

Who Needs God, IVF and the Gift of Life

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“Less visible, but not for that reason less disturbing, are the possibilities of self-manipulation that man has acquired. He has investigated the farthest recesses of his being, he has deciphered the components of the human being, and now he is able, so to speak, to “construct” man on his own. This means that man enters the world, no longer as a gift of the Creator, but as the product of our activity – and a product that can be selected according to the requirements that we ourselves stipulate. In this way, the splendor of the fact that he is the image of God...no longer shines upon this man; his only splendor is the power of human capabilities.”¹

To consider the question of whether morality must be grounded in God in a more particular and concrete way, I focus in this paper on the moral problem of artificial reproduction, looking specifically at homologous *in vitro* fertilization² in those cases where embryonic human life is not intentionally sacrificed. I consider what sorts of arguments have been marshaled against what ethicist Peter Singer has referred to as the simple case.³ This simple case is not complicated by the ethical problems surrounding donor gametes, for the sperm and egg come from husband and wife. It is uncomplicated, too, in that no embryo is subject to cryopreservation or research while outside the womb; no embryo is subject to what has been euphemistically named “reduction” if, while in the womb, he or she is found to be the less fit candidate for survival. In the simple case, each embryo that begins to exist in a petri dish is transferred to the womb and permitted to develop into a baby. In such a case one can focus solely on the morality of creating what are commonly called “test tube babies.”

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006), 26.

² “Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services,” 5th ed., US Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued by USCCB, November 17, 2009, accessed February 19, 2013, p. 25, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/upload/Ethical-Religious-Directives-Catholic-Health-Care-Services-fifth-edition-2009.pdf>.

³ Peter Singer, “IVF: The Simple Case,” in *Biomedical Ethics*, ed. David Degrazia, Thomas A. Mappes, and Jeffrey Brand-Ballard, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill Co., Inc., 2011), 544–48.

Thus identifying the moral problem is more difficult in this case than for IVF as it is commonly practiced. It presents a special challenge to the question, “Must morality be grounded in God?” The question of the paper is essentially, “Can one show the immorality of the simple case of IVF without assuming the existence of a God Who grounds morality?” I will argue that the immorality of the simple case *is* accessible to reason, but that the default consequentialist vision of morality is so pervasive and alluring, particularly when it comes to technological advances, that the anti-IVF position may appear unreasonable outside a religious perspective. Arguments demonstrating the immorality of IVF may not be convincing enough and so may not reliably guide behavior. Strong adherence to faith in this instance may be an essential requirement for fully recognizing and assenting to moral truth.

In this paper, I first introduce Peter Singer’s competing view, the default consequentialist position, because it most fully exemplifies common opinion and moral reasoning regarding IVF. Secondly, I look to *Dignitas Personae* and the writings of William May and Martin Rhonheimer for natural law arguments showing why reproduction *via* IVF is contrary to the natural law. Thirdly, I reflect on the notion of “giftedness” in particular, considering whether the notion presumes a gift giver. And finally, I explain a twofold sense of reasonableness respecting moral truth.

Part I: Peter Singer and the Simple Case

In his 1985 work, *Making Babies: The New Science and Ethics of Conception*, Peter Singer lists among the most frequently heard objections to the simple case of IVF the opinion that IVF is unnatural and that it separates the procreative and the conjugal aspects of marriage and so damages the marital relationship. He responds to these criticisms as follows: If IVF is unnatural, so is all of modern medicine; it is natural to use human intelligence to overcome “adverse situations in which we find ourselves.”⁴ And secondly, it is blatant paternalism on the part of certain religious groups to suggest that anyone but the couple should decide what will damage their marriage. The only criticism that makes sense to him is that the cost of IVF is great and that money could have been better spent on alleviating the suffering of many people who are already living. Nevertheless, he concludes that misdirected funds do not make the procedure immoral.⁵

In his January 2009 article in the *Guardian*, in which he commemorates 30 years of IVF, Singer finds the Vatican’s objections to the procedure

⁴ *Ibid.*, 545.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 546.

on the grounds that conception is achieved as a result of “technical action,” rather than “a specific act of the conjugal union,” “harsh.” Singer elaborates:

Dignitas Personae says that new human life should be “generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman.” But if by that the church is referring to sexual intercourse, then it surely has an unduly narrow view of what kinds of acts can express reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Taking the several inconvenient and sometimes unpleasant steps required to have a child together by means of IVF can be, and often is, the result of a much more deliberate and reciprocally loving act than sexual intercourse.⁶

Singer focuses the question for us: how could human rational choice directed at countering the adverse situation of infertility be considered misguided or morally objectionable? He does not share the Church’s moral concern regarding the manner in which this new child comes to be, and here the consequentialist’s thinking is internally consistent. In his eyes, the good result of IVF, the baby, legitimizes the procedure. A sense of the significance of the physical act and the perspective of the acting person are absent from the consequentialist rendering of morality. And to be honest, this is likely the position of many people, whether they are secularists or believers, whether they identify themselves as Muslims, Jews, or Catholic Christians. Why does the quality of the individual act matter when the good accomplished is so clearly good?

Part II: Natural Law Arguments Against IVF

Peter Singer has an unduly narrow view of nature, of marriage, and of the nature of the conjugal act. However, this narrow view cannot simply be attributed to a lack of faith. The Church and those who argue in support of the Church’s position do not direct moral teaching on this subject to Catholics or believing Christians only. The instruction *Dignitas Personae* is addressed to the faithful as well as to those of good will—that is, to physicians and researchers interested in knowing the truth and promoting a humane civilization.⁷

⁶ Peter Singer, “The Test-Tube Baby at 30,” *Guardian*, January 14, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/14/vitro-fertilization-ivf-ethics>.

⁷ “Instruction *Dignitas Personae*, On Certain Bioethical Questions,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued by CDF, September 8, 2008, accessed March 22, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html (henceforth, DP).

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith evidently intended that this instruction be comprehensible to all people—and I will argue that it is indeed comprehensible to all people. In fact, the nature of this teaching—as one which is based upon reason and enlightened by faith—seems to be an important theme of Part I of the instruction. According to that section of the document, natural law is “the source that inspires the relationship between the spouses in their responsibility for begetting new children. The transmission of life is inscribed in nature and its laws stand as an unwritten norm to which all must refer.”⁸ What marriage *is* and what responsible parenthood *is* inhere as part of the natural law.

Yet the document also says that what is human is “not only received and respected by *faith*, but is also purified, elevated and perfected.”⁹ Man *and* man’s self-understanding are perfected by the mystery of the Incarnation.¹⁰ The moral truth concerning these most recent scientific and technological advances is accessible to reason, *and also* clarified by faith. Again I quote the document: “The respect for the individual human being, which reason requires, is further enhanced and strengthened in the light of these truths of faith: thus, we see that there is no contradiction between the affirmation of the *dignity* and the affirmation of the *sacredness* of human life.”¹¹ The document affirms reason’s ability to grasp moral truths concerning marriage and procreation, while also attributing to faith the power to more fully illuminate such moral truth. Accordingly, reason can affirm and support human dignity; faith can illuminate human sacredness.

Dignitas Personae declares IVF to be at odds with the natural law; it does not accord with human dignity. Even the simple case of homologous IVF fails to preserve all of the three fundamental goods of human procreation mentioned in that document. The value of each human life from conception until natural death, it does recognize; the value of the union between husband and wife with the corresponding right to bear children only with one’s spouse, it also recognizes; the human value of sexuality itself, which requires “that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses”¹² is a good not preserved in the simple case of IVF.

The document speaks of responsible parenthood in terms of the vocation of couples to co-create through their own *gifts of love and life*. However, it does not make explicit the difference between natural procreation

⁸ DP 6.

⁹ DP 7.

¹⁰ DP 7 references the Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

¹¹ DP 7.

¹² DP 12.

and artificial reproduction. It does not explain in full why the gift of life must also be a gift of love, in particular of conjugal love. It lacks a full accounting of the good of sexuality itself as it relates to procreation, of why this third fundamental good is so fundamental. Martin Rhonheimer and William May extend the argument. Their accounts differ slightly, but both more closely consider the nature of the relation between parent and child when IVF is used as compared to when a child is conceived naturally. Both reflect more deeply upon the *gift* of life and its relation to conjugal *love*.

Rhonheimer advises caution in focusing on the artificiality of the procedure when offering moral judgments regarding it: “‘artificiality’ as such cannot give an answer, nor can moral reasoning condemn artificiality simply because it is ‘unnatural’ (for example, Caesarian sections and the incubation of premature infants are not problematic morally, despite their ‘artificiality’).”¹³ Peter Singer’s superficial and hasty dismissal of the criticism that IVF is unnatural will find its answer in the accounts of Rhonheimer and May. Rhonheimer suggests that it is insufficient to point to the fact that human procreation by nature occurs in the course of bodily sexual acts.¹⁴ What is natural (in the moral sense) cannot simply be identified with what is “given by nature.” One has to give an argument that this artificial technology does not *conform to man’s nature*; that is, that it does not regard “*that which is good for man*.”¹⁵ His moral analysis thus centers not on the artificiality of IVF as opposed to the “naturalness” of human reproduction *via* the conjugal act, but on the moral dynamics of the act itself, specifically on its repercussions with respect to the virtue of justice. The argument is that artificial reproductive technologies and the actions that correspond to them oppose two principles of justice: first, the unconditional recognition of human life in its concrete individuality, and second, the “golden rule.”¹⁶

Why is that so? The “intentional relation”¹⁷ between the parents and the baby when an artificial technique is used differs from the intentional re-

¹³ Martin Rhonheimer, *Ethics of Procreation and the Defense of Human Life*, ed. William F. Murphy, Jr., (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 155. See also, DP 12, where it cites from the introduction to “Instruction *Donum vitae*,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 3: *AAS* 80 (1988), 75: “Techniques which assist procreation ‘are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. As such, they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. But they must be given a moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the human person, who is called to realize his vocation from God to the gift of love and the gift of life.’”

¹⁴ Rhonheimer, *Ethics of Procreation*, 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

lation between parents and baby when the child is generated through natural procreation. Both sets of couples desire to have a child. This desire is natural and good and remains legitimate, says Rhonheimer, if they also recognize that human beings are not entitled to ordain the beginning and the ending of human life, that this natural desire may, in fact, not be fulfilled. Essentially, this child's existence must truly be a gift.

The desire for a child leads to an "instrumentalization" or "exploitation" of the child in IVF, he says, for the child becomes the fulfillment of the parents' desire, the product of their will. In Kantian terms, the child becomes a means to have their desire fulfilled. "Children," says Rhonheimer, "cannot be desired like an auto or a vacation in the Canary Islands. The subjective sense of the goodness of their birth and of their existence cannot consist in their being desired.... But children must be desired as a good, even if they were not desired in the first place and even if they are *different* from the way they were desired."¹⁸

Yet, someone may object, perhaps such instrumentalization is not the attitude felt by parents who use IVF. The fact that IVF is more often than not unsuccessful, the fact that parents deeply desire a child, could translate into a deep appreciation for their child and the recognition of the child as a gift.¹⁹ However, it is the intentional structure of the actions involved in that procedure that brings about a kind of formal degradation. With no chance of generating a child, the actions would not make sense and would not take place.²⁰ Because the means, in the form of concrete actions, are chosen to accomplish or fulfill this desire, the child's dignity suffers, as he becomes a function of the will of his parents. "Such a child, in relation to his parents, could say: 'I exist because you *wanted* me, and only because of this.'"²¹ This dependence on his parents' will would conflict with the fundamental equality of persons, and since no one would wish for such existential obligation, the Golden Rule is broken²²—by none other than those who ardently desired his existence and took action to produce him.

Certainly, parents who conceive naturally may instrumentalize their children, considering them the means to their own selfish ends and their own sense of self-fulfillment. Yet the intentional structure of a conjugal act—that it may or may not result in procreation and that it is in itself a loving act—works against this instrumentalization. The will of parents to procreate does not essentially and formally dominate the conjugal act. The act "is not chosen with the purpose (intention) of generating a child. Rather, the child

¹⁸ Ibid., 159.

¹⁹ Ibid., 160.

²⁰ Ibid., 162.

²¹ Ibid., 166.

²² Ibid., 168.

is generated *on the occasion* of this act...the child *arises from this act*, which is, in its personal structure, not an act or a means for the generation of a child, but an act of love....”²³ Rhonheimer argues that since the conjugal act is by its very essence a reciprocal act of self gift (a loving act) and not only a procreative act, the intentional relation between child and parent is not one of domination or control. A human life is not made; it is begotten. In natural procreation, parents (and doctors) are not in a position of ultimate control, and so the attitude of unconditional acceptance and of equality of persons naturally follows.²⁴ The child can be truly recognized as gift, rather than the product of one’s own making. He would naturally view himself as unconditionally accepted and equal to all persons—because of the way he came into being. This, I believe, is Rhonheimer’s argument, in which he attempts to give a deeper explanation of why IVF is contrary to the natural law.

William May offers a similar analysis, distinguishing between transitive (making) and immanent (doing) human acts. When human life comes about as a result of IVF, says May, the activity of the parents is transitive, for the action “passes from the acting subject(s) to an object or objects fashioned by him or her or them.”²⁵ The rules of art govern this activity in the sense that the product made is measured according to someone’s plan for it. In the case of autos, cookies, novels, etc., the results of the acts of production that do not measure up are discarded. The object made is what is intended to be perfected, not the agent that is bringing the product into being.²⁶

On the other hand, the marital act is an immanent activity, in that the action remains with the acting subjects and is “governed by the requirements of the virtue of prudence, not by the rules of art.”²⁷ If the “doing” kind of action is good, it is morally perfective of the agents. The child that may result from this act is begotten, not made, says May, and husband and wife are not properly said to be making love or making a baby. They are “doing” something—namely, giving themselves to each other—and in such giving, opening themselves to the *gift* of human life.²⁸ The human life that may result from the marital act is seen as “*gift* supervening on and giving permanent

²³ Ibid., 164. Rhonheimer mentions that such a mentality could occur in the case of the natural procreative act, but that this would be an “accidental deformation.” It occurs inevitably and necessarily in IVF.

²⁴ Ibid., 169ff.

²⁵ William May, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life*, 2nd ed. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2008), 72.

²⁶ Ibid., 72.

²⁷ Ibid., 72.

²⁸ Ibid., 72.

embodiment to “the marital act itself,”²⁹ for the marital act “makes sense,” so to speak, without the gift, without the new life, in a way that the actions required by IVF do not.

May’s description of the acts involved in IVF add credence to this distinction: the overstimulation of the woman’s ovaries, the harvesting of ova, the obtaining and washing of the sperm, the fertilizing of the ova, the freezing of embryos so that they can be used if needed, the implantation of several embryos with the option to discard spare embryos—these acts are making acts, rather than doing acts. Of course, making requires doing, but it is clear that the intended object of these acts is outside the actors themselves.³⁰

May also lends theological support to this natural law position. The human person is made in the image and likeness of God. A human person who comes to be when human life comes into existence is, says May, “an icon or ‘created word’ of God.”³¹ Just as Christ is said in the Council of Nicea to have been “begotten, not made, one in being with the Father,” equal in dignity to the Father, a divine person of the blessed Trinity, so also does a human person have the right to be begotten not made, the fruit of a loving union of spouses. Marriage, the marital act itself, says May, structures the relationship between child and parent so that the equal dignity of each human life is maintained.³² Both Rhonheimer and May consider IVF an offense against the equality of persons, whether this equality be established naturally, through the Golden Rule—as Rhonheimer assumes—or theologically, in imitation of the personhood of the blessed Trinity—as May ultimately suggests.

Part III: Giftedness

The arguments cited here were made by Catholic moralists. However, Catholic philosophers and theologians are not the only thinkers who harbor moral concern regarding reproductive technologies. Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel’s thoughts regarding genetic enhancement sound a familiar note:

The problem with eugenics and genetic engineering is that they represent the one-sided triumph of willfulness over giftedness, of dominion over reverence, of molding over beholding.... From the standpoint of religion... (to) believe that our talents and pow-

²⁹ Ibid., 73. May is quoting the Catholic Bishops’ (of England) Committee on Bioethical Issues, *In Vitro Fertilization: Morality and Public Policy* (London: Catholic Information Services, 1983), no. 23.

³⁰ Ibid., 83.

³¹ Ibid., 87.

³² Ibid., 87–88.

ers are wholly our own doing is to misunderstand our place in creation, to confuse our role with God's. But religion is not the only source of reasons to care about giftedness. The moral stakes can also be described in secular terms. If the genetic revolution erodes our appreciation for the gifted character of human powers and achievements, it will transform three key features of our moral landscape—humility, responsibility, and solidarity.... Genetically enhanced children would of course remain indebted rather than responsible for their traits, though their debt would run more to their parents and less to nature, chance, or God.³³

What Sandel says here regarding genetic enhancement applies equally to the use of artificial reproductive technology to bring into existence an enhanced child—the simple case of homologous IVF that we have been considering. The concerns are similar. The dominance of will in the procreative sphere means that life is no longer recognizable as gift.

Of interest here is that Sandel finds the quality of “giftedness” to be meaningful even outside the context of religious faith. Those who do not believe in God can apparently understand their own lives as gifted. When existence and, for Sandel, the qualities and characteristics of our existence, are not a result of pure will and technological manipulation, but rather nature or chance or God, one understands oneself as gift. Sandel suggests that a healthy humility follows therefrom. When no such giftedness is present, a person's accomplishments become his own and humility subsides. When humility subsides, an unhealthy sense of responsibility for one's own accomplishments grows.³⁴

Sandel notes the mindset of athletes in the age of performance enhancing drugs, in which one feels pressured by teammates or others not to “play naked.” Players' heightened sense of responsibility to succeed comes from the technology itself and potentially from their teammates' subtle suggestions that playing without it is not giving one's all.³⁵ These drugs tempt players to sacrifice the health of their bodies in hopes of living up to the expectations of others and of themselves.³⁶

³³ Michael Sandel, “Mastery and Gift” in *Biomedical Ethics*, ed. David Degrazia, Thomas A. Mappes, and Jeffrey Brand-Ballard, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill Co., Inc., 2011), 610–11. This is an excerpt from the book by Michael Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 85–100.

³⁴ Sandel, “Mastery and Gift,” 611.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ In fact, this very criticism is the root of some feminist concerns regarding IVF. See Paul Lauritzen, “Whose Bodies? Which Selves? Appeals to Embodiment in Assessments of Reproductive Technology,” in *Contemporary Bioethics, A Reader with*

Sandel also suggests that when humility subsides and responsibility increases, social solidarity decreases. If a person has a sense of “there but for the grace of God (of chance or of nature) go I,” he empathizes with others; he sees equal vulnerabilities, equal indebtedness.³⁷ When this grace and this sense of gift are no longer preserved, some are in the position of dominating others. We are no longer all in the same boat. If we are parents or reproductive technologists we are making the boats and counting on them to float. Social solidarity disappears.

However, the question remains: can someone truly see human existence as gift without recognizing a divine gift giver? Does this existential position simply arise as some innate self-understanding? Of course, we think of the parallel question, “Can a person recognize the moral law without assuming the existence of a divine law giver?”

There is a certain intuition of the giftedness of one’s being, a knowing which is as innate as knowledge of the natural law. We know that we are not and perhaps ought not try to be the masters of our own human existence in the way that we know that there is a moral law that is not our own making. Even if we do not know that there is a God, we know that our very existence, as the result of nature and/or blind chance, is beyond human control, to be accepted as is, and, at least in this respect, equal to other lives. We can understand that to allow one of us to produce another one of us will destroy the sense of natural equality of each individual person. We suspect that even nature or blind chance are to be trusted before humanly derived reproductive technologies. That is, we have a sense of the danger of *hubris* and of a need to refrain from taking over and dominating human procreation. While we may not have faith in God, we nonetheless harbor an innate respect and sense of awe before God’s handiwork, nature itself.

Nevertheless, when a couple is faced with infertility, the choice of simply waiting for a gift that may not come is an unattractive option, especially when that couple has the opportunity to produce something they long to have. The reasoned position against IVF lacks the clarity that a theology, even a natural theology, can give it. An innate sense of giftedness can contribute to an understanding and protection of the dignity of human nature, but it does not enjoy the clarity that comes with faith in a God who gives the gift of creation. We can argue that giftedness must be maintained at the risk of denigrating human dignity, but in such an argument we must place our confidence in nature over human intellect. If God is in the picture, we can have confidence that there is a plan and that the being that becomes gift is part of

Cases, ed. Jessica Pierce and George Randels (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 321–29. Lauritzen cites Gena Corea’s, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

³⁷ Sandel, “Mastery and Gift,” 611.

that plan. We can also have confidence that when no gift comes, that too is planned. The gift of human life is obviously gift when a Creator gives it.

Part IV: Faith and Reason

Why isn't the natural sense of giftedness epistemologically compelling? There is a distinction to be made, and Martin Rhonheimer articulates this distinction.³⁸ A moral truth may be known *via* the natural law, through the light of natural reason. It may be accessible to *reason*. At the same time, this truth may not be seen to be *reasonable*.

The use of IVF by a married couple unable to conceive can be seen to be contrary to the natural law. It can be shown to be an act which offends against justice and the dignity of the human person, against human equality and the Golden Rule. The "giftedness" of natural procreation and the corresponding loss of dignity associated with artificial reproduction—human beings coming to be as products of human will and desire—is a contrast available to unaided human reason. The argument is well *reasoned*, for IVF is morally concerning for someone who thinks through the procedure and the corresponding intentional relation between child and parent.

However, outside the realm of faith, without the virtues of faith, hope, and love and outside the context of the cross, this moral truth may not seem *reasonable*—that is, a person may not think himself able to conform behavior to such a judgment because it demands too much. The moral stricture forbidding IVF would seem exceedingly difficult and cold hearted to many, especially to a couple facing infertility. Why that couple should not do what would result in great happiness for themselves and in life itself for another, is a question that only the fulness of faith can answer in a convincing way. Faith supposes that the life of each individual person matters, that, moreover, the moral life of each individual person matters. This truth is at the very root of a Christian world view. If they are to be consistent, Christians must view their moral lives and choices from the perspective of the acting person, rather than from the perspective of the greatest happiness principle. It is more important that a person live a good and holy life than that he live a happy life in this world. For the theist, happiness is only coherent as an ultimate goal and final end in the context of eternal life.

Outside the context of the cross, the avoidance of suffering as a life plan and as a social policy seems utterly reasonable. Why should we be so

³⁸ Martin Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of the Acting Person, Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 1–17. Rhonheimer reflects on the question, "Is Christian Morality Reasonable" and there lays out the two senses of reasonableness which I discuss.

scrupulous regarding the manner of the coming to be of a human person when the result of the disputed technologies is a human baby? Look, for example, to the surrogacy website “Growing Generations” to *see* the argument on the other side: deliriously happy parents and beautiful babies.³⁹

Rhonheimer makes clear that the context of faith does not simply make such a challenging ethic seem attainable; one which can be lived because of grace. It makes it seem reasonable, as well. There is an epistemological difference that comes with faith in the Christian God. The grounding of morality in faith in God brings to unaided natural reason a fullness and completion which makes a great difference. In this pragmatic, technological age, the significance and value of what I *do* is not easy to see. Rhonheimer asks his reader to imagine the predicament of a woman who finds herself in a dysfunctional and unhappy marriage. Is she likely to see the value of maintaining the marriage and forgoing divorce and remarriage when, in so doing, she is sacrificing her own and perhaps her children’s chance for happiness? What of the mother of five children facing a possibly fatal pregnancy? Will it seem reasonable to her, to her husband, to her physician, to *forgo* taking the life of the innocent fetus? Does it seem reasonable to risk losing the life of this mother of five children who are waiting for her at home? If this is, in fact, part of the natural law—and I don’t presume to know what is called for in all of these difficult moral circumstances—only faith can make that moral truth appear reasonable.

Faith comes in at a deeper level than that of of natural reason. According to Rhonheimer, “This means that we can speak of a true specific Christian humanism which differs from the purely secular humanism of the non-believer. Thus, what initially appears unreasonable regains reasonableness through faith, hope, and charity. That is how faith in fact rescues reason and reason recovers all its power to make faith both human and effective.”⁴⁰ The consequentialist world view is the reasonable secularist position. The moral slide presently under the radar—the move toward physician assisted suicide—is a case in point. When life seems no longer worth living, according to the patient himself, why not proceed with physician assisted suicide? Only if morality is viewed from the perspective of the acting person does such a decision raise red flags. Only in the context of faith is such a perspective fully reasonable.

The moral quality of the individual act is recognized when someone begins from the perspective of faith in a way it that is not recognized when someone has neither faith in God nor confidence in one’s own sustained spiritual presence beyond this life. Lacking confidence in the immortality of

³⁹ <http://www.growinggenerations.com> (accessed February 28, 2014).

⁴⁰ Rhonheimer, *The Perspective of the Acting Person*, 3.

the soul, a person's care or sense of moral concern for the individual act would seem to diminish. From within faith, the locus of morality is the human soul. From outside of faith, the locus of morality may reasonably be the concrete and empirically verifiable experience of human happiness. It is true that the ancients ground virtue in the rightly ordered soul insofar as this rightly ordered soul finds happiness and honor in the polis. Yet Socrates's argument against Glaucon in the *Republic* regarding whether one should be just⁴¹ seems not truly effective outside the context of the *Phaedo's* teaching regarding the immortality and transcendence of the soul.⁴² The adverse circumstances which Peter Singer thinks should be avoided at all cost may cause the virtuous man to lose any chance at human happiness—even according to Aristotle. Contemporary teleology seems to make a lot of sense, especially when the we are in possession of the means of attaining happiness. It seems that only from the perspective of faith does the deeper truth regarding the moral life call these alluring prospects into question.

For these reasons, God does not ground morality, if we mean by this that a person can know the natural law only from within the context of faith. However, faith in God fully illuminates the human person in his origin and destiny in a way that clarifies the moral law. Faith makes the perspective of the acting person—as a moral perspective—reasonable.

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⁴¹ Plato, *Republic* 9.288a–292b, in Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed. (USA: Harper Collins, 1991), 271–75.

⁴² Plato, *Phaedo* 102b(ff), in G.M.A. Grube, trans., *Plato, Five Dialogues*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 139ff.