

but has a powerful impact shaping and reinforcing those values.

This volume will have value to readers seeking either foundational theological input on cultural engagement or specific guidance on making a difference in their sphere of influence. It is unlikely that a reader will profit from the entire volume, since the essays are so diverse. But this is a fine contribution to the goal of making a tangible difference in the maelstrom of discussion and debate over bio-ethical issues.

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**Dombrowski, Daniel A., and Robert Deltete.** *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion.* Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 153 pp.

Imagine that you are a professor of philosophy at a university founded and operated by Jesuits, and you decide to write a book arguing that abortion is morally permissible up until the start of the third trimester of pregnancy. Imagine further that you want to argue that your position is "at least as compatible with Catholic tradition" as that which everyone *thinks* is the Catholic position, which is that direct, intentional abortion is always gravely immoral. Not far fetched enough? Well, add that you decide to argue that your position is as Catholic as the Catholic tradition without once in the course of the book offering a discussion, let alone an analysis, of the teaching of the Catholic Church on the issue. Still not enough? Add that you will base your conclusions on arguments from history and philosophy without using real historical sources, while your arguments from "reason" defy logic. Be sure to try to enlist St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas in your attack against the Magisterium's condemnation of abortion, even though both were fiercely loyal to the Magisterium and anti-abortion. As a topper, fill your book with

unsupported assertions, and garnish it with harsh and misleading rhetoric. After you have done all that, know that Professors Daniel Dombrowski and Robert Deltete have beaten you to it with their *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion*. The only redeeming quality of this book is that it is indeed "brief," being only 129 pages of repetitive text.

The central thesis of the book is that within the "Catholic tradition" (like most terms in the book never defined or never defined clearly), early abortions were tolerated, since the fetus at the early stages was considered subhuman. It was only after mistakes in seventeenth century medicine were taken up into the tradition that the idea became widespread that fetuses at early stages of pregnancy deserve protection.

It is clear, however, from the Didache and the writings of Tertullian that the Catholic Church has condemned abortion since at least the end of the first century. How do the authors deal with that? They set up a strawman. They claim that the only grounds for opposition to abortion within the early Church was something they call the "perversity position." The so-called "perversity position," is the idea that abortions are wrong because they result from sexual intercourse (even between married couples) that is perverse by virtue of being pleasurable to the partners. The only evidence that the authors offer that this actually was the grounds for the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion is their erroneous analysis of a portion of St. Augustine's treatise *On Marriage and Concupiscence*. They reduce St Augustine's teaching to "those who mix pleasure with sex, even sex with one's spouse commits sin." But that is not even close to a fair reading of the text. Rather, St. Augustine condemned sex that is against the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, that is, sex engaged in not for the intention of producing life but solely for the purpose of satisfying the demands of lust. In modern parlance, what St. Augustine is actually condemning is objectifying the other, using the body of one's spouse to satisfy lustful desires.

Unhindered by what St. Augustine actually wrote, the authors then leap to the conclusion that St. Augustine's entire opposition to abor-

tion was based on the so-called “perversity view.” They fail to establish that St. Augustine’s opposition to abortion was limited to such grounds, which is an example of an unsupported assertion in a book that is full of them. The authors are again setting up a strawman: since no one any longer believes in the “perversity view” as a grounds for opposing abortion (if indeed anyone held the view at any time), then abortion must be licit unless there is some other basis for opposing abortion.

The authors claim that the alternative ground for Catholic opposition to abortion is something they call the “ontological position.” By that they mean the Catholic belief that a fetus is a human person and thus entitled to protection. The authors claim that this is *not* the traditional Catholic position, at least not as regards the early stages of pregnancy. To show this, they essentially rehash Joseph Donceel’s project of rehabilitating the “delayed hominization” theory of fetal development of St Thomas Aquinas. The authors claim that St Thomas’ theory is that the human embryo first has the soul of a plant, then that of an animal, and only receives a proper human soul when the matter of the fetus sufficiently resembles a human body. The authors then focus only on the cerebral cortex, and say that there must not be a human soul present until that part of the fetus is sufficiently developed, which is not until the seventh month of pregnancy. Thus, they conclude, the unborn child in the mother’s womb is not “morally considerable” until then. They claim that Catholics who believe in “immediate hominization,” i.e. that God infuses a human soul at the moment of conception, “should mourn a women’s menstrual flow.”

As was the case with their treatment of St. Augustine, the authors are hardly faithful to Aquinas’ work. For instance, they conveniently fail to mention that Aquinas condemned abortion at all stages of pregnancy. And Jean de Siebenthal’s refutation of Donceel’s hijacking of St Thomas’s theory of fetal development is equally applicable here. Since Aquinas, lacking modern scientific knowledge, thought that the male “seed” was the only active principle, then the first

*body* and soul of the conceptus was vegetable. Then, a substantial change occurred and an animal *body* animated by an animal soul took its place. Then finally a human body animated by a spiritual soul arose. Now of course today we know, and the authors know, that there is no succession of bodies in the stages of fetal development, but that zygotes differentiate and grow into what looks more like a baby as time passes. Thus were he alive today, Aquinas would certainly conclude that the body from the moment of conception is human, and thus has a human soul.

The authors claim that the idea of “immediate hominization” did not gain ascendancy until the seventeenth century, when certain errors in the field of medicine’s understanding of fetal development were taken up into the Catholic tradition. The authors, however, utterly fail to establish that such medical errors did in fact impact Catholic teaching on abortion. They cite only one seventeenth century theology book that they say was impacted by the then prevalent errors in medicine, and *that book they admit was placed on the Index of Prohibited Books.*

In the next chapter, the authors claim that pro-life Catholics cling to their unreasonable defense of fetuses during the early stages of pregnancy because they fail to understand something called “temporal asymmetry.” So abstract and briefly stated as to be almost impenetrable to the nonspecialist, this portion of the book argues that pro-life Catholics fail to appreciate that there is not a “strict identity” between the “Mary on Friday and Mary on Monday.” Mary on Monday had experiences over the weekend that Mary on Friday could only imagine. Therefore the “two Mary’s” are “somewhat different realities.” Pro-life Catholics fail to account for such “implications of temporal becoming for human identity,” and thus identify too strongly with human embryos. If only such Catholics understood temporal asymmetry, then they would see that the relevant question is “when does an individual human life become as valuable as the life of an animal?” This theory of temporal asymmetry evidently has implications for theology as well. The authors assert that even God does not know with absolute assurance

and in minute detail what will in fact happen to an embryo at the early stages of pregnancy. According to the authors, their view of divine knowledge is important in understanding that a “fertilized egg” is no more than a potential person, and thus not worthy of protection.

The authors follow this with what they call an explication of a “defensible sexual ethic.” Presumably, the authors find the sexual ethic of the Catholic Church *indefensible*, thus forcing them to formulate a new one. Not surprisingly, they misstate Catholic teaching on sexual ethics by limiting it to what they call the perversity view, discussed above but here used mostly to mean that Catholics think that sex is immoral if it is pleasurable. In place of this gross caricature of Catholic sexual teaching, the authors propose something they call an ethic of “mutual agapic respect.” This standard seems to be that, in addition to consent, there must be an element of respect between the parties prior to and while they are engaging in sex. Under this new “Catholic” ethic, not only is extramarital sex permissible, but so is homosexual sex and pornography (so long as the use of pornography does not render sex with another human being impossible).

The authors next offer an extended discussion of the political theory of John Rawls. The connection between this chapter and the rest of the book is so tenuous that one suspects that it is mere padding. This chapter does feature the authors praising Justice Harry Blackmun of *Roe v. Wade* fame as something of a prophet. Why? Because he said that the age of viability is twenty-four weeks. The authors claim that the date of viability has not and will not be pushed back any further. This claim is flatly wrong as a simple case of medical fact.

In the book’s final chapter, the authors argue that if pro-life Catholics are to be consistent, then animals and animal fetuses deserve equal respect since they exhibit sentience at similar levels as fetuses and young infants. But since pro-life Catholics do not reduce human dignity to sentience, the authors’ argument is worthy of scant attention.

On the whole, this book is so haphazardly put together and is so derivative of others’

work that one wonders why the authors bothered writing it. Despite being written by two university professors and being published by a university press, this book is not a work of scholarship. Rather it is little more than a pro-choice propaganda piece, an attempt to disseminate the erroneous and highly rebuttable views of Donceels and others to as wide an audience as possible. For that reason, one is grateful it is so poorly done.

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**Henig, Robin Marantz.** *The Monk in the Garden: The Lost and Found Genius of Gregor Mendel, the Father of Genetics.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2000. 292 pp.

Robin Marantz Henig has produced in this book not only the biography of a monk and scientist of intrinsic interest, but also she has traced the initial history and development of the science of genetics. Thus the reader will find that the story of Mendel ends with the account of his death on page 170. In the next 100 pages or so the book follows the story of Mendel’s hypothesis and its eventual widespread adoption by the scientific community at the beginning of the twentieth century. While the majority of contemporary ethical concerns in the area of genetics surrounds the DNA molecule, the molecular genetic paradigm rests clearly in the Mendelian paradigm. For this reason alone, Henig’s text is valuable in providing access to the foundational context of molecular genetics.

The author is convinced that a more authentic and accurate description of Gregor Mendel is an important corrective to what she considers the almost mythical historical depictions of Mendel and his work. In this task I believe she succeeds well. The first half of the book pieces together from what authentic fragments remain a more historically accurate picture of Mendel than is available in most genetics texts. What emerges is a portrait of a person who is more vulnerable and believable than