

# Foreword

THE ESSAYS in this book were written originally for *The Human Life Review*, where they first appeared. The Review itself sprang into existence in 1975, in response to the Supreme Court's 1973 rulings legalizing abortion; but as the variety of subjects in these essays suggests, it quickly broadened to address many other issues.

I have always marvelled at the charge that the anti-abortion movement is engaged in "single-issue politics." To meet the charge head-on, why not? What single issue lies nearer the heart of civilization? What could be more barbarous than the killing of an unborn child, by the choice of its mother, through the agency of a doctor, and with the blessing of the state? What could be more hypocritical than to speak of "terminating a pregnancy," when the child is squirming in agony and perhaps, on being removed from the womb before death, crying?

This (and I apologize for the unpleasantness) is at the core of the anti-abortion movement. But the "single" issue is, as I argue in one of these essays, more accurately described as crucial: other issues revolve around it. The debate about abortion is really the kind of debate America shies away from: a debate about what man is, and about what society should be.

Ironically, the Supreme Court professed to be avoiding bitter differences over fundamental questions when it abruptly struck down the abortion laws of all fifty states. To put it bluntly, the Court seems to have felt that legalizing abortion was simply the progressive thing to do, and the reasons it offered in terms of constitutional law have the air of afterthought: the Fourteenth Amendment doesn't protect fetuses, but the Ninth Amendment does protect privacy, ergo, since this poor Court is hardly competent to resolve grave and complex questions that have baffled philosophers for centuries, anyone can get an abortion any time they want to.

In the dissent, Justice White damned the abortion rulings as an exercise in "raw judicial power." Apart from awakening the kind of controversy it

said it eschewed, the Court has excited a new debate about its own role and power. Its reasoning on abortion has been an embarrassment even to so vigorous a champion of judicial activism as John Hart Ely of Harvard Law School. Meanwhile the case for judicial restraint has gained new force—and won new followers. In the end the Court may find that it has provoked Congress to assert prerogatives that have lain dormant, with few exceptions, since 1789.

I have found that the abortion issue has so many ramifications that it can't possibly remain isolated. Time and again when I thought everything there was to say had been said, new and vital considerations came to the fore. The Court's disruption of life rippled outward to disrupt the family: it ruled that women were entitled to get abortions without informing their husbands, and teenage girls without informing their parents. The Court's very willingness to assert these things implied something deeply ominous: that the state could redefine family relations, as well as life itself, at its whim.

Moreover, millions of people seemed to notice nothing wrong with this. We are so inured to the expanding claims of the state—even when it pretends to be conferring rights on us—that we take for granted that our officials will assume a bit more power tomorrow than today, and that unpredictable change in the very principles that we live under is the natural course of things. Not only natural, but "progressive." It is widely thought reactionary to oppose that sort of change.

C. S. Lewis remarked that every increase in man's power over nature can turn out to mean an increase in the power of some men over others, with nature as its instrument. Given technological progress, we need to fight hard to retain our clarity about the nature and rights of human beings, or we face what Lewis called "the abolition of man." Abortion and totalitarianism both represent new possibilities of some men's power over others, and both are defended by certain ideologies of "progress." We hear of human "autonomy" and of man's "control of his own destiny." But the autonomy is enjoyed by a select (or self-selected) few, and the control is exercised by a shrinking elite; those who are powerless, whether unborn children or the subjects of a totalist dictatorship, simply don't count.

Put otherwise, modern man is a potential victim in a novel sense. We are no longer so much at the mercy of the elements and blind natural forces: famine, flood, and pestilence. These we have pretty much conquered. But we are increasingly at the mercy of morally blind human forces. The modern state has killed tens of millions of people, most of them in the name of human equality. In America, where the spirit of freedom is still alive, the state doesn't directly kill; it merely authorizes private killing, by the millions. Ultimately the result is the same: the abolition of man.

We no longer know what we are.

The official philosophies have only subverted these tendencies. Regnant American liberalism calls itself pluralist, but it is not: it is aggressively secularist. It seeks to force religious awareness out of public life, beginning with public schools; and it seeks to expand the domain of public life, and to crowd private schools out of existence. The major media of news and entertainment join in this process, while blandly pretending nothing serious is at stake. Casual sexual liaisons, which never seem to result in pregnancy or children, are represented as normal, and tyrants, provided they pay homage to the progressive pieties, are honored as "leaders." There is no sign of God, which may be excusable; but there is also no recognition of the common human yearning for the divine, an obviously unrealistic omission. It is possible to say that God does not exist, but it is hard to deny that churches exist.

All these issues converge in the abortion issue. Just what is being killed when the tiniest human embryo is destroyed? Do we dare to say it is nothing? Do we dare to risk assuming the role of enemies of creation? The very act of abortion implies something grave about the whole universe. If it is not wrong, then what can be right? Do we exist in a void in which nothing matters? Is the whole sense of piety—the motive of so much important human action, in history and in our daily lives—deluded?

All these questions and more are felt to be at stake by the millions of people (many of them unattached to formal religions) who recoil from the idea of permitting casual abortion, let alone defining it as a "right." Under its pretended neutrality, the Court has given a positive answer to the religious question: it has defined us, operationally, as an atheistic people, a people for whom no moral considerations may obstruct the claims of convenience and hedonism assisted by advanced techniques of killing.

The anti-abortion movement refuses to accept that definition of America. This is the heart of the issue. Those of us who oppose abortion, morally and legally, are trying to keep alive the very idea of piety—man's subordination to creation and the Creator—at a time when we are being seduced with false promises of power over creation, society, each other. We are arguing that human embryos have souls; we are even arguing that abortionists have souls.

Over the years I have groped toward a comprehensive view of all the things at stake in this momentous controversy. The essays in this book represent my efforts. I have been constantly encouraged, prodded, and overpraised by the editor of *The Human Life Review*, the militantly self-effacing J. P. McFadden, who, just this once, will have to permit me to salute him as a hero of the movement to defend human life, and to dedicate to him, with deep affection, this book.