

**Antitheses on Human Dignity:**  
**Raymond Dennehy and Peter Singer**

A Senior Studies Report

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The focus of this paper is to expound the concept of the dignity of the human person through the argument for the ontological basis of human rights as presented by Raymond Dennehy. Further, the argument shall be used in the assessment of Peter Singer's antithetical argument against the moral convention of the sanctity of human life. This will be done in three parts. First, I will examine Dennehy's ontological argument. Second, I will examine Singer's argument against the moral convention of the sanctity of human life. And third, based on Dennehy's argument, I will raise objections to Singer's argument.

#### Dennehy on the Concept of Dignity

The argument presented by Raymond Dennehy is an argument from ontology; that is, it is an argument from being, an argument that states that rights are due a human being by his very nature or being. The argument purports that the acts of knowing and choosing demonstrate a person's "intrinsic superiority over brute animals and all material nature, for such acts originate only in a *self*, an *I*, in a unique center of conscious being" (Dennehy, 439). Being a unique center of conscious being, he is then said to be a whole, entire in himself. Such a whole "exists not only in himself but for himself" (439).

This idea that a human being exists in himself and for himself is contrary to some contemporary philosophical ideas, namely, that of the concept of 'quality of life' (434). The quality of life focuses on the whole of society, not just individuals within that society. For example, since the increasing world population threatens the quality of life and the survival of the human species, then any individual born into that society has value second to the whole of that society. Thus, any doctrine that a person has inviolable, natural rights is incompatible with some understandings of the social good of the whole society (434-5). Therefore, every human being has a value secondary to the whole of society. However, since it cannot be true that a human being has inviolable rights and at the same time could be expendable for the good of society, then in determining the value of a human being, the focal question is "whether man ultimately exists totally for society or exists in some significant sense for himself" (434)? Dennehy argues against the idea that a human being only has value in so far as the human has value for the social whole.

To first set up his argument for the dignity of the human person, Dennehy involves two principles from Thomistic thought: that of immanence and extensiveness. The principle of immanence states that "the higher a

nature, or formal essence, the more intimate to that nature is the activity that flows from it" (438). The second principle complements immanence: extensiveness. This principle states that "the higher a power is, the more universal is the object to which it extends" (438). It is related proportionately to immanence in that the more immanent a being is, the more extensive are its powers. Immanence is a cause that renders the effect of extensiveness. This bears on the topic of this paper for knowing and choosing are immanent activities that extend from the very nature, from the essence, of man.

If it can be demonstrated that a human being has a unique interiority, that is, a capacity for immanent activity, then it follows that a human being has a value or dignity that transcends his use to society. For if the value of a human being transcends his use to society, then he exists in some significant sense for himself. Thus, if a human being exists in some significant sense for himself, then a human being has certain fundamental rights that are prior to society.

If it is true that the ontological acts of knowing and choosing are immanent activities, then the acts of knowing and choosing are self-perfecting operations. The acts of knowing and choosing are self-perfecting because knowing and choosing originate in a knower and for the fulfillment of the knower (445-6). If knowing and choosing originate

and terminate in a knower, then that knower is a whole, entire in himself. Recall the meaning of immanence mentioned previously: the higher a nature, the more intimate to that nature is the activity that flows from it. Any immanent activity that flows from a being thus originates and terminates in that being. That this is true can be demonstrated.

First, to the act of knowing. In order to know anything, a person enters into a relationship of subject to object because when a person knows, he knows some thing. Thus knowing is composed of two components: an object that is known and a subject that knows. This relationship between subject and object is such that the subject 1) *becomes* the object, and 2) *dominates* and *possesses* the object (439).

The first claim of knowing as a way of becoming makes knowing more than an apprehension of ideas or a grasping of a representation of an object. When we know, we know things, and we know what they are because we know their essences, their 'whatness'. If it were just a matter of apprehending a representation of the object, then it would mean we apprehended a representation of the object but not the object itself. As it is, we can know the essential differences between objects and any representation. Thus, we know the object itself and not a representation of the object. As Dennehy observes, if when we know something by

only knowing a mental representation of the object, then our intellect would provide only a knowledge of the representation itself instead of the object itself (440). But since we do know objects and not representations of objects, then it stands that our "knowledge of things can be accounted for only by the inference that nothing...stands between the latter [object] and the intellect" (440). The intellect does not form a representation of the object from the object's essence; rather, the intellect becomes the thing known (440).

This becoming a thing through knowing it is not a material becoming. Obviously, when I know, become, what a tricycle is, I just don't suddenly transform into a tricycle. When I know something, I know something as other (440). Thus this becoming, if not material, must be formal: "the intellect seizes the intelligible structure, the essence, of the concrete existent perceived by the senses" (441). The intellect becomes the thing's essence. If the intellect becomes the thing's essence, then the intellect actually becomes the thing known. The intellect raises the essence of the object to its own level of spiritual (immaterial) existence. Thus, knowing is a becoming (441).

However, in knowing, the intellect not only formally becomes the object known, but the intellect also dominates and possesses the object. This can be seen through the

following observations about knowing. When a person knows some thing, he knows it as other. But if a person does not have knowledge of himself as the subject who knows an object, then there could not be any knowledge (442). This is true because when a knower has knowledge of an object as other, he also has knowledge of himself as the subject who knows (442). A knower has consciousness about himself. It is a knowledge of oneself as object. This type of knowledge is a reflexive knowledge (442).

Further, knowledge is not only reflexive, but it also demonstrates a concomitant consciousness, for a knower simultaneously knows an object and knows himself to be the subject who knows an object (443). Since a knower knows himself as subject and not just as object, this knowledge cannot be conceptual because it is a knowledge of the self not as the known, but as the knower (443). This is so because "insofar as conceptual knowledge requires the abstraction of the intelligible form from the material image of the concrete existent, it presupposes the subject-object relationship" (443). It is in this way that a knower dominates and possesses an object that is known.

If a knower both becomes the object and dominates it and possesses it, then the act of knowing originates in a knower and is for the fulfillment of that knower. This is so because it is the knower who becomes the object and dominates and possesses it. Since knowing is for the



benefit of the knower, then it is a self-perfecting operation. Since it is a self-perfecting operation, then it is an immanent activity, an immanent activity from a being with a unique interiority.

Conceptual knowledge is not the only immanent activity that flows forth from the nature of man. Choosing is also an interior, immanent activity. "Insofar as choice is consequent upon deliberation and deliberation is consequent upon knowledge, it is clear that choice is consequent upon intellection" (445). It is the intellect that knows. In order to choose then, I must first have knowledge, because without knowledge one cannot deliberate. Thus it is that choice is an extension of the power of the intellect. Since intellection originates in a unique center of conscious being, the act of choosing likewise originates in a unique center of conscious being, a *self* (446). Since choosing originates in a *self*, then it is an immanent, self-perfecting activity.

"The principles set down above with regard to knowing and choosing undergird the correlation between a being's dignity... and its capacity for immanence" (446). The more intellectual a being is, the more perfect, the more immanent is that being. It is a unique center of being, the self, that knows and chooses. Only those beings that demonstrate a unique interiority of immanent activity demonstrate this correlation regarding dignity. Thus it is

that human beings have dignity. For if humans have a unique interiority, a capacity for immanent behavior, then they have a value or dignity that transcends their use to society. If humans have a value that transcends their use to society, then humans have certain fundamental rights which are prior to any societal imposition of value. Human beings do have a unique capacity for immanent activity; they have the capacity for the immanent activities of knowing and choosing. Now, because they demonstrate these activities, human beings have certain fundamental rights which are prior to any societal imposition, or determination of value. This is why human beings have dignity.

#### Singer Versus the Concept of Dignity

The aim of Peter Singer's argument is to challenge what he calls a moral convention, namely, the doctrine of the sanctity of human life. This doctrine sets forth the idea that only human life is sacred; that is, only human beings have a life of any significant value. This then implies that there is a sharp distinction between the value of a human life and the value of some other animal life. This is a difference not simply of degree, but of kind.

Singer illustrates this sharp distinction through two examples. The first example is that of an infant born with

Down's syndrome, an intestinal obstruction, and a congenital heart defect (Singer, 44):

The mother, believing that the retarded infant would be impossible to care for adequately, refused to consent to surgery to remove the intestinal obstruction. Without surgery, of course, the baby would soon die. Thereupon a local child-welfare agency, invoking a state child-abuse statute, obtained a court order directing that surgery be performed. After a complicated course of surgery and thousands of dollars worth of medical care, the infant was returned to her mother. In addition to her mental retardation, the baby's physical growth and development remained markedly retarded because of her severe cardiac disease. A follow-up inquiry eighteen months after the baby's birth revealed that the mother felt more than ever that she had been done an injustice (quoted Shaw, 44).

This first example shows the regard for human life that is the current 'moral convention'. Human life is sacrosanct; it must be protected at all costs. The second example regards the condition of animals in medical experiments. A medical research project at the University of Michigan Medical School conducted an experiment on sixty-four monkeys (Singer, 45). The experiment was to determine the effects of severe drug addiction:

The researchers confined sixty-four monkeys in small cubicles. These monkeys were then given unlimited access to a variety of drugs through tubes implanted in their arms. They could control the intake by pressing a lever. In some cases, after the monkeys had become addicted, supplies were abruptly cutoff. Of the monkeys that had become addicted to morphine, three were "observed to die in convulsions" while others found dead in the morning were "presumed to have died in convulsions." Monkeys that had taken large amounts of cocaine inflicted severe wounds upon themselves, including biting off their fingers and

toes, before dying convulsive deaths. Amphetamines caused one monkey to "pluck all of the hair off his arms and abdomen." In general, the experimenters found that "The manifestations of toxicity... were similar to the well-known toxicities of these drugs in man." They noted that the experiments on animals with addictive drugs had been going on in their laboratory for "the last 20 years" (quoted US Public Health Service, 45).

These two examples demonstrate the radical difference between the way in which we treat human life and the way in which we treat animal life. The question that Singer raises from considering these two examples is whether or not it can be right to save the life of a deformed infant just because it is a human being and at the same time not wrong to slowly kill monkeys just because they are not human beings? Why is it wrong to treat members of our own species in the same way we treat members of other species of animal life? Obviously, we would not consider the use of human infants for such an experiment. Singer asks the same question in a different way. Can it be right to treat one kind of being in a way we would not treat another? Singer thinks that we can provided that they differ in relevant respects. Singer gives the example of teaching a human child to read but not a dog, because they differ vastly in their ability to read. Knowing this however, what happens when severely retarded infants are compared with non-human animals, like monkeys? In some cases a human infant does not possess any characteristics that distinguish it from other non-human animals.

Now, given that they sometimes do not differ, then we must conclude, Singer says, that there is nothing to appeal to in defense of the discrimination of one species over another. The only thing that does make them different is the fact that they are of different species. Thus, "the doctrine of the sanctity of human life, as it is normally understood, has at its core a discrimination on the basis of species and nothing else" (48). Because of this doctrine, there is no distinction made between normal humans, who have developed to a point where they surpass anything another animal can achieve, and humans who are senile or suffer from mental dementia, human fetuses that are dependent upon in-utero development, or human infants. Moreover, we do not show concern over killing animals that seem to have capacities and abilities greater than the senile, than human fetuses or infants. All human beings are said to have dignity, while no animals do regardless of whether or not some human beings possess characteristics greater than any animal.

Singer argues that since there is no morally relevant distinction between the two groups, any further distinctions in how we treat them is based upon species discrimination. It follows then that there is a flaw in the doctrine of the sanctity of human life. Before, the argument held that only human life was sacred, but since there is no distinction between the abilities exhibited by

members of different species on some occasions, the doctrine must be false.

However, the doctrine can be modified to avoid being called speciesist. If the term 'human' was to be removed from its biological definition based upon species, then its classification could be based upon whether or not a being has the characteristics of a person. In this way any bias based on speciesism would be avoided. Any definition of a person then would be based on the attributes characteristic of persons. Such capacities would be the ability to feel pain, to act intentionally, to solve problems, to communicate with and relate to other beings, and to be self-aware and have consciousness (46). It follows then that only those human beings who meet these criteria would be considered persons. Further, since some animals may exhibit these same characteristics, they should be treated with greater dignity than we attribute to them now because they too would be persons. However, the consequence of avoiding speciesist bias is that those human beings who do not display these attributes, such as human fetuses and infants and senile humans, are not considered to be persons with dignity.

Now, concerning those placed in such a group with the senile, fetuses, and infants, what would be their status based upon the potentiality to develop into beings that

were characteristic of the attributes of a person? If we are committed to the idea that it is wrong to kill even potential human persons (since that is what a fully developed being with the characteristics of a person would be), we would then be committed to the view that even abortion is as seriously wrong as infanticide (50). However, based upon potentiality, a being would only have value if there is potential for the development of rationality and self-consciousness. Here, Singer argues that:

while we may think that a rational, self-conscious being has a right to life, relatively few of us, I think, value the existence of rational self-conscious beings in the same sense that the more of them there are, the better we think it is. If we did value the existence of rational self-conscious beings in this way, we would be opposed to contraception, as well as abortion and infanticide, and even to abstinence or celibacy (50).

But, Singer says, since most of us think that there are enough rational, self-conscious people around anyway, any weight given to potentiality would not be great. Thus, any idea that just the potentiality to be human grants a 'right to life' falls short.

However, if potentiality did matter, it would not settle the question of which lives to hold as sacred and which would be justifiable to kill. This is so because there is no connection between what is characteristic of human and what it takes to make it wrong to kill a being

(51). To say that it did matter would create only a slightly more complicated form of speciesism.

In his argument, Singer does not take up the problem of moving from a fact to a value for he says: "I have been unable to make up my own mind about the necessary criteria for a right to life" (51). However, remaining committed to his argument against speciesism, he suggests three possibilities for removing the sharp distinction between the rights of human beings and the non-rights of other non-human animals. The possibilities are:

- 1) While holding constant our attitudes to members of other species, we change our attitudes to members of our own species so that we consider it legitimate to kill retarded infants in painful ways for experimental purposes even when no immediately useful knowledge is likely to be derived from these experiments; and in addition we give up any moral objections we may have to rearing and killing these infants for food.

- 2) While holding constant our attitudes to members of our own species, we change our attitudes to members of other species so that we consider it wrong to kill them because we like the taste of their flesh or for experimental purposes even when the experiment would result in the immediately useful knowledge; moreover we refuse to kill them even when they are suffering severe pain from some incurable disease and are a burden to those who must look after them.

- 3) We change our attitudes to both humans and non-humans so that they come together at some point in between the present extremes (51-52).

None of these possibilities contains a bias on the basis of speciesism. He is uncertain, though, as to which position to hold. Based on the implications of each position, he favors the third possibility. On one hand, most people, it



can safely be said, do not want to use any human infant, deformed or not, as food or for use in experiments, as in the first example. On the other hand, most do not want all forms of mercy killing, even for animals, to be eliminated. This leaves only the third example. "We have to change our attitudes in both directions" (52). That is, both non-human animals and fully developed human beings would have dignity. To equate dignity with just being human would be speciesism. To avoid speciesism, we then say that all non-human animals who are persons and fully developed human beings who are persons have dignity.

Given that this is so,

once we realize that the fact that severely and irreparably retarded infants are members of the species *homo sapiens* is not in itself relevant to how we should treat them, we should be ready to reconsider current practices which cause suffering to all concerned and benefit nobody (53).

What should be reconsidered is the practice of keeping alive deformed infants and fetuses, even the senile and chronically sick, whose existence puts a burden on those who must care for them. This would mean that abortion and euthanasia are allowable and should even be practiced. It is the current practice of distinguishing between humans and non-humans that creates needless suffering. When speciesism is avoided, this needless suffering is avoided. Likewise, when we consider the absurdity of speciesism, the

concept of the sanctity of human life becomes absurd for deformed fetuses and infants.

The obvious alternative to trying to bring up a severely retarded and handicapped child--a swift, painless death for the infant--is not available because the law enforces the idea that the infant's life is sacred and cannot be directly terminated (54).

It is in this treatment of severely retarded infants, the senile, and fetuses that the third possible choice of avoiding speciesism is considered. It holds fully developed human beings on the same plane as non-human animals who are persons, yet it considers the senile, fetuses, and retarded infants as having unsanctified human life, i.e., as not having dignity, because they are lesser than non-human animals in capacity and ability.

This doctrine of the sanctity of human life "is a legacy of attitudes and beliefs that were once widespread" (56). The basis for these beliefs, to Singer, has more or less gone away. All that is left are the vestiges of a moral system that "few people would now try to defend" (56). The heritage of the Christian system is the distinct sharpness in the division between human beings and other non-human animals. It is wrong to kill a human being, even a fetus, but it is not wrong to kill an animal. This idea is held because the Christian believes that he has an immortal soul, destined for either eternal bliss with God or eternal damnation (57). There is no such immortal soul

in a non-human animal. Compounding this belief is the practice of baptizing to remove original sin (57). If a infant was not baptized, it was bound for hell. Even the fetus was bound for eternal damnation without baptism. This made the doctrine of the sanctity of human life even more serious.

To finish his argument, he makes one last appeal. The consequence of not removing speciesism from our modern moral viewpoint will only bring a very tangible harm: the misery of deformed infants whose lives are needlessly prolonged, and the flagrant harm to the moral interests of non-human animals.

#### Dennehy's reply to Singer

There are three main ideas within Singer's argument to which I object based on Dennehy's argument. The first is the concept of speciesism itself, and the statement that on some occasions there is no distinction between human beings and some non-human animals. The second is Singer's casual dismissal of potentiality as a reason to grant a right to life because of his inability to move from a fact to a value. The third is Singer's remarks about the history of the idea of human dignity.

To the first point, inherent within Singer's concept of speciesism is what Dennehy would call "the animalization

of man" (Dennehy, 5). This idea holds that there is nothing in man that makes him essentially different from brute animals (5). In Singer's own words:

Those who talk of the sanctity of human life are trying to say that human life has some very special value; and a crucial implication of this assertion is the idea that there is a radical difference between the value of a human life and the value of the life of some other animal-- a difference not merely of degree, but of quality or kind (Singer, 44).

It is explicit within Singer's argument against speciesism that human persons differ from animals only in degree, not kind. The consequent of this is that since "what is called the 'human person' is essentially no different from animals, then he cannot essentially be nobler than they or inviolate when they are not" (Dennehy, 7). This is apparent in Singer's third possibility to remove speciesism from any value attributed to human persons.

To the contrary of this idea, as Singer rightly claims, the traditional view of man originates in the distinction between human beings and brute animals. It is the locus of the idea from which human persons rightfully claim their special dignity. Human beings are radically different from brute animals.

A being's capacity for immanent activity is what grants a being dignity (446).

The more perfect a being, the more completely is it an intellectual substance; the more completely it is an

intellectual substance, the more autonomous and self-perfecting it is (446).

It is only a human person that has an immanent interior principle, and therefore truly intimate to the activity that flows from it. The activities of sub-rational animals, on the other hand, are the product of an interior principle that is instinctual (447). Although a sub-rational animal does have an interior principle, it is not as perfected as that of the rational animal, the human person. Thus, because it is not as perfect, it is less completely an intellectual substance; and thus, sub-rational animals are not self-perfecting beings by their nature. Since they are not self-perfecting beings, they do not exist for their own sake. Since they have two different kinds of natures, they must be radically different. They are different in their level of immanence. However:

This is not to suggest that they have no value in themselves. Insofar as they exist, they have ontological value, but whatever their value, it is subordinate to the good of the species. Thus, while there is something intuitively immoral in wantonly crumpling a rose or killing an animal, it is the insight into the ontological difference between rational and sub-rational beings which underlies our readiness to prune a rose for the vigor of the rose bush and kill animals for food or to kill diseased animals to prevent them from infecting other members of their species or to preserve the balance of nature, etc., but which... produces moral revulsion in us at the thought of killing human beings for eugenic purposes or using involuntary patients to further medical science (449-50).

Animals then do have value in that they exist. However, since they do not exist for their own sake, they do not exhibit that which is necessary to grant them the same dignity as human persons. Since Singer's argument against speciesism is rooted in "a method which can apprehend only what is measured," it fails because it does not take being itself into account (451). According to Singer, personhood is not granted because of an immanent interior personhood, but because personhood has measurable traits such as the ability to feel pain, to act intentionally, to solve problems, to communicate with and relate to other beings, and to be self-aware and have consciousness (Singer, 46). Since these attributes exist because of the being's own existence first, being must be considered as the source of these attributes. Thus, human persons have dignity because of what they are naturally, that is, because of their essence.

The second problem flows from this consideration. Singer questions what the status of infants and fetuses would be if they had the potentiality to develop into beings with the attributes of a person. Singer's answer is that it does not matter because it cannot answer the problem of moving from an 'is' to an 'ought'; that is, the problem of moving from a fact to a value.

"The doctrine of the dichotomy between fact and value... represents the outlook of Nominalism" (Dennehy,

450). It is the rejection of Thomas Aquinas' view "that morality is grounded in objective reality and is accessible as such to human intellect" (450-1). Nominalism, on the other hand, is not grounded in objective reality. Things do not have essences. Thus, it is a philosophical method that can only apprehend that which is measurable (451). Thus, to Singer, the basis of any right is some property in the right-holder, such as self-awareness, etc. (451). To avoid the 'is-ought' dilemma, Singer simply says that potentiality does not matter because it doesn't matter to the majority of people. We already think that there are enough rational people running around now (Singer, 50). Because he cannot answer the is-ought problem, he cannot find a suitable criteria to grant a right to life (51). Thus he gives his 'three ways'.

However, for Dennehy, we can move from a fact to a value. Since we can know the essences of things, we know what things are, including the essence of man. Because of their activities, we know human persons to be by nature rational animals.

Now to appreciate the legitimacy of the transition from fact to value and a *fortiori* the legitimacy of the transition from the conclusion that man is a self-perfecting being to the conclusion that he is naturally entitled to rights, it is necessary to state explicitly what has been implicit throughout this essay: the dependence of ethics upon metaphysics, upon the intellect's capacity to go beyond the sensible properties of things to an apprehension of their intelligible structures (Dennehy, 451-2).

First, consider the real distinction between essence and existence. Essence, or the 'whatness' of a thing, belongs to the realm of potency; it does not exist in itself but rather what is possible existence. On the other hand, existence belongs to the realm of actuality. We know them to be distinct because "from our knowledge of what a thing is, we cannot infer that it exists, nor from the mere knowledge that a thing exists can we infer what it is" (452). Each thing that exists is a composite of essence and existence. The essence specifies its existence, that is, determines it to be this thing or that thing. The act of existence is what makes the essence real. One will observe, however, that the world is dynamic; it is always in a state of change. It is the essence that determines the possibilities of existence, while existence determines its actuality (452). In other words, essence belongs to the realm of necessity, while existence belongs to the realm of contingency (452).

However, despite the fact that existence is in constant flux, the human person, as a knower, still perceives what things really are, "eventually coming to an understanding of the ideal type of fulfillment," or self-perfection (453). Thus, perceiving that a human person is rational and self-perfecting, it follows that it is desirable, i.e., good, that a human person actualize the potencies of his essence (453). The essence of a human



person thus demands, because essence is of the realm of necessity, its completion. Thus:

the objection that an *ought* cannot be derived from an *is* rests upon a philosophy which fails to understand that oughtness, far from inhabiting a realm beyond things, has its ground in being (454).

Since it is desirable that a thing attain the perfection of its being, that is, what is good, it follows that the good *ought* to be (454). It is good that a being attain the fullness of its being. Therefore, it proper for an 'ought' to be derived from an 'is'. Thus, potentiality does matter because an infant or a fetus is developing, that is, actualizing, its proper fulfillment.

The objection to this is that it does not cover the seriously retarded, or human fetuses and infants because they do not have the capacity for self-perfection. But to say this is to commit the fallacy of equivocation (457). What is meant by capacity by those who object is the physical or neuro-physiological impediment of their natural ability to exercise their natural ability (457). However, it is only in light of the fact that a human person by his very nature possesses the capacity for such immanent activities that it makes sense to say that he lacks the 'capacity' to exercise such powers. To say that he lacks the capacity in the first sense is to ignore the primacy of metaphysics over empirical measurement. Thus, even though some human persons cannot exercise their immanent powers,

they still do not lack the metaphysical capacity for those powers because they are that type of being which does exercise its powers. They are human persons nonetheless. Such beings just are not able to exercise their natural capacities.

The third area of contention with Singer's argument is his comment on the historical heritage of the sanctity of human life:

the following historical excursion is intended to be a kind of softening-up operation on your intuitions, to persuade you that the doctrine of the sanctity of human life is a legacy of attitudes and beliefs that were once widespread, but which few people would now try to defend (Singer, 56).

It was the tradition of the ancient world in Europe before the advent of Christianity to expose deformed or unwanted children (54-5). The changes in attitudes concerning abortion and infanticide are due to the rise of Christianity. Since Europe has largely been de-christianized, the theological reasons to argue against abortion and infanticide have likewise fallen. It follows that

the intuitions which lie behind these laws are not insights of self-evident moral truths, but the historically conditioned product of doctrines about immortality, original sin, and damnation which hardly anyone now accepts; doctrine so obnoxious, in fact, that if anyone did accept them, we should be inclined to discount any other moral views he held (59).

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to repudiate Nominalism itself, it should still be noted that this view stems from such a viewpoint. If one discounts the idea of the existence of essences, or substantial forms, then one does not have an account of why human persons have the interior powers that they do. We know man to be a rational animal with the power to know things as other, and to choose with a moral import. Such activities can only stem from an interior principle that is immaterial in nature. It is this immateriality that leads some to the conclusion that the essence of man is immortal.

Further, his historical views are biased. Singer does not take into account the long philosophical tradition of faith seeking understanding through reason. If it is obnoxious to hold such theological views, then it is also obnoxious to hold any view from reason, since reason is so often applied to revelation to produce theology. If I cannot rely upon reason, what can I rely on? As it is, Peter Singer has told only half the historical picture to 'soften our intuitions'.

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