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ABORTION AND THE CULTURAL WAR

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We are not descended from the apes, but we are rapidly getting there.

- Count de Gobineau

I



WHY IS THE ABORTION BATTLE SO PERSISTENT, WHETHER AS WORDY DEBATE, OR AS street demonstration? There have been many political, social and economic issues which have become lost or forgotten within a matter of a very few years after they raged in the public fora of newspapers, speeches, radio, and television; these have included arguments over the gold standard, over personal income taxation, and over the conscription of soldiers, indeed no small matters. Yet, as those on both sides know and readily admit (mere rhetoric aside), this battle has been boiling for over twenty years, and shows no sign of cooling down, and much less of being forgotten. Religious *contra* secularist conflict at the recent population conference at Cairo alone suffices as evidence. Again, why is this so?

The purpose of this paper is to reach an explanation of the *face en face* over abortion (with allusions to several other related and ongoing social conflicts) and to find that the abortion set-to is the logical and existential opposition between the consequences of two radically opposed and irreconcilable philosophical stances, stances themselves which are the marshalling principles of a culture war.

It has been more than two years since many Americans were astonished to hear a nationally prominent politician and Columbia University-trained journalist explicitly advert to the “culture war” being waged in American society. The term has become almost journalistic commonplace by now, but as is usual with such popularizations, few journalists and their audiences have even a faint notion of what this means. A introductory grasp of the roots and principles of this cultural war will reveal that only the hopelessly naive can incline to regard this deep-seated intra-cultural animosity (of which the abortion battle is one manifestation) as mere matter for lively debate and as soluble by the great American Genius for Political Compromise, or by the theory of the “big tent.” Such animosity of theory and consequent practice, based on the profoundest and most irreconcilable principles, is exactly what marks much debate and difference in ideas and rhetoric as well as the practice bred therefrom. It is easy to recall from news reporting many instances where exponents of the left or of right clearly practice and by now have for decades practiced the maxim never to surrender - never, never, never, never. Further, we must not fail to note that the war has become global.

To suggest only a few examples, we have as well as the abortion debate, only to consider the public-schools’ battles over sex education and over the “rainbow curriculum”; at the fury directed in *Scientific American* against as respectable a writer as Philip Johnson (whose sin was to attack Darwinism); and at the uproar over natural law in Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas’ senate judiciary hearing. None of these issues (and the many akin to them) will go away or be subsumed into a grand, high-minded national coming-together. The reason is that every pair of positions in these issues and their kindred is based on profound and mutually contradictory philosophical (and religious)

first principles - on principles so basic that none can be more so. The names for the adverse powers are Aristotelianism on the one hand, and nihilism on the other.¹ In the mid-1980s Alasdair MacIntyre characterized the most radically counter-posed principles, yet those which admit no further alternatives; he titled a chapter of his book *After Virtue*, "Aristotle Or Nietzsche." His analysis and his nomenclature were not amiss.²

Thus, the only possible way to "resolve" these matters is to grasp their sources at the most foundational level, and the only way to understand these debates is to take them to their roots both systematically and historically. The test cannot ultimately be of the cleverness of the rhetoric or compromise, but of truth. For example, in the abortion debate, is human life valuable and meaningful or not? What is the difference between good and evil and how do we know? Or must we simply admit there to be no such real difference beyond subjective preference?



Nearly everyone will, of course, admit that if we are faced with a societal datum to understand, it is that the social world has become chaotic: rife with crime, greed, the use of law for personal gain, abdication of personal responsibility, disease, drugs, schools that do not educate, prisons that do not punish, economic resources that do not feed the hungry and employ the able-bodied, technological developments which have become latter day sorcerer's apprentices, and the like. In American cities daily life is often lived in literal fear of death.

What explains this datum? In particular, what explains the fear and loathing of the death of the unborn, and the corresponding audacious love for life, which is the pro-life movement's motive? And what explains the abortionist's movement's insistence on "rights," and their corresponding fear and loathing of any scent of those whom they would take to threaten to remove or withhold those rights? To understand this activity, we must proceed immediately to the realm of thought.

It was not without astuteness that Guiseppe Mazzini, the nineteenth century Italian revolutionary,

utter the insight: **IDEAS RULE THE WORLD.** The daily life of the world is practical, and philosophy is the prime requisite for practicality. While it is true that philosophy is impractical, it is also true that it is impossible to be practical without it. The only really important question about any idea is whether it is true or false. If it is true, the mind which harbors it possesses that great attribute of intellectual health, sanity - the ability to see things as they truly are. If the idea is false, then the opposite holds, and no matter how impressive a simulacrum of rationality and truth is presented, the attribute of the mind which possesses (or should one say, "is possessed by?") that idea is insanity or madness. Democracy may or may not be a good thing in some cases, but it is never in itself a good thing where ideas are concerned. All ideas are not equal; some are true and others are false.

It was not ignorance of the history of ideas that allowed Bertrand Russell to note that every great "advance" (sic) in the history of ideas in modern times (i.e., since the sixteenth century) was achieved by the rejection of some doctrine of Aristotle.⁴ Understanding the doctrine and rejection of Aristotle, then, is particularly helpful in understanding the modern experiment⁵ and its child: the contemporary world.

II

Let us answer what is the historical origin of modern and contemporary times, but only after we recount briefly the meaning of the tradition against which modernity rose up. While it is necessary to be brief, it is nevertheless worthwhile to summarize the great ideas the rejection of which has resulted in the datum of chaos described above. It is impossible to understand a revolution without understanding that against which the rebels rebelled.

Aristotle has been described as the pre-eminent philosopher of common sense, and his as the natural philosophy of the human mind. As do persons of common sense everywhere, Aristotle readily acknowledged that the world we experience is intelligible, and that the things that we know are real, independently of our knowing them, and that they have natures (inherent qualitative characteristics). Thus, I recognize a bird because it exists (rather than the other way around); this bird has a nature of its own which I can identify (I do not confuse it with

a tree or a snake). I come to know this as a bird by observing its activity, which differs from that of a thing of a different nature, a rosebush, for example.

The nature of a thing Aristotle describes as the principle of motion and rest which belongs to a thing inherently. In other words, the nature of a thing is the principle of its characteristic behavior. Natural things are radically different from man-made things, which have human work as their origin and so receive their identity from the artisan rather than naturally. While nature may be enhanced by art (as when a physician aids the natural process of healing), it may also violate nature, as when a tree is harvested for lumber.

Human nature is not merely animal, but also rational, that is, capable of intellectual (abstract) knowledge. Thus the famous capsule definition and description of man from Aristotle: “rational animal.” Because the human intellect can know abstractly, it is capable of choosing without coercion among particular instances of good things. In a word, it is free. For example, by having the abstract knowledge of “food,” it is possible to choose from among many foods. Both of these characteristics point to a very special identifying feature of man, namely that he inherently possesses the ability to go beyond the limitations of the physical here-and-now world of particulars, by a spiritual capacity.⁶

In man, as in all things natural, it is precisely the nature that measures the goodness. Just as a good fruit tree is one which bears much healthy fruit, this being its nature, so also a good man is one whose action is guided by intelligence and whose choices are of the good that is known. The hallmark of Aristotle’s moral and political thought is his recognition that the natural is the good.⁷

What man seeks by his actions is the good, which is the objective of the practical intellect, just as the true is the goal of the theoretical intellect. To be faithful to his nature, then, man chooses freely and rationally the pursuit of those things and actions which are fulfilling to him according to the intellectual animal that he is.

For man, no less than for brute animals, to have a nature is to have a goal towards which he is dynamically ordered, but in the case of man, the pursuit of the natural end is free. It is the nature which is this end. The fundamental exigency of the moral order (also called the natural law) is “pursue and realize the excellence proper

to your nature,” which means simply, be virtuous. Man, the only animal who can sin, that is, deviate deliberately from his nature, has at the same stroke the dignity of being able to embrace his own fullness responsibly.

Not only is to have a nature to have an end according to that nature, but to have a nature and thus an end is to have meaning, for meaning is found in purpose. Without proximate and ultimate purposes to his life, man is meaningless. Thus, while in one way the purpose of human actions is to promote virtue, the sum of the possession of which is happiness, so also in another way the ultimate end of goal-seeking is found in pursuing the order of the spiritual man for the spiritual union with the universal good, that is, God. In a modern throwback to classicism, Blaise Pascal saw that there is in the human ability to desire an infinite abyss which can only be filled by a corresponding infinite good. And the only such good is God. Thus there can be no meaning to human life without there being this order to God, no matter how much sheer activity and *prima facie* high-mindedness masks the absurdity.⁸

There is then, in the great classical thinkers such as Aristotle above all, a law found written in the very nature of man - a natural law - which points the way by which a meaningful and good life is to be lived, and promoted, and which proves that human life is meaningful. This is the built-in law of a spiritual creature, rational and free and craving the God for whom he is designed.⁹ The law cannot be contravened without, as Cicero had it, “despising the very nature of man in one’s self.”

The tradition begun even before Socrates and advanced so greatly by Plato and Aristotle was to a large extent the common heritage of the classical Greeks and Romans. We find echoes of their moral teaching in not only Cicero, but also in Justinian, in St. Augustine and others, until it reached its apogee in St. Thomas’ treatises concerning man, virtue, law, and the final goal of human life. Thereafter it came to be attacked, and was largely suppressed, but never silenced.¹⁰



III

There is no room to doubt that the early modern thinkers, such as Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes, were entirely self-conscious of their roles as revolutionaries – as landing upon a new philosophical continent and exploiting it for all its newness, and simultaneously repudiating the older tradition. A few examples arranged historically will show the changes that ensued from their revolutions of principle, and even in a short survey we expect to be able to recognize the landmarks of our own social landscape.

In Hobbes' moral and political doctrine, we find an explicit positivism bred from the "natural" state to man as lupine unto man. While perhaps no one is unfamiliar with the Hobbesian dictum that the natural life of man is "nasty, poor, brutish, and short," we may suspect that many are unaware of the role of such a starting-point in engendering its consequences.

Three of the consequences of Hobbes' basic doctrine of the state of nature which are relevant to this discussion are: 1) that human motives are led by passion rather than by reason, and that fear is the root and most basic of these passions; 2) that justice is artificial, and the implicit contrast that nothing is inherently good or evil;¹¹ 3) that rights of the citizen ascend to primacy over obligations in the moral and political practice.

While man is in the state of nature, his condition is that of a constant war of all against all. There being neither justice nor injustice yet; each is a wolf to the other, and men live above all else in fear, a fear so great that it motivates even surrender to the contractually unilateral control of the sovereign. While fear is in the foreground in that state of nature, in the condition of the sovereign state it is still the motive which keeps that state afloat. Fear is the motive *par excellence*; man is purely animal, and fear-driven. Reason only gives him to respond cleverly to the exigencies of fear, but never to be a free and spiritual and virtuous *person* in the sense of Boethius and St. Thomas.¹²

With neither good or evil inherent in actions, and the function of law reduced to the use of raw power to control fear, it is easy to appreciate why Hobbes was forced to acknowledge that justice and injustice are a product of the will of the sovereign.¹³ Moral principles do not exist in nature, yet experience shows us that they

are found in the state, and that they are useful. Justice, in the doctrine of Hobbes, is coeval with the state, and is whatever the state says that it is. This monster of Malmesbury then is the modern founder of the doctrine of legal and moral positivism,¹⁴ the doctrine most radically opposed in principle to the natural law.¹⁵

"The widely taught and cherished right of all to all is but the reverse of the coin of the state of nature as the war of all against all."¹⁶ If in nature each man is motivated by fear and therefore is greedy in his seeking of gratification of self, then no less in civil society is he concerned to return to his roots and claim to be entitled to all things. For the first time in the history of Western thought (which let us not forget is soon to be exported to the entire world via empire) is a state described and explained in a way which gives simple priority to rights rather than to obligations.¹⁷ Let us make note also that there is not only a Hobbesist logic of the priority of rights over duties, but also a diabolically wily psychology. One is prone to be much less critical of a doctrine of the self-evident primacy of what one is entitled to be given by others, rather than to be impressed by a doctrine which tells one first to what one is obliged to do for the sheer good of it.

In sum, the doctrine of Hobbes is revolutionary in a radical way because it denies nature,¹⁸ because it is therefore forced by its own premises to positivism,¹⁹ and because avarice ascends over all moral factors.²⁰

John Locke, accused during his lifetime of Hobbesism, taught a doctrine which was not unlike that of his maleficent precursor. While Locke's description of the state of nature (again as contraposed against the state of civil society) seems to be rather benign, and thus much unlike that of Hobbes' universal and lupine war, it is nevertheless true that the genuine condition of nature is revealed in the practical judgment which he claims must have arisen from its participants: namely that it is undesirable. (For if it were uniformly and genuinely as idyllic as Locke's portrayal might be taken to suggest, who would endeavor to leave it behind?)

While "nature" is a state of plenty for all, there is indeed trouble in this paradise. For one thing, the goods of nature tend to spoil, and this inclines Locke to hold that in the state of nature there is a rule that no one may have more than he can consume before it spoils. Yet all things natural are subject to decay. When this deficiency

in nature has been supplied by a contractual arrangement that creates the civil state, it is also true that men will have circumvented this “spoilage rule” by the invention of money, which cannot spoil, and thus cannot be subject to the spoilage rule - that is, there are in civil society no boundaries setting the limits acquisitiveness, of avarice. Indeed civil society arises from economic causes, and continues to exist to ensure the protection of same. The immediate cause of the generation of the state of civil society and which is operative in order to protect the interests of material avarice is the contract.

The end of the spoilage rule unbridles greed, and typifies the Lockean world, which is a world of *de facto* materialism and a world within which purpose is limited to material ends. No less in the state of civil society, then, than in the state of nature, Locke is and remains an economic determinist. The propulsion from the state of nature to that of civil society is economic need, and this need continues to function in civil society as both condition for participation and motive end of legislation.²¹

Far more subversive to classical and Christian civilization, however, is the principle which underlies and undermines Locke’s political doctrine: his epistemology. Like Descartes before him, Locke had replaced metaphysics, the philosophical science of being, with epistemology, an arm of the study of man - and man as merely material at that. Thus we shall now see, that even were his political doctrine as sweet and kindly as some Americans have attempted to interpret it to be, it has no foundation.²²

It is the understanding of *substance* as the real composition of essence and existence which made the classical (Boethian and Thomistic) notion of *person*; indeed Thomas quoted Boethius’ formula to define “person”: an individual substance of a rational nature.²³ A person, then, is a rational and consequently free entity of unique value, created by and ordered to God. Absolutely vital to this understanding of personhood is its inclusion of the nature of man.

It is this understanding of personhood which Locke rendered impossible, as effectively as Hobbes’ materialism had rendered it meaningless.²⁴ Locke denied at least the knowability of substance. Because substance is

unknowable, the natures of things are also unknowable, for the substance of a thing includes its essence, as indicated above. To deny that we can know substance is to deny that we can know human personhood and human nature.

While it might be argued that Locke does not so much deny the existence of substance as the ability for man to know it, the effect is the same. If substances are unknowable, then human nature is unknowable. If human nature is unknowable, then the norm of good and evil, natural law (by which human laws must be judged for rectitude), is also unknowable. Where the natural law is unknowable, human actions and laws cannot be based on it. If actions cannot be judged according to reality, that is according to the good or evil of a thing according to the nature of the thing, then all differentiation of good and evil is artificial. What is artificial is “made up” (i.e., made by human artifice rather than being natural), in this case, according to the intellectually blind preference of any individual, or, more effectively, according to the subjective preference of anyone with the greatest power to establish his preference²⁵ (which can no longer have a rational basis²⁶ that would be found in classical personhood).

What then is the yield of Lockeanism and Hobbesism? A morally subjectivist, passion-driven, artificial and meaningless understanding of man and society. Yet the generation and manifestation of implicit ideas comes slowly, and there were further “contributions” to the gadarene slide so well-begun in the moral, political, and anthropological domains of thought where the philosophers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century seemed safely sequestered.

It was then up to David Hume to underscore and emphasize the results of the moral doctrine of Locke. Hume, we might put it, took up his philosophy of knowledge in the same key if not on the same note that Locke left off. And the philosophy of Hume, if imaginable, was more destructive even than Locke’s, finally completing the setting of the stage of Kant, the last modern philosopher, after whom nothing remained.

As had Descartes and Locke, Hume first considered knowledge rather than being. His doctrine was that


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what we know are impressions rather than things. This doctrine might sound innocent for a very brief moment - what could be more readily agreeable than to assert that knowledge is of impressions and ideas?²⁷ Hume, though, continues: the impressions and ideas which we know are in no way to be misunderstood to be the effects of really existing things which cause them. Already the divorce of knowing from reality is accomplished, and thus the victory of subjectivism is guaranteed.

Among ideas (faint residual impressions) some are readily proved to be spurious, namely, those which arise from no impression of sense. In other words, where there is no empirical source for an idea, the idea is spurious.

Of especial importance to reject among spurious ideas is that of cause and effect. Causation is never *seen*; it cannot be known to be real. Rather, all that can be seen are contiguity in space and time, resemblance, imaginary association of ideas, customary and arbitrary. Thus, let me risk repeating, human “knowledge” is hermetically sealed off from the real world; the mind cannot reach what Aristotle had thought to be its object.

Given this division of ideas into spurious versus vivid (i.e., empirical impressions) and the divorce of mind and extra-mental reality, Hume is forced to his doctrine of human personhood, which is rather more negative than positive. To David Hume, man is no more than a “bundle of sensations,” of whom neither nature nor continuing self-identity can be affirmed.

With neither nature, nor intellect, nor recourse to things at all, Hume is forced by the logic of his own premises to deny that there can be knowledge of good and evil - these are obviously spurious ideas, if ever there were any.²⁸ The “moral” residue in Hume is purely subjective, purely emotional, and one’s actions are purely passion-driven. “Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason itself is utterly impotent in this particular.”²⁹ “Morality is more properly felt than judged of”³⁰ Also in his own infamous words: “Take an action allowed to be vicious: willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice ... You can never find it, until you turn your reflection into your own breast and find a sentiment of disapprobation which arises in you towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but it is the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in

yourself, not in the object.”³¹ And once again: virtue is “whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary.”³²

The good being that which is attractive to feeling, evil being that which is repellent to feeling, and knowledge rendered impotent in judging or discriminating good and evil, it is no wonder that Hume has found an eager ready audience, witting and unwitting.³³ To give to men and especially to the educated class the assurance that good and evil are no more than subjective preferences according to feeling³⁴ is to guarantee the end of rational discourse, the abdication of human nature, and therefore the collapse of civilization.

From Hume to Kant is no great distance. It was Kant who not only agreed with Hume (who was his “wake-up call”) that cause and effect relationships are not characteristic of the real world beyond the confines of the human intellect, but it was also Kant who confirmed the Humean implication that there is no knowledge of reality at all. Where of course there is no knowledge whatever of reality, there is no knowledge of the difference between good and evil, of whether human life has neither meaning nor value. We can know only what appears, but appearance does not reveal reality. “Kant waves off the pretense ... ever to reach knowledge that transcends ‘appearances’ .”³⁵

How then did Kant manage to treat of ethical matters? For treat of them he did, devising one of history’s most memorable ethical theories. The astonishing jujitsu which Kant invoked as he propounded his ethics was this: For purposes of evaluating behavior as good or evil, we must act as if we knew that there were freedom, immortality, and a real God. Upon this foundation Kant appeals to his reader to be duty bound in a host of matters. Again, “Theoretical reason affords no ... knowledge of the essence [nor existence] of things; practical reason ‘believes’ in God, freedom, and immortality, things which theoretical reason is unable to demonstrate; for without them morality would be impossible.”³⁶

Another short and logical transition occurs between Kant’s overt acknowledgment that without God there can be no morality, and Nietzsche’s denial of God, and therefore his assertion that raw power is the only factor which differentiates “right” from “wrong.”

At last the harvest is in. Never yet in the post-Kantian world has there been effectively willed a patrimony of knowledge of natures of God. Ignorance of human nature is ignorance of moral principle; the denial of God is the denial of all meaning in the world and life. The absence of an inherent norm of good and evil in man gives way to the extrinsic imposition of power upon the meaninglessness of his life. This ignorance of moral principle, the priority of feeling over reason, the gratuitous ability to create and invoke a "right," the pointlessness of human life are all the flipside of Aristotle and St. Thomas.³⁷ Bertrand Russell's appraisal of modern philosophical history as having proceeded at the expense of Aristotle is quite so. This modernity is also the hallmark of contemporary higher education, and therefore of the educated and leadership class in American society.

The cumulative cultural and logical result of this dwindling fund of moral principle has been to create a preponderant cultural influence which is irrational, inhumane, and incapable of sustaining a civilization, and at the same time derisive of its only hope, the recovery of nature, of the spiritual world, of humane politics, and of God. It is one thing to proceed on the wrong road, and another to do so burning one's bridges behind. But it is precisely this which has been collectively achieved in the ideas and habits of mind which have generated the very social chaos which nearly everyone finds glowingly obvious and unacceptable. The two difficulties with the only remedy are that it has been forgotten, and where remembered, it is known to require sacrifice.

It is no wonder that universities have become the seminaries of atheism, of arrogant ignorance, of indoctrination into modernity, and therefore most to our point in this article, of abortionism. Probably the most telling proof of this indictment against the universities is the greatly higher incidence of approval of abortion in proportion to the higher level of formal academic degrees

earned. What is the case is not that more education reveals the moral propriety of abortion by subtle yet compelling argument. What is the case is that institutions of higher education are bereft of the knowledge of the distinction between good and evil.³⁸

This doctrine is by no means limited to colleges and universities. The National Education Association has equally shown itself pro-abortion by official policy. And this policy is an armament in the battle of teaching on behalf of the modern philosophical mentality in the classroom. The NEA can no doubt give agreement of heart and "soul" to the American Humanists Association award-winning essayist of 1983: "The battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith." And indeed, how easy a victory to convince youngsters that there are no moral strictures beyond the purely subjective matters of feeling. Because of their tacit acceptance of the cumulative doctrines of the modern philosophers, the schools of today are incapable of teaching anything else.

What is perhaps most characteristic of the abortion debate as it enters its third decade, then, is that no longer is there medical argument about the humanity of the fetus. Scarcely anyone bothers to hide behind the language used only twenty years ago about "products of pregnancy" or "cellular masses." Rather, the abortionist argument is simply the simulacrum of rationality drawn against a backdrop of nihilism, namely that this killing of an innocent is a woman's "right." And this is felt to be good in nearly two million individual cases per year in the U.S. alone - reason notwithstanding.

NOTES

1Jim Hoagland, himself a pro-Clinton critic and opponent of the Vatican apropos of the Cairo Conference, quoted an Iranian diplomat, “The future war is between the religious and the materialists.”

2Anent the currently regnant politically powerful, such as President Clinton, we must therefore say this: Either they know that abortion is the killing of an innocent human being, or they do not. If they do know, then the only “principle” upon which they can support their pro-abortion policies is that innocent human life is meaningless - that is has no special dignity. They are thus nihilists and unfit to govern, because governing entails working for the common good. If they do not know that the life in the mother’s womb is human, then their ignorance reveals that they are incompetent to govern. There is no middle ground.

3By “abortionism” I mean any theory or practice which would require or even only permit direct induced abortions. Such a theory or practice therefore approves of abortion to the extent that it does not find it to be an evil practice.

Some persons will argue that this whole nomenclature is tainted by the conviction that good and evil are matter for legislation. To such a person I reply that it is not so much a matter of asking whether morality should be legislated, but rather of whether anything else should be legislated. Clearly both parties to the abortion battle agree in principle that good and evil are to be legislated about. The abortionists argue that the law ought defend the right of a woman to an abortion, and that the defense of personal rights is a moral good; anti-abortionists argue that the death of an innocent is evil, and therefore ought to be legally barred.

We should note, further, that organizations such as Planned Parenthood actively seek to prohibit any publication of data they consider damaging to abortionism, as indicated by their recent opposition to the DeMoss Foundation pro-adoption advertising campaign. The threat to Planned Parenthood from adoption practices is not only that these practices imply the wrongfulness of abortion, but that such practices numerically reduce the clientele for abortion, thus reducing income. It should not be ignored that abortion becomes a positive desideratum (rather than something merely permitted) for a corporation which stands to benefit from a \$400 million yearly industry which deals in said product.

4In some few cases, ancient cultural convictions survive, as passed through subterranean conduits separate from the larger “mainstream.” Among such cases Alasdair MacIntyre includes Orthodox Jews, Irish Catholics, and the Greek Orthodox. The differences between these peoples and the mass-thinking Americans among whom they live is both illustrative and helpful. See *After Virtue*, second edition, Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 252.

5While I use the expression, “experiment,” I am aware that the subjects have been and are the peoples of the world. In this sense, then, for example, Pol Pot performed a political experiment on his people, according to the principles of Marxism he had learned at the University of Paris.

6It was their unawareness of this that lead the pre-Socratic materialistic philosophers to the dead-end of not being able to account even for their own intellectual activity while they were thinking that all that exists is material. They could understand neither understanding nor freedom. Theirs is the role of fountainhead of materialism in its every subsequent historical appearance. It was because of this limitation of materialism that Socrates was propelled to his great breakthrough in philosophy: the discovery of the spiritual world.

7Thus, since life is natural to man, and fundamental, to deprive a man of life without commensurately serious reason is wrong, i.e., murder. Murder of course is wrong whether performed for economic motives, or those of convenience, or to enhance one’s career, or to eliminate an obstacle to the pursuit of pleasure.

8In every explanation, note that for an action or a thing to make sense, it must have a purpose. Thus, a man might be found running; now his activity can make no sense unless it is aimed at health, or some escape from an enemy, or towards the bank or post office, or some destination. if we ask him why he runs, only if we are given a reply such as these we conclude that his behavior is intelligible. The question “What is the meaning of life?” asks unto what if any purpose is life to infinitely good in order to correspond to the experienced fact of desire, purpose, then life is meaningless, and so are all its choices, among them the choices of “good” over “evil.”

9Anent the issue of human destiny and the approximation of the doctrine of a full Christian theology, see the opening chapter of *Human Destiny* by Joseph Owens (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985).

10This “perennial philosophy” continued unbroken into the nineteenth century, and was re-emphasized in

principle in *Aetemi Patris* of Leo XIII, as well as his social doctrine, which emerged from the same source. In the twentieth century the vitality and seriousness of the doctrine of natural law is still evident in documents such as *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Humanae Vitae* (the Catholic opposition to which itself was an index of how far many so-called Catholic theologians had strayed into the camp of the moderns), and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

11It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that any ethical principle which teaches that the locus of the principles of good and evil are extrinsic to the person is implicitly nihilistic, for to say that the principles of morality are not inherent in human nature is to say that this same nature is of itself neither good nor evil, but only so by circumstance. There is, in other words, no real goodness or evil latent or actual in man - one is as meaningless as the other. This is of course precisely the doctrine of Sartre: "To be a drunk in a bar or a leader of nations is equally pointless."

12See below under Locke, at the paragraph "It is the understanding of substance . . ."

13See the treatment of Thomas Hobbes in *The Natural Law* by Heinrich Rommen, trans. by Thomas Hanley (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1947), p. 85.

14Mortimer Adler provides a succinct enumeration of the consequences of legal positivism: "If the positivist view is correct, it follows: 1. that might is right; 2. that there can be no such thing as the tyranny of the majority; that there are no criteria for judging laws or constitutions as unjust and in need of rectification or amendment; 3. that justice is local and transient, not universal and immutable, but different in different places and at different times; 4. that positive laws have force only, and no authority, eliciting obedience only through fear of the punishment that accompanies getting caught in disobeying them; and 5. that there is no distinction between the mala prohibita and mala in se, namely, between a) acts that are wrong simply because they are legally prohibited (such as breaches of traffic ordinances) and b) acts that are wrong in themselves, whether or not they are prohibited by positive law (such as murdering human beings or enslaving them)." *Haves Without Have-Nots* by Mortimer Adler (New York: MacMillan, 1991), p. 197.

15It is quite arguable in some sense that this palm should go rather to Machiavelli, but Machiavelli was burdened by the genuine knowledge of what were good and evil, and thus was tied to a classical conscience. In the case of Hobbes we have the fruit of Machiavellianism. This is in no way to be understood as suggesting that Machiavelli was a good man or a classical thinker, but merely to say that he was not as Machiavellian as was Hobbes. It is interesting to note that it was a task for the late Leo Strauss to deliver the burden of guilt back to Machiavelli, who had at the hands of some scholars been exonerated of any wrong-doing; I would suggest that this is more a matter of prior and tainting commitment to Machiavellianism on the part of such interpreters, which they do not wish to decry as evil, lest they call themselves evil.

Here is Strauss' appraisal and the reason for it: "What other description [than "teacher of evil"] would fit a man who teaches lessons like these: princes ought to exterminate the families of rulers whose territory they wish to possess securely; princes ought to murder their opponents rather than to confiscate their property since those who have been robbed but not those who are dead, can think of revenge; men forget the murder of their fathers sooner than the loss of their patrimony; true liberality consists in being stingy with one's own property and generous with what belongs to others; not virtue but the prudent use of virtue and vice leads to happiness" and the like. Finally: "If it is true that only an evil man will stoop to teach maxims of public and private gangsterism, we are forced to say that Machiavelli was an evil man." *Thoughts on Machiavelli* by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 9.

16Rommen, p. 83.

17A word on the relationship in Thomas: Thomas understands the right and obligation to be reciprocal realities, but right is secondary in this sense: obligation is strictly self-evident in the first principle of practical reason: do good and avoid evil; right then is that characteristic of a person such that he is owed a debt of obligation. No right can be reasonably asserted, then, without discovering the co-relative prior obligation. It makes no sense, then, to assert rights while denying personal responsibility (obligations).

18Rommen, p. 85.

19The moral and legal doctrine which teaches that good and evil are determined from external imposed and artificial sources, most notably from the sheer will of the lawgiver. In this doctrine, because nothing is inherently good or evil, actions are themselves morally indeterminate - that is, nothing about any action whatsoever makes it commendable or not, worthy to pursue or not. In the doctrine of Hobbes, as in many kindred moral and legal doctrines

of the modern age, there lies latent an affirmation of nihilism, later to be put on parade in the doctrine of Nietzsche. One need only scratch the surface to discover that the doctrine of positivistic 'obligation' is a doctrine utterly without obligation, for if there be no obligation inscribed in human nature itself apart from positive law, why indeed one ought to obey such laws? The laws themselves cannot generate the inherent obligation in their subjects to obey them. Bereft of this root of obligation, neither are there rights nor moral meaning at all.

20The maniac proclivity to assertion of rights and the utter denial of personal responsibility as a contemporary social and legal phenomenon has been amply documented in *A Nation of Victims: The Decay of the American Character*, Charles Sykes (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

21It thus is no way surprisin that in the united States, the grandest Lockean experiment, over 80% of all legislation is oriented to property.

22John Courtney Murray, for example, expended great labor to discover an intimacy of principle between Locke and St. Thomas Aquinas. As indicated, the effort is ill-starred. See *We Hold These Truths*, John Courtney Murray (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), *passim*.

23Rational knowledge is universal in its manner of knowing (in contrast against sensation, which is always of the particular only); as universal in its manner of knowing the natures of things, it is not preordained to any particular object of choice, nor is it subject to physical coercion, while it remains able to consider the advantages and disadvantages of any given concrete object of choice.

24Hobbes was at root of all else a mechanistic materialist, and thus held that there are no real qualitative differences among things - however we may be accustomed so to naming them. Rather, as latter-day Hobbesists (such as the late Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court Oliver Wendell Holmes) have put it, there is no real difference between a man and a baboon or a grain of sand. The doctrine was reinforced for much of the political world by Marx, perhaps the most infamous materialist. In the science-dominated intellectual culture of the world, the same doctrine again was driven home by the theory of evolution as propounded by Darwin and as a sine qua non of secular faith in these days. Thus, the narration of a widely distributed I-MAX film program proclaims blithely that man evolved from lower creatures, and is "no better than an insect, no worse."

It is indeed, beneath all else, this materialism which is the first principle of the culture which wars against the residue of the classical in our society. The same basic doctrine "justifies" the denial of personhood, the purpose of life, knowledge, and what might be naively taken to be the noblest ambitions of man and society. Again, from materialism emerges a very real nihilism, and its exponents have been widely influential: Darwin, Marx, Galileo, Hobbes, to name only a few of the most prominent. For these men to have built materialist doctrines is to have contributed hugely to a culture of nihilism, a culture in which nothing is sacred, nothing is in any way valuable - not even life itself.

25Such persons, in our times, have included not only Chief Justice Holmes, but also Mussolini, Hitler, and numerous U.S. Senators. The choice between the knowable reality of natures and their denial is utter; it admits of no compromise. In other words, either the materialists or the classicists must be right. Here lies the crux of the culture war. To the extent that the classicist are in a manifest minority, nearly everywhere derided, it is quite accurate to say, as the late Dietrich von Hildebrand wished to say in the title of the last book he did not manage to write before his death, *Hitler Won*. The same relativism that we found in Hobbes and his progeny is the explicit root principle of fascism, whether of the Italian, German, or Soviet species. In the United States, this relativism functions under the banners of "freedom" and "equality."

26Man as the possessor of real intellectual insight is a casualty of materialism, for instead of being intellectually spiritual and thus capable of grasping universally the intelligible natures of things, "knowledge" becomes one more instance of particular material contiguity of things rather than a meeting of nature by spirit. Recall that it was precisely this limitation of materialism which piqued Socrates' study to reach beyond the merely material, and which then enabled Plato and Aristotle to grasp the very meaningfulness of the world and human life, which had eluded the inquiries of the physicalists.

27Of course the answer is that knowledge is of things, and one need consult only ordinary experience for the verification.

28Indeed, without cause/effect, nature, intellectual knowledge, freedom, God, substance, and persons, it is no wonder that the Humean world is the philosophical harbinger of contemporary chaos. One might say of the Humean

world as of the world of social affairs in the late twentieth century what Ronald Knox said of himself as caught between a dwindling faith in Anglicanism and his mature Roman Catholicism, that he was not together because he had no together - had not the wherewithal to understand the great unities of life and truth by reason and by faith.

29*Treatise of Human Nature*, III, II, 9.

30*Ibid.*, 3, I, 2.

31*Ibid.*, III, I, I.

32*Essay Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix I. Virtue, then, for Hume, is as “family values” are to Mrs. George W. Bush: whatever one wishes or feels them to be.

33Emotivism may well be the most common implicit moral theory operative in America today. See MacIntyre. At any event, the retreat of judging intellect from reality is not merely an invitation but a command to perform for subjectivism. It cannot be too often affirmed that subjectivism implies nihilism, for it holds that no thing or action has any or is at least known to have any value inherently.

34This principle, that good is what one feels attracted to also goes a long way towards explaining why it is that thesis theory is so dearly-beloved by its idolators: it allows the justification of any pleasure. Note how greatly the legalized status of abortion turns on the desire to have the prerogative of sexual pleasure without responsibility.

35It was not only the relationship of cause and effect that Kant denied as existing in reality, but also space, time, quantity, quality, and even existence itself. Kant, rather a more thorough thinker than Hume, discovered all these to be impositions from the factory-mind of the knower. Of course, it is obviously rationally incoherent to maintain this position, for it amounts to the claim that “If you really know what the human intellect is, you know that it is impossible to know what or whether anything is.” But this was a small cavil by the beginning of the nineteenth century, as for Hobbes the impossibility of knowledge on the materialistic principle, “Only matter exists.” In fact, the entire edifice of modernity is built upon rationally incoherent first principles, just as the entire edifice of the great Classical and Christian medieval tradition was built upon the recognition that being is intelligible. *Modern Philosophy*, E. Gilson and T. Langan (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 414.

36Rommen, p. 102. Note, importantly, that Kant was quite aware (all thoroughgoing thinkers have been), that without God, there is no morality. Dostoevsky is perhaps plainest: “Without God, all things are permissible.” And, beginning in the late nineteenth century, let us say with Friedrich Nietzsche, the logic became prophesy fulfilled.

37In shortest scope, for the sake of clarity in showing the antitheses upon which the entire abortion battle (and indeed the entire war of cultures within American society) depends, we may express the matter this way: In the classical and Christian doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas, man is held to have a specific, spiritual, rational nature; this nature is knowable intellectually, and is teleological. Man in the view of the moderns is not possessed of a specific nature, or has perhaps a nature which is unknowable, exists by chance rather than purpose, and is at all events not spiritual, and thus has no spiritual end. Man has, then, spirit, nature, purpose, and knowledge, or not; granting these his life is meaningful and valuable; denying even any one, his life is meaningless and worthless. The difference in the conclusions is inchoate in the premises; the difference is strictly radical - from the root; the irreconcilability of the conclusions lies in their premises. The difference in the premises is that the latter are modern, the former classical; more important, the latter are false, the former are true.

38In many universities, this denial of morality is consequent upon formal or informal allegiance to atheism. Dostoevsky, as cited above, was indeed saying nothing that Sartre could not agree with. Contemporary universities have not only accepted this logically, but have taught implicitly that the premise is true - God is dead.