

Rand on Abortion, Revisited

Gregory R. Johnson and David Rasmussen

We wish to thank Tibor Machan and Alexander Tabarrok for reading and responding to our paper. We think that the best rejoinder to their criticisms is the original paper itself, so we urge the reader to turn there first. Most of the following remarks simply amplify statements in the original paper and point to how our critics misunderstand them.

Our Main Argument

After a nineteen paragraph introduction, Machan devotes three paragraphs to our principal argument. But he misses the point of it.

This is our argument: Rand's main argument for the moral and legal rectitude of abortion is simple. Human beings have rights simply because they are human. Rand does not hold that some additional property has to be added onto our humanity so that we acquire rights. In other words, Rand draws no distinction between being human and being a moral "person," i.e., a rights-bearer. We have rights simply because we are human. Thus, her chief argument for abortion does not assert that unborn children may be humans, but they are not persons. Instead, she asserts that unborn children are not human beings at all. Therefore, they do not have rights. Therefore, they can be killed at our pleasure.

The chief flaw of Rand's argument is the assertion that unborn children are not actual human beings, but merely "potential" ones. However, according to Rand's "axiom" of identity, to be is to be something. This means that if unborn children are not actually human beings, they have to be some kind of beings. What species do they actually belong to? A biologist could answer this question quite

handily. The organism formed when human egg and human sperm unite is a human.

This is a fact so obvious that even Rand could not entirely evade it. Hence, in "The Age of Mediocrity," she lets slip that the product of conception is not merely a "blob of protoplasm" of indeterminate identity, but a "few human cells," whereupon she denies the difference between the human cells that form a distinct organism and the human cells that do not, such as a blood stain or an unfertilized egg (Rand 1981, 3).

In answer to our question, "What species do unborn children belong to, if they are not human?" Machan replies: "The answer is that the identity of the being that is potentially human is a human fetus . . . A potential human being can be an actual human fetus. That is its identity." On the one hand, Machan admits that an unborn child is human. On the other hand, he seems to assert that there is some sort of relevant difference between a human being and a human fetus. An unborn child may be human, says Machan, but it is not a human being. Why not? In one place, Machan claims that the product of conception is a human being only after its twenty-fourth week, when its cerebral cortex is developed. In another place, he seems to say that it is a human being after the second week, when it is no longer susceptible to twinning and various causes of death. It is all very confusing. In fact, it is blatantly contradictory to say that the same thing both is and is not human at the same time and in the same respect.

There are two ways of resolving this contradiction. On the one hand, one can amend Machan's assertion, "A potential human being can be an actual human fetus," to read: "A potential human adult can be an actual human fetus." On this reading, however, one is human throughout all the stages of life, from conception to old age and death. And if an unborn child is human from conception, then on Rand's account it has the right to life, since Rand holds that rights are required to insure human survival and flourishing in a social environment. (An unborn child is in a social environment, not some sort of "private" limbo. An unborn child is not part of its mother's body; they are genetically distinct individuals; and society begins when there

are at least two individuals.)

On the other hand, Machan may simply be using the term "human" equivocally, so that the contradictory assertion, "A human fetus is not a human being" really means, "A human fetus is not a legal person, i.e., a rights-bearer." Machan does seem to be edging toward a distinction between human beings and human persons. On his account, personhood is constituted by rationality, so that he would not, "*consider it homicide to kill someone who has not yet developed even in the slightest the familiar distinguishing capacity of a human being, namely, thinking or idea formation, conceptualization*" (the original is entirely italicized). He goes on to explain: "Around the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy, the biological basis for the capacity for thinking develops within the fetus and at this point if one were to abort it, one would most sensibly be considered to be killing an infant human being." Still later, he asserts that, "to be a human individual is to be an animal that has the capacity to think, to form ideas, to conceptualize . . ." To square these assertions with his admission that the products of conception are human (or human after two weeks), all Machan need do is replace "human being" and its cognates with "moral person."

If, however, Machan wishes to support abortion on the basis of a personhood argument, he faces a problem: The same arguments that deny the personhood of unborn children also deny the personhood of infants and small children, the incurably insane and the severely retarded, people in vegetative and comatose states, and the senile and severely brain-damaged. If we can kill unborn children at our pleasure, then we can kill these people as well. In short, Machan's argument proves too much and thus presents him with a choice. He can either accept that his argument also justifies infanticide and euthanasia, opening the door for Nazi-style abuses, or he can come up with an argument that supports abortion and only abortion. In either case, Machan's defense of Rand actually abandons her own argument and offers an entirely new, and no less problematic, argument in its place. We have no objection to abandoning Rand's position, as it is untenable. We wish only that the new argument were tenable and that it were not inaccurately characterized as being in the

spirit of Rand's.

Bringing in Biology

Like Machan, Tabarrok simply does not grasp the force of our main argument. Perhaps he misses the point because it is so obvious, and, as he remarks, "any thinker worth grappling with is unlikely to be defeated by a statement of the obvious." He needs to check his premises.

Tabarrok completely misunderstands our appeals to biology. He simply asserts that biology cannot answer questions of moral and political philosophy, even though Rand's primary argument for abortion on demand hinges on the purely biological question of whether the organism that results from the union of human egg and human sperm is human. Contrary to Tabarrok, however, this does not imply that we hold that Rand somehow "deduce[s] rights from personhood or from 'simply being human.'" To base a moral philosophy on an account of man's biological nature is obviously an inductive not a deductive procedure.

Tabarrok claims that our "argument rests on an equivocation between the use of human as an adjectival description of cells and the use of human as a noun meaning a member of the human species." In support of this claim, he quotes our article: "by Rand's criterion [for having rights], being a blob of *human* cells is all that it takes for an organism to be a person." Tabarrok removes this quote from its context, which clearly deals only with *organisms*, not with single detached cells or clumps of cells. Indeed, he quotes our use of "organism," but apparently does not understand it. If an *organism*, as opposed to a single detached cell or clump of cells, is made of human cells, then it is a human being.

Tabarrok claims that "there is no logical contradiction between asserting that 'this zygote is not a human being' and 'this zygote is a human zygote.'" But this is simply false. All we need ask is: What is a human zygote? Answer: A human zygote is a human being at an early stage of its development. Thus, Tabarrok is committed to the patent contradiction that, "A human zygote (a human being in an

early stage of its development) is not a human being." The only way that Tabarrok can make this statement non-contradictory is by assuming that being human is more than just being a human organism; but this is merely a disguised version of the distinction between human beings and moral persons; if so, then Tabarrok is departing from Rand's view, which begs the question against us.

Tabarrok on Rights and Personhood

Tabarrok quotes Rand's statement:

A "right" is a moral principle defining and sanctioning a man's freedom of action in a *social* context. . . . Thus, for every individual, a right is a moral sanction of a positive—of his freedom to act on his own judgment, for his own goals, by his own voluntary, uncoerced choice. (Rand 1964a, 93)

Tabarrok then asserts that this passage (along with another passage of dubious relevance) shows that Rand's concept of rights does not apply to unborn children, because "the embryo or fetus has no freedom of action to define or sanction. The embryo cannot and does not act on its own judgment; it does not have its own 'goals.'"

This is true. It is also true of infants, the retarded, the insane, the comatose, and the senile. In short, Rand's definition of rights reflects her tendency (which we discussed in our paper) to equate being human as such with being a healthy adult human. In short, Rand's definition is inconsistent with her own fundamental belief that human beings *as such* have rights. Moreover, her definition does not mention the fundamentality of *life* to her moral and political philosophy. Presumably, though, our "freedom of action in a social context" is meaningless if we have no right not to be murdered at will, before or after birth. Rand's definition, therefore, is inconsistent and does need to be revised.

Tabarrok, however, prefers to accept Rand's inadequate formulation of her definition of rights; he is, therefore, compelled to reconstruct its foundations to make them consistent with the

definition—all the while denying that there is any inconsistency in the first place. To do this, Tabarrok introduces a distinction between being human and being a person or rights-bearer: “the issue is not whether fetuses are human beings but whether they are rights-bearers. Since embryos and fetuses do not possess the characteristics that make rights ‘right,’ they are not rights-bearers.”

Since Tabarrok is not disputing that these “embryos and fetuses” are human beings, the property that must be added on to make them rights-bearers is some notion of “personhood.” According to Tabarrok, personhood is constituted by having mature and healthy rational faculties, such that “it denies that entities possessing immature or defective rational faculties are rights-bearers to the same extent as those possessing mature rational faculties.” One indication as to how far Tabarrok has strayed from Rand’s position is that he finds it, “plausible that as fetuses near term and as they near the time when they fully enter a social context, they gain a restricted set of rights similar to, but not yet as extensive as, those of infants.” He is, of course, free to do this, but he is departing from Rand’s position, not defending it, and he should at least recognize that fact.

As for Tabarrok’s claim that, “[r]ights, in Rand’s view, are not discovered or deduced—they are created, and created for a *purpose*,” this dichotomy seems to be a failed attempt to formulate Rand’s trichotomy of the intrinsic-subjective-objective. If rights are “created,” however, we have to ask: On what basis are they created? If they are “created” because they are objective conditions for man’s survival and flourishing in a social context, then the foundation of rights is man’s objective nature. But if this is so, it is hard to see how they are in any meaningful sense “created.” Rights on this account are like air, trees, water, and animals, which are also objective conditions required by nature for our survival and flourishing. We do not create rights; we merely recognize and respect rights, just as we recognize and respect our needs for air, trees, water, and animals. Human creativity comes in only in providing the means to recognize and respect rights, such as laws, courts, police, and prisons. Tabarrok’s loose talk about creating rights conjures up a sovereign power that can arbitrarily refuse to

recognize the rights of unborn children.

Tabarrok points out that, “an infant does *not* have a right to possess a firearm, shoot cocaine, go where he or she will, or sign a binding contract. Parents routinely constrain their infants in ways that would violate the rights of adults but does not violate the rights of infants . . .” He also correctly observes: “It does not follow, of course, that infants etc. have no rights, only that their rights are restricted as a function of the immaturity or diminishment of the rational capacity.” We would add, however, that this in no way implies that the sole foundation of rights is the functioning of one’s rational faculty, such that if one’s rational faculty is entirely inactive, one has no rights at all and can be killed at will. This argument would not only sanction abortion, but also the killing of the mentally retarded, the insane, and the senile. We agree with Tabarrok that a “theory of rights based on simple ‘humanity’ . . . needs to be supplemented with a theory of why the number and scope of rights increases as children become adults.” We think it is reasonable to hold that we have the right to life simply because we are human and other, more specific rights to the extent that our nature requires them and is capable of exercising them.

Moles, Tumors, Twins, Etc.

One of Machan’s arguments comes from a biologist’s “Letter to the Editor” of the *Wall Street Journal*: “before day 14, when the embryo can first be said to exist, the embryoblast can develop into an embryo proper, a tumor, a hyatidiform mole, a choriocarcinoma (i.e., cancer), twins, or triplets, or, in at least two-thirds of the cases, nothing at all (due to genetic defects).” According to Machan, this means that, “no person with an identity—or, to use a different term for it, a soul—can exist prior to day 14 after conception.”

The list Machan cites breaks down into two categories: forms of death (turning into a cancer, a mole, a tumor or being spontaneously aborted) and forms of asexual reproduction (dividing into twins and triplets). Machan’s argument is that anything that can undergo these processes is not a human being. But this simply does not follow.

Let us deal first with death. The arbitrariness and absurdity of this argument becomes clear as soon as we ask: Why confine the argument to the particular causes of death enumerated? Why confine it to the first two weeks after conception? Why not argue that the product of conception is not human at the third month of pregnancy either, because it can die from a whole host of other causes? Why not argue the same for a child of ten or a man of sixty? They can die too. Machan is, in short, assuming that to be human, we cannot be mortal.

Machan also assumes that if the product of conception can twin during the first fourteen days, then it is not human. Twinning is a mysterious form of asexual reproduction in which a single organism divides into two distinct but genetically identical organisms. If Machan is willing to grant that the products of twinning are human, then it is hard to understand how he can deny that the original organism is human as well, given that it is genetically identical to the twins. Indeed, why is the death of a human being at the stage when it can become twins or triplets not counted a greater loss than the death of a human being at a later stage of its development when twinning is not possible? A human being past the stage when twinning is possible has a whole life ahead of him, but a human being before that point may have two or three lives ahead of him. More's the loss. Furthermore, now that human cloning is a real possibility, all of us are capable of twinning ourselves at any age. On Machan's account, would this mean that none of us are now human?

Good and Bad Analogies

Machan offers a slew of bad analogies. He states that "killing a fetus is not homicide, just as killing a seed is not equivalent to killing a flower and killing a caterpillar is not equivalent to killing a butterfly." But killing a seed is more analogous to killing a sperm cell or unfertilized egg, for they are not distinct organisms, but merely detached cells. Killing a germinated seed would, however, be analogous to killing an unborn child. In both cases, they are separate and distinct organisms in the early stages of their development.

Killing a germinated seed is killing a plant, a plant in the earliest stage of its development. Killing an unborn child is killing a human being, a human being in the earliest stage of its development.

As for caterpillars and butterflies: Killing a caterpillar is not the same as killing a butterfly, just as killing an unborn child is not the same as killing an adult. But caterpillars and butterflies are merely two distinct developmental stages of the same organism. So when we kill a caterpillar and a butterfly, we are killing the same kind of organism at different stages of its development. Likewise, when we kill an unborn human or an adult human, we are killing the same kind of organism, a human being, at different stages of its development.

Elsewhere, Machan claims that "eggs are potential chicken; they possess an identity, which is being eggs," just as an unborn child is both "a potential human being" and "an actual human fetus." Finally, he claims that the killing of an unborn child is no more the killing of a human being than the killing of "an egg [would] constitute the killing of a chicken." Then he adds: "A thief who steals eggs is not the same as a thief who steals chickens." All of these analogies commit an error we identified in our original article: equating a species with its adult members only. A fertilized chicken egg may be a potential *adult* chicken, but is an actual chicken all the while, an actual chicken in the earliest stage of its development. Therefore, killing a fertilized chicken egg is killing a chicken, and stealing a fertilized chicken egg is stealing a chicken—but not, of course, an adult chicken. Likewise, a human fetus may be a potential *adult* human, but it is an actual human being all the while, an actual human being in the earliest stage of its development.

Tabarrok also uses bad analogies: We claim that once human egg and human sperm have united to form an organism, the result is a human being in the earliest stage of its development. Tabarrok asserts that this is analogous to the claim that "once eggs, water and flour have been mixed together the product is an actual cake." Now, it is tempting to say that the product is a cake: a cake in the earliest stage of its development. But the analogy fails, because a fertilized egg is an organism that, given the proper conditions and left to its own devices, will develop itself into an adult human being, whereas

cake batter is not an organism and left to its own devices will never become a cake.

Tabarrok also offers a critique of our own Siamese twins analogy. But it is entirely beside the point, because he misunderstands the purpose of our analogy. He then constructs a circular argument, falsely attributes it to us, and triumphantly un.masks our alleged error. The aim of the analogy was not, however, to establish that unborn children have rights (something already established by that point in our essay), but to argue that Rand is mistaken to equate rights-bearers with separate, independent individuals whose only positive obligations are chosen ones.

We cannot, moreover, resist pointing out that Tabarrok's Peter and Hans do have unchosen obligations since their joint ownership was imposed upon them by their father, not by themselves. Tabarrok's assertion that their obligations follow from their rights rather than their rights from their obligations is not apparently relevant to the question of chosen and unchosen obligations.

Trespassers, Kidnappers, Violinists, and Kidney Thieves

Tabarrok asserts that, "in the case of the mother and fetus, it is the mother who has pre-existing rights to her body and the fetus that is 'trespassing.' In the latter case, it does not follow that the fetus has a right to remain in the womb even if it is a rights-bearer in other respects." The claim that an unborn child is a trespasser is an abuse of language. Trespassing is a minor crime. To be guilty of a crime, one has to choose to commit it. A person who is forced onto another person's property is no trespasser, particularly if he is forced by the property owner. Indeed, in that case, the property owner would be guilty of abduction. Since an unborn child has no choice about whether and where it is gestated, but the vast majority of mothers do have the choice to conceive or not, it would be less of an abuse of language to call mothers kidnappers than unborn babies trespassers. And if a kidnapper refuses to keep her victim alive, then she is guilty of murder as well.

But let's grant for the sake of argument that unborn children are trespassers. Abortion on demand would still not follow. After all, to kill an unarmed and helpless trespasser would be murder. Instead, the victim of trespassing should call the police and have the little criminal incarcerated. But to kill the criminal then would be a denial of due process. So the victim would have to continue sheltering the criminal until he can be tried and convicted. But even then, the criminal could not be killed, for to kill someone for trespassing is patently unjust. Since when is trespassing a capital crime?

Tabarrok then cites Judith Jarvis Thompson's infamous "violinist" scenario. He notes that her paper is supposed to be "the most cited in all of philosophy" and finds it "strange" that we "do not discuss this paper given its relevance." (In his very next note, he remarks that it is not relevant to the discussion of Rand's views.) Tabarrok notes that in Thompson's scenario, the violinist clearly has rights, but thinks it obvious that he does not have the right to stay hooked up to your body, even if unplugging him will kill him. And, "[i]f the violinist does not have a right to force you to stay tied to him, then *a fortiori*, an embryo, a questionable rights-bearer at best, does not have a right to have his mother carry him to term."

We chose not to discuss the violinist scenario in our original article not only because it is irrelevant, but also because it is stupid. First, it is strictly analogous to only a vanishingly small percentage of pregnancies, those induced by rape. Second, one of the main reasons why the scenario seems offensive and disturbing is that it is entirely unnatural—something that cannot be said about pregnancy. Third, the intended conclusion is not intuitively obvious at all.¹ The fact that Thompson's scenario is widely cited does not mean that it is a good argument. It is simply indicative of the credulity, moral fatuousness, and scandalously low intellectual standards of pro-abortion advocates. (Rand is certainly not alone in this.)

In this, the real world, if one woke up with another person attached to one's body, one would justly be charged with murder if one simply pulled the plug. If the person did not actively participate in being hooked up, then he is guilty of no crime, not even "trespassing." If he did actively trespass, this is still a matter for courts to

handle, and in any case the just penalty for trespassing is not death. If either of us found ourselves involuntarily attached to a violinist for nine months, the "obvious" course of action would be to call the police and try to bring the culprits to justice. In the meantime, we would try to arrange an alternative voluntary host for the violinist. But if this were impossible, we would stay hooked up for the duration. Why? Because the violinist is a human being with rights, and no matter how guilty he is or how inconvenienced we are, death is not a just penalty. The best we could hope for is an award of financial damages from the culprit.

Rand's Anti-Natal Bias

In our original article, we argued that Rand seemed to define human flourishing as if the human race consisted entirely of career-oriented, competitive males. Rand simply ignored the possibility that childbearing, child-rearing, and other forms of nurturing might be essential parts of a woman's flourishing, not merely optional extras. We accused Rand of treating such activities as mere afterthoughts that could not be justified on their own terms and could be redeemed only by turning them into a "career."

Tabarrok, however, accuses us of failing fully to quote Rand's *Playboy* interview, dismissing our argument as if it rested entirely upon that source. Oddly enough, though, the passage he cites supports our thesis. Rand (1964b) claims that the aim of being a housewife and a mother is "not immoral" but "impractical"—surely an odd dichotomy to hear from Ayn Rand. It is impractical, because it "cannot be a full-time occupation," i.e., a "career," except when children are young. Thus far, it seems that child-rearing is a practical vocation only when it takes up all of one's time. When the children are older, however, the mother is condemned to the horror of leisure—as if the leisure of an educated and ambitious woman could consist only of loafing around in bathrobe and curlers, eating bon-bons and watching soap-operas, gossiping and getting her hair done. Rand then adds another condition to redeem the choice of child-rearing. It can be responsible and important, but only if treated "as a science, not as a

mere emotional indulgence." Tabarrok does not hear the bias and the lip-service here, but we do.

We think that Rand grossly overrates work and underrates leisure as components of a happy life. In our view, the ancients had it right and Rand had it wrong. Leisure has priority over work, and it is work that must be justified as a means to leisure rather than leisure having to be justified by being turned into work.

It is true that many men find a great deal of fulfillment in their work. Men are naturally drawn to competitive and hierarchical social arrangements.² But it is also true that most men find their "careers" to be miserable and alienating drudgery. No human heart is so small that it can be content huffing packages for UPS. Furthermore, it is leisure, not work, that is the primary condition for the cultivation of all-round human excellence.

Rand is a typical modern feminist in accepting the mistaken notion that every man's happiness is to be found in a full-time career and then recommending the same strategy to women. But most women find full-time careers even more miserable and alienating than men do. Aside from the fact that most careers cannot engage the deepest levels of the self, male or female, most women are not naturally drawn toward competitive and hierarchical social orders, which are characteristic of the workplace, preferring instead non-competitive and egalitarian orders. Furthermore, a full-time career is not compatible with responsible childbearing and child-rearing. Thus, the pursuit of full-time careers leads many intelligent and ambitious women, precisely the kind of women who are most capable of raising their children well, to run out their biological clocks or to neglect the children they do have.

Rand's advice to the women who choose family over career is: Make the family as much like a career as possible. But why? Why make family life a full-time occupation? Can any woman be fully satisfied with domestic life? Not likely. Then why make it a full-time occupation? Because being a housewife and a mother is not a full-time occupation, many women have leisure time that makes them the envy of their husbands: the leisure to read, to keep themselves fit, to develop new hobbies and interests, to involve themselves in com-

munity groups and volunteer organizations, to develop and round out their personalities. On our view, the choice of being a full-time career woman or a full-time housewife is a false alternative premised on the false assumption that we should want to be a full-time *anything*.

We heartily agree with Rand's assertion that child-rearing should be rational and scientific rather than merely emotional. Tabarrok, however, thinks that Rand's advice applies to the motives for childbearing, not merely to the means of child-rearing. Thus, he condemns the millions of unwed teenagers who become pregnant merely because they want a child to love. This, he thinks, is a "tragedy."

Why a tragedy? Is it tragic because of the mothers' emotional motives? Or is it tragic because of the consequences for the children? Rand was perhaps wise to refrain from commenting on the proper motives for childbearing, for outside of noble families who need to produce heirs, it is hard to see any "rational" and "scientific" motives for having children at all. Thus, we would hazard that virtually all women give birth as a matter of emotional self-indulgence. But surely Tabarrok does not think that every birth is tragic.

If the tragedy does not lie in the motives, then it must lie in the results. The children of teenage mothers frequently live in poverty, and some of them are emotionally damaged. Many abortion and family planning advocates think they are better off dead—not because they are not human, not because they are not "persons," but merely because they are not middle class. It is not clear if Tabarrok belongs in this camp, but note that he is willing to second-guess the choice to conceive, but not the choice to abort.

Terminological Complaints and Misunderstandings

Machan reproves our use of the words "unborn children" to refer to human beings before they are born: "If one were to think that only left-wing ideologues invoke political correctness, this is a clear example of how those on the right do so as well. Using 'unborn child' emotionally loads the debate in ways that 'fetus' does not." On the contrary, we think that "fetus" is an abuse of language employed

by abortion advocates to draw a veil over what they are killing: unborn children.

"Fetus" was originally a scientific term. It has been adopted by politicians, journalists, and abortion advocates, but it is not in general use. To the layman, "fetus" has the semantic opacity of most technical terms. It lacks the semantic and emotional content of "unborn baby" or "unborn child," which refer to the same realities. The use of "fetus" in connection with abortion is scientifically inaccurate, because it refers to only one stage of an unborn baby's development. Used generically, the term conceals the fact that it is a *human* "fetus" being killed. The term was chosen to suppress the natural feelings of horror and moral indignation evoked by the killing of innocent human beings. It suppresses these feelings simply by clouding our awareness of the facts that evoke them. In short, "fetus" is the term of choice for abortion advocates for the same reason that the Nazis referred to their victims as vermin, bacilli, subhumans, or mere cargo. Killing is easier if we first dehumanize the victim.

But it is a futile stratagem. As soon as "fetus" becomes more a part of colloquial usage, it will acquire all the semantic and emotional connotations of "baby." Pregnant women will want to know the sex of their unborn "fetus." They will want to hear the heartbeat of the "fetus." They will name their "fetus," throw "fetus" showers, wear T-shirts that read "fetus on board," and recoil in horror at the killing of innocent fetuses by abortionists. At that point, abortion advocates will adopt a new scientific term to obscure the human reality of abortion. Then a future writer will demand that the emotionally loaded term "fetus" be replaced with the more "neutral" term. And the whole process will start again.

Our only regret about the phrase "unborn children" is that we did not use "unborn babies" instead.

We must also protest Machan's outrageous accusation that our choice of words is merely a right-wing version of "political correctness," as if we sought to impose our preferred terminology through brain-washing and intimidation.

Tabarrok objects to the phrase "abortion on demand." Abortion

on demand does not mean "abortion available for free through a government hospital or public health insurance system." It simply means that a woman can seek an abortion without having to obtain permission from the government.

Other Aristotelians

In our original article, we mentioned *en passant* that "Catholic natural law moralists use essentially the same premises [as Rand] to argue that abortion on demand is murder." Nothing in our critique of Rand depends upon this assertion, but both Machan and Tabarrok seize upon it nonetheless, perhaps on the debater's premise that one wins rhetorical points by contesting anything, no matter how irrelevant.

Tabarrok falsely asserts that we "misstate the views of Catholic natural law moralists many of whom, including Aquinas (who followed the lead of Aristotle) did not think that abortion, especially early abortion, was murder." Machan also mentions Aquinas, as if we had asserted a universal generalization about Aristotelian moral philosophers or offered an argument from authority.

But we merely observed that such thinkers do use Aristotelian arguments against abortion, which is true. As for Aristotle and Aquinas: their understanding of nature, and therefore of natural law, was defective, for they believed that life does not begin at conception. The fact that the church's positions on abortion changed as our understanding of nature changed undermines Tabarrok's assertion that "the moving force of Catholic prohibitions on abortion is Catholic theism and not Catholic Aristotelianism."

In sum, we do not find Machan's and Tabarrok's defenses of Rand to be persuasive. They merely replicate Rand's own confusions and errors, without rectifying them, or they abandon Rand's arguments for new ones that are no more tenable. Thus, we think that the arguments of our initial paper still stand, and we invite the reader's comments and criticisms.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Glenn Magee, Doris Gordon, and John Walker for their comments. The usual disclaimer applies.

Notes

1. Johnson has used Thompson's argument as an example in numerous sections of his course on critical thinking. Of the hundreds of students who have discussed it, not one ever indicated that pulling the plug was either his initial intuition or his final considered judgment. Most seemed to find the whole scenario bizarre, laughable, or just pathetic.

2. We are presupposing here the findings of a fairly large and well-established scientific literature on the biological foundations of sexual differences in psychology and social behavior, which is quite relevant to a biocentric approach to moral and political philosophy. See, in particular, Money and Ehrhardt 1972, Maccoby and Jacklin 1974, and Goldberg 1993. For a brilliant popular presentation of many of these findings, see Gilder 1986.

References

- Gilder, George. 1986. *Men and Marriage*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican.
- Goldberg, Steven. 1993. *Why Men Rule: A Theory of Male Dominance*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Maccoby, Eleanor Emmons and Carl Nagy Jacklin. 1974. *The Psychology of Sex Differences*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Money, John and Anke A. Ehrhardt. 1972. *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl: The Differentiation and Dimorphism of Gender Identity from Conception to Maturity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rand, Ayn. 1964a. *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism*. Paperback edition. New York: New American Library.
- . 1964b. *Playboy's* interview with Ayn Rand. Reprint. New York: The Intellectual Activist.
- . 1981. The age of mediocrity. *The Objectivist Forum* 2, no. 3 (June): 1-11.