate identity at conception is just another way of saying that a new individual comes into existence at conception.

Sometimes this individual is even a boy. If a male child is part of its mother's body, then *a fortiori* all of its parts would be part of her body as well. But would it make sense to speak of "her penis"?

So what are we to make of Rand's claim that we cross the line between potential and actual human being at the point of birth? It appears to be an arbitrary line. It is certainly an arbitrary line from a biological point of view. From a biological point of view, the only non-arbitrary line for determining when a new human being comes into existence is conception. At conception, a new, genetically unique human being comes

into existence. Given the proper conditions, he or she will grow and change, passing through all the natural stages of human life: infancy, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. Although it makes sense to talk about eggs and sperm cells as "potential" human beings, once egg and sperm have successfully united, the product is an *actual* human being, a unique individual in the earliest stage of his or her development.⁴ Although it makes sense to call an unborn child a potential *adult*, it would be a mistake to identify adulthood with humanity as such. Being an embryo, an infant, a child, an adolescent, and an adult are just different stages of human life, but we are *actual* human beings through every one of them. And if being an actual human being is the criterion of personhood, then we become persons with legal rights at conception, not at birth.

Rand's second reason for denying the humanity of unborn children follows from her definition of man as "the rational animal." Rand's argument is quite obscure, but it seems to presuppose something like the following scenario. Our task is to determine whether an unborn child is a true human being or not. By what criterion would we answer this question? Let us see if an unborn child fits the definition of a human being. Man is defined as "the rational animal." With this criterion in mind, we can look at an unborn child. Does it display obvious signs of rationality? Clearly not. Its rational faculties are undeveloped or dormant. An unborn child does not build skyscrapers, smelt ore, run railroads, or invent perpetual motion machines. Therefore, it is not a rational animal. Therefore, it is not a human being. Therefore, it has no rights and can be killed at will. In short, it seems that Rand believes that to be a rational animal, one cannot just belong to the species defined as "the rational animal"; one cannot just have a human mother and a human father and a human genetic code. Rather, to really be a rational animal, one must be *consciously* and *actively* rational. One cannot actually be a rational animal if one's rational faculty is undeveloped or dormant.

This argument has three serious problems. First, its use of the definition of man is contrary to Rand's theory of definitions. Rand distinguishes between the definition of a concept and the identity of the entity referred to by the concept, and she explicitly denies that the *identity* of man is reducible to the *definition* of man. The identity of man consists of *all* human characteristics. The definition of the concept man names only

two human characteristics: a genus (animal) and a differentia (rational), rationality being the characteristic that differentiates man from the rest of the animal kingdom. Thus, there is more to being human than just being a rational animal. In Rand's words:

A definition must identify the *nature* of the units, the *essential* characteristics without which the units would not be the kind of existents they are. But it is important to remember that a definition implies *all* the characteristics of the units, since it identifies their *essential*, not their *exhaustive*, characteristics; since it designates *existents*, not their isolated aspects; and since it is a condensation of, not a substitute for, a wider knowledge of the existents involved. (1979, 55; cf. Peikoff 1979, 132-43)

Rand likens a definition to the tag on a file folder. The file folder contains all known characteristics of the entity being defined, and the file is always open for collecting new information as knowledge expands.

In the case of unborn children, however, Rand treats rationality as the entire meaning of the concept man. She pulls off the label, discards the file, and then, when she fails to observe rationality's superficial manifestations in unborn children, she concludes that they are not human. If, however, we were to use the information Rand discarded, we would draw quite a different conclusion. For instance, it would not be difficult for a biologist to determine that the organism formed from the union of a human sperm and a human egg is a human being—a human being who, if left unmolested, and barring accidents and abnormalities, will develop and display a rational faculty.

Second, Rand seems to reduce man's rational faculty to its mature and active state. But philosophers and psychologists, most eminently Jean Piaget, have shown that the human rational faculty develops and unfolds its capacities over time. Yet, at every stage of its development, the rational faculty is still the rational faculty.⁵ Reason is reason, whether in its earliest stages of development or in its full maturity. Reason is reason, whether in a state of dormancy or in a state of activity.

Third, if the criterion for being human is the *actual usage* of one's *mature* rational faculty, then this does much more than deny that unborn

children are human. It also denies that newborns, the mentally retarded, the insane, and the senile are human. If Rand's article, "The Missing Link," has any credibility, one would have to deny the humanity of pragmatic Republican businessmen, naturalistic lady novelists, carefree Latino factory workers, and pinheaded analytic philosophers, all of whom, according to Rand, operate on subrational and therefore subhuman levels of consciousness (1982b 35-38). And if it is not wrong to kill the unborn because they are not actually rational, then it is not wrong to kill infants, the retarded, the insane, the senile, or Bertrand Russell. On this account, active rationality begins to look like the Objectivist equivalent of Aryan good-looks.⁶

4. The Argument from Individualism

Rand also offers a subsidiary argument for abortion on demand that begins from her principle that there can be no conflicts of rights. To say that an unborn child has a right to life implies that the child's mother does not have the right to do whatever she pleases to "her body." This conflict is unacceptable. Therefore, the unborn child does not have the right to life. Therefore, abortion on demand is legally permissible. In Rand's words: "Observe that by ascribing rights to the unborn, i.e., the nonliving [this is a stunning claim, given that nobody denies that something is killed during an abortion], the anti-abortionists obliterate the rights of the living: the right of young people to set the course of their own lives" (1976, 3).

But the principle that there are no conflicts of rights is a double-edged sword. If there are no conflicts of rights, and unborn children are human beings, then Rand would simply have to accept that pregnant women do not have the right to do whatever they please to "their bodies," because their bodies are, for approximately nine months, attached to the bodies of other human beings.

This argument will be resisted because it seems to strike at the very heart of Rand's ethical egoism and libertarian commitment to negative liberty and individual sovereignty.⁷ Objectivism, after all, is about the rights of individuals to live their lives as they please. Objectivism recognizes only negative obligations in relation to others. It tells us only to respect their equal liberty to live their lives as they please. It imposes no

positive obligations on us to help others, support others, or even give a damn about others. An unborn child's right to life, however, imposes positive obligations on women, so it seems to destroy negative liberty.

But does it? Objectivists do recognize positive obligations to others, but only if they are *chosen* obligations. Hence, Nathaniel Branden's claim, in the days when he was a spokesman for Rand, that parents do have positive obligations to their children, because:

(a) they [the parents] brought him [a child] into existence, and (b) a child, by nature, cannot survive independently. (The fact that the parents might not have *desired* the child, in a given case, is irrelevant in this context; he is nevertheless the consequence of their chosen actions—a consequence that, as a possibility, was foreseeable.)⁸ (Branden 1962, 3)

Given this argument, and given that unborn children are human beings, the right to life follows as a matter of course.

Of course, if the only positive obligations are chosen ones, then there would be no obligation to a child conceived involuntarily. But there is good reason to think that there are unchosen positive obligations.

A crucial presupposition of Rand's claim that rights can never conflict is that right-bearers are separate individuals who are in principle capable of living on their own, and whose only positive obligations to others are voluntarily chosen ones. Rand reasons that because unborn children are not separate and independent individuals, they have no rights. But this equation of rights bearers with separate and independent individuals is precisely what is at issue.

Would Rand seriously argue that Siamese twins have no positive obligations to one another? Could one Siamese twin sign up for skydiving lessons without the consent of the other? Could one take drugs without the consent of the other? Could one commit suicide without the consent of the other? If not, then one would have to admit the existence of unchosen, biologically-based positive obligations between human beings who cannot exist separately.

The same argument applies to women with children in their wombs, whether the children are conceived voluntarily or not. Rand, however,

simply closes her eyes to such possibilities. Rather than adjusting her individualist ideology to complex human realities, Rand employs the abortionist's scalpel and vacuum hose to force human reality into the Procrustean bed of an abstract ideology.

5. Where Does Rand Go Wrong?

Rand claims with great pride to have bridged modern philosophy's gap between "is" and "ought," between the facts of reality and moral norms, by discovering that the fact of life is both the foundation and standard of value. What an organism is determines what it ought to do. For human beings, the standard of value is "man's life *qua* man," i.e., a truly human existence. If one accepts Rand's argument that man's life *qua* man is the standard of value, then one's standard must be the *whole* of human life, including all its developmental stages, from conception to old age.

Where does Rand go wrong? Rand's approach constitutes an austere reductionistic account of human nature. She departs from the holism implied by the standard of "man's life *qua* man" through a series of reductive equations or conceptual substitutions.⁹

First, when discussing the question of human flourishing, Rand does not focus on all the features of human life and human flourishing, but only on one feature: reason. From the claim that "*man's life*" is the standard of value, Rand moves directly to the argument that, "[s]ince reason is man's basic means of survival, that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes, or destroys it is the evil" (1966, 23). Thus, the empirically rich concept of man's life is replaced with the relatively more austere concept of reason, on the questionable assumption that all components of human flourishing arise out of reason. Consequently, when we give an account of the flourishing of the rational faculty, we have given a complete account of human flourishing, and need not say any more.¹⁰

Second, Rand reductively identifies reason with its mature and active state. Thus, Rand's virtues consist simply of different ways of actively applying rationality to the problem of survival; no virtues, and no value, are ascribed to human beings who are unable, or not yet able, to use reason in this manner.

Third, at the foundation of her theory of rights, Rand substitutes the concept of rationality with the concept of will, or "volition."¹¹ Rand claims: "To think is an act of choice. . . . [*M*]an is a being of volitional consciousness" (1961, 146). Therefore, if man is to live his life *qua* man, i.e., if he is to be rational, then the free exercise of his will must be protected from its two deadly enemies: force and fraud. Rights protect the social conditions for the exercise of rationality, establishing a society in which separate individuals relate to one another only through voluntary means, through persuasion and trade, rather than through force and fraud.

Thus, once we enter the realm of politics, the empirically rich aim of promoting man's life *qua* man has been reduced to the empirically almost vacuous aim of protecting freedom of choice—the freedom of the will as such, regardless of whether it chooses wisdom or folly, good or evil—so long as these choices respect the equal freedom of others to do the same.

Rand, of course, would deny that anything essential has been lost in the conceptual equation: man's life = active rationality = freedom. She would claim that nothing comprehended by the concept of man's life is not comprehended by the concepts of reason and freedom. But this is false. What Rand loses sight of is the entire biological, corporeal dimension of mankind. In particular, three important biological facts are ignored: (1) sexual difference, (2) the developmental nature of life, i.e., the biological fact that human beings develop and unfold their various capacities, including their capacity to exercise reason, over a life-span that begins at conception and ends with death; and (3) the fact that women and their unborn children are distinct, but not separate, individuals during pregnancy.

Furthermore, Rand not only ignores the human body and its biological functions, in her response to *Humanae Vitae* she explicitly denigrates them:

It is only animals that have to adapt themselves to their physical background and to the biological functions of their bodies. Man adapts his physical background and the use of his biological faculties to himself—to his own needs and values. *That* is his distinction from all other living species. (1988b, 55)

Rand vehemently opposes any form of the mind-body dichotomy (1961, 170-71, 175). Yet here she distinguishes man's environment and his body

from "himself," i.e., his "own needs and values." So man is really just a mind with a set of preferences. And, since Rand holds that values are chosen, what is really ultimate is the will. As a "biocentric" Aristotelian, Rand should treat man's life *qua* man, including his body and biological functions, as *normative*, as the standard of value, so that a life that does not actualize its potentialities for physical excellence is a diminished life. Her reduction of life to freedom, however, demotes the body to the same level as the environment. It is merely raw material for the satisfaction of preferences, a vehicle for the expression of the will: "your body is a machine . . . your mind is its driver" (1961, 160). But given this degraded conception of the body, how can an understanding of man's biological nature serve as a *norm*, as a foundation for ethics? How can a mere means be part of the standard, i.e., an end in itself? And if none of man's "needs and values" are derived from his body and its biological processes, then from what are they derived? From the will, apparently. But since the will cannot look to man's biological nature for guidance in selecting values, it is hard to escape the conclusion that they are merely sovereign whims.

Thus, it is ironic that Rand accuses the Catholic church of an insidious mind-body dichotomy because it wishes to make mankind's biological nature, including our reproductive biology, part of the moral norm to which the will must submit. The irony is compounded when Rand accuses Catholicism of denigrating the body because it treats its proper biological functioning as part of the human good, while she herself degrades the body to being a mere tool of the will.

The conceptual sleight of hand by which Rand reduces man's life to freedom reveals a contradiction in her account of the relationship of reason and the will. As an Aristotelian, Rand affirms the priority of the "metaphysical" over the "man made." By this, she means not only that man's will and creativity are constrained by natural necessities, but also by natural *norms*; our choices are governed not only by what naturally *is*, but also by what naturally *ought to be*. In terms of human faculties, this means that will and creativity must be governed by the faculty which discovers what naturally is and ought to be. That faculty is reason. In other words, reason has primacy over the will. However, Rand's assertion that man has the choice to be rational or not means that this choice is prior to the exercise of rationality. Hence, it cannot be determined by an appeal to

rational grounds or to natural grounds; it is absurd, irrational. In sum, the will has primacy over reason (Johnson 1999, 159-63).

6. Rand: Feminist or Masculinist?

One can also argue that Rand's apparently feminist advocacy of abortion on demand is, ironically, an expression of a deep masculinist bias in her conception of man's life *qua* man. Rand implicitly understands man's life *qua* man exclusively in terms of traditionally masculine activities, which are not easily combined with bearing and nurturing children. Rand declares: "The motive and goal of my writing is *the projection of an ideal man*. . . . My purpose, first cause and prime mover is the portrayal of Howard Roark or John Galt or Hank Rearden or Francisco d'Anconia *as an end in himself*. . ." (1975a, 162). These heroes are Rand's answer to the question: What, precisely, does "man's life *qua* man" *mean*? (1975b, 21-22). Her apparent answer is: Man's life *qua* man is that of a highly intelligent, creative, ambitious, and productive adult male in the prime of his life. And at the center of his life is his career.

Interviewing Rand for *Playboy*, Alvin Toffler asked: "According to your philosophy, work and achievement are the highest goals of life. Do you regard as immoral those who find greater fulfillment in the warmth of friendship and family ties?" (1964b, 7). To this, Rand replied:

If they place such things as friendship and family ties above their own productive work, yes, then they are immoral. Friendship, family life and human relationships are not primary in a man's life. A man who places others first, above his own creative work, is an emotional parasite.

But something is created through true friendship: self-knowledge and self-actualization. And something is created through marriage and family life, the most remarkable thing that human beings can create: new human beings.

Rand describes femininity as "man worship" (1988a, 268). Womanhood is defined in relation to manhood. In answer to Toffler's question, "Do you believe that women as well as men should organize their

lives around work . . . ?” Rand replied, “Of course. I believe that women are human beings. What is proper for a man is proper for a woman.” With the one exception of the job of President of the United States, Rand denies the relevance of sexual difference in the choice of one’s career (1988a). However, when asked if she regarded as immoral women who choose home and family over careers outside the home, Rand hedged. Such women are “not immoral” but “impractical, because a home cannot be a full-time occupation.” Raising a family could, however, be redeemed “if [a woman] approaches it as a career—if she studies the subject, if she defines the rules and principles . . . if she approaches her task in an intellectual manner.” She must, in short, treat it “as a science, not as a mere emotional indulgence.”

In short, women have two options: either career or motherhood—and the family option can be redeemed only by treating it as a career. Thus, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, for Rand, the fully actualized life is the life of a *male* architect, scientist, copper baron, or steel tycoon. Motherhood deserves only an afterthought, and cannot be morally justified in its own right. Consequently, for a woman, the greatest impediment to a truly human existence is childbearing. This being the case, abortion is absolutely necessary to liberate women from the slavery of their bodies, their biology, their womanhood. Pregnancy is not seen as a function of a healthy female body. It is a sickness to be cured so that a woman can return to a state of health, the state of childlessness which is the normal state of the male body.

For Rand to denigrate childbearing and domestic life and laud childless careerism is to adopt an iceberg model of humanity: the submerged nine-tenths of women toil away day after day in endless diaper drudgery so that the tenth of women above the waterline need not fear for the survival of the race and can instead spend their days posing for nude statues, running railroads, and writing novels. It asserts that we are alive simply because our mothers had us out of unthinking ignorance, or emotional parasitism, or because they had nothing better to do. It asserts a Hindu model of life where enlightenment finally breaks the endless cycle of birth, childbearing and death. But if all women were to emulate Dagny Taggart or Dominique Françon or Ayn Rand, the human race would end in 100 years. And, from a biocentric point of view, that is as anti-life a position as you can get.

7. Conclusion

Ayn Rand was one of the most vigorous advocates of abortion on demand. We have shown, however, that her arguments for abortion are weak because her criteria for personhood are confused. We have also argued that Rand’s advocacy of abortion on demand and her denigration of child-rearing and domestic life follow from a reductionistic and, therefore, flawed conception of human life. If, however, one adopts a more nuanced and holistic conception of human flourishing, then pro-life and pro-family positions follow as a matter of course.

This presents Rand and her followers with a choice. They must either affirm her basic Aristotelian commitments, in which case they must conclude that abortion on demand is murder. Or they can continue to defend abortion rights by abandoning Rand’s Aristotelianism. Either way, one cannot escape the conclusion that Ayn Rand’s philosophy is ultimately incompatible with abortion on demand.

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Notes

1. On the nature of Rand’s Aristotelianism, see the essays by Douglas J. Den Uyl and Douglas B. Rasmussen, and by Jack Wheeler, in Den Uyl and Rasmussen 1984.
2. For other Objectivist defenses of abortion on demand, see Peikoff 1991, 357-58 and Bernstein 1998. Peikoff adds nothing to Rand’s statements. Bernstein tries to add new arguments. We do not deal with Bernstein for two reasons. First, we are concerned only with Rand’s views. Second, Campbell (1998 and 1999) has already offered a devastating critique of Bernstein.
3. Rand waffles on this slightly, stating: “One may argue about the later stages of pregnancy” (1976, 3).
4. The process of cloning allows any human cell to function as a gamete, and to grow into a new organism, which is genetically-identical to the cell donor. But until a given cell actually becomes part of a new organism, it has the same status as an egg or sperm cell. Eggs and sperm are not *actually* separate organisms, but are only components of *potential* separate organisms and are *actually* merely parts of the organisms that produce them.
5. For an excellent introduction to Piaget, see Kitchener 1986.
6. Those inclined to dismiss this last line as a cheap shot should consider Rand’s remarks, in the question and answer session following her West Point lecture, “Philosophy: Who Needs It,” on the treatment of the American Indians by European settlers and of Palestinians by Jewish settlers. Aside from some bizarre and inaccurate historical claims,

Rand could not bring herself to condemn the killing and dispossession of Indians and Arabs because she regarded them as primitive and irrational. She also makes the subjectivist claim that primitive people have no property rights worth respecting because they do not have the "concept" of private property. See Rand 1974.

7. This, of course, would indicate that it is Rand's political convictions that dictated her moral philosophy and not vice-versa.

8. John Walker has suggested (in private correspondence) that Rand's strong notion of parental obligation is the reason why she preferred abortion to adoption: If a child is born, its parents are morally obligated to raise it, not put it up for adoption. Thus, the only way to avoid raising an unwanted child is to abort it.

9. For more on Rand's reductionism, see Johnson 1999, 152-57.

10. This assumption is highly questionable, because man is not merely rational; he is the rational *animal*, which would imply that many components of human flourishing are shared with non-rational animals as well.

11. Rand's statements do not support the interpretation that reason and volition are the same faculty; nor do they support the interpretation that volition is merely part of the rational faculty. If we can will to reason or not, this implies that the faculties are distinct. Although we cannot reason without willing, we can will without reasoning.

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