

THE CLASH OF ORTHODOXIES

CHAPTER 1

(Including an exchange with Josh Dever)

A FEW YEARS AGO, the eminent Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington published in *Foreign Affairs* a widely noted article called “The Clash of Civilizations.”¹ Looking at contemporary international relations from a geopolitical vantage point, he predicted a clash of the world’s major civilizations: the West, the Islamic world, and the Confucian East. Huntington’s article provoked a response from one of his own most brilliant former students—Swarthmore’s James Kurth. In an article in the *National Interest* entitled “The Real Clash,”² Kurth argued persuasively that the clash that is coming—and that has, indeed, already begun—is not so much among the world’s great civilizations as it is within the civilization of the West, between those who claim the Judeo-Christian worldview and those who have abandoned that worldview in favor of the “isms” of contemporary American life—feminism, multiculturalism, gay liberationism, lifestyle liberalism—what I here lump together as a family called “the secularist orthodoxy.”

This clash of worldviews is sometimes depicted (though not by Professor Kurth) as a battle between the forces of “faith” and those of “reason.” I propose to challenge this depiction in a particular and fundamental way. I shall argue that the Christian moral view is rationally defensible. Indeed, my claim is that Christian moral teaching can be shown to be rationally superior to orthodox secular moral beliefs.

In defending the rational strength of Christian morality, I do not mean either to denigrate faith or to deny the importance—indeed, the centrality—of God’s revealed Word in the Bible, or of sacred Christian tradition. My aim is to offer a philosophical defense of Christian morality; and to put forward a challenge to the secularist worldview that has established itself as an orthodoxy in the academy and other elite sectors of Western culture.

FIRST, let’s get clear what is at stake in the conflict between Christian (and Jewish and to a large extent Islamic) morality and the secularist orthodoxy. The issues immediately in play have mainly, though not exclusively, to do with sexuality, the transmitting and taking of human life, and the place of religion and religiously informed moral judgment in public life.

According to the secularist orthodoxy, a child prior to birth—or some other marker event sometime before or soon after birth, such as the emergence of detectable brain-wave function or the acquisition of self-awareness—has no right not to be killed at the direction of its mother, no right, at least, that the law may legitimately recognize and protect. At the other edge of life, orthodox secularists believe that every individual has a right to commit suicide and to be assisted in committing suicide, should that person, for whatever reasons, prefer death to life.

In short, secularism rejects the proposition central to the Judeo-Christian tradition of thought about issues of life and death: that human life is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, good

and therefore morally inviolable. It rejects traditional morality's condemnation of abortion, suicide, infanticide of so-called defective children, and certain other life-taking acts.

The secularist orthodoxy also rejects the Judeo-Christian understanding of marriage as a bodily, emotional, and spiritual union of one man and one woman, ordered to the generating, nurturing, and educating of children, marked by exclusivity and permanence, and consummated and actualized by acts that are reproductive in type, even if not, in every case, in fact. Marriage, for secularists, is a legal convention whose goal is to support a merely emotional union—which may or may not, depending upon the subjective preferences of the partners, be marked by commitments of exclusivity and permanence, which may or may not be open to children depending on whether partners want children, and in which sexual acts of any type mutually agreeable to the partners are perfectly acceptable.

As any type of mutually agreeable consensual sexual act is considered as good as any other, secularist orthodoxy rejects the idea, common not only to Judaism and Christianity but to the world's other great cultures and religious traditions, that marriage is an inherently heterosexual institution. According to secularist orthodoxy, same-sex "marriages" are no less truly marriages than those between partners of opposite sexes who happen to be infertile.

And orthodox secularism, consistent with its view of what marriage is, declines to view marriage as the principle of rectitude in sexual conduct. So orthodox secularists reject as utterly benighted the notion that sex outside of marriage is morally wrong. For them, what distinguishes morally good from bad sex is not whether it is marital, but, rather, whether it is consensual. The consent of the parties involved (or, as in the case of adultery, other parties with a legitimate interest) is the touchstone of sexual morality. So long as there is no coercion or deception involved, orthodox secularism proposes no ground of moral principle for rejecting premarital sex, promiscuity, "open" marriage, etc.

It is not that all secularists believe that sexual passions should be completely unrestrained; it is rather that they conceive constraints on sexual activity other than the principle of consent as merely prudential in nature rather than moral. For example, secularists may counsel against promiscuity, but will do so not on the moral ground that it damages the integrity of people who engage in it, but rather on the prudential ground that it courts disease, unwanted pregnancy, and general unhappiness—which of course it does. To the extent, however, that "safe-sex" techniques can reduce the risk of these and other bad consequences of promiscuity, orthodox secularism proposes no ground for avoiding it.

ON the question of the place of religion and religiously informed moral judgment in public life, orthodox secularism stands for the strict and absolute separation of not only church and state, but also faith and public life: no prayer, not even an opportunity for silent prayer, in public schools; no aid to parochial schools; no displays of religious symbols in the public square; no legislation based on the religiously informed moral convictions of legislators or voters.

Here secularism goes far beyond the views shared by most Americans: namely, that everyone should enjoy the right to be free from coercion in matters of religious belief, expression, and worship; that people should not suffer discrimination or disabilities under civil law based on their religious beliefs and affiliations; and that government should be evenhanded in its treatment of religious groups. Secularism aims to privatize religion altogether, to render religiously informed

moral judgment irrelevant to public affairs and public life, and to establish itself, secularist ideology, as the nation's public philosophy.

Orthodox secularism promotes the myth that there is only one basis for disbelieving its tenets: namely, the claim that God has specially revealed propositions contrary to these tenets. Most orthodox secularists would have us believe that their positions are fully and decisively vindicated by reason and therefore can be judged to have been displaced only on the basis of irrational or, at least, nonrational faith.³ They assert that they have the reasonable position; any claims to the contrary must be based on unreasoned faith. Secularists are in favor of a "religious freedom" that allows everyone to believe as he wishes, but claims based on this "private faith" must not be the grounds of public policy. Policy must be based on what secularists have lately come to call "public reason."

INTERESTINGLY, there have been two different lines of response by religious people to this myth promoted by orthodox secularism. Some concede that religious and even moral judgments depend on faith that cannot be rationally grounded, but they argue that secularism itself is based on a nonrational faith, that secularism must, in the end, also rest on metaphysical and moral claims that cannot be proved. In that way, they suggest, secularism is just like religion, and is not entitled to any special standing that would qualify it as the nation's public philosophy. In fact, its standing would be less than that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, since it is not the tradition upon which the country was founded. On this account, secularism itself is a sectarian doctrine and, as such, is incapable of fulfilling its own demands of being accessible to "public reason."

A second response by people of faith to the myth promoted by orthodox secularism is to affirm the demand for public reasons for public policies and offer to do battle with secularism on the field of rational debate. Those who take this view tend to agree that secularism is itself a sectarian doctrine, but they claim that religious faith, and especially religiously informed moral judgment, can be based upon and defended by appeal to publicly accessible reasons. Indeed, they argue that sound religious faith and moral theology will be informed, in part, by insight into the authentic and fully public reasons provided by principles of natural law and natural justice.

These principles are available for rational affirmation by people of good will and sound judgment, even apart from their revelation by God in the Scriptures and in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Based on this view, it is possible for Christians to join forces with believing Jews, Muslims, and people from other religious traditions who share a commitment to the sanctity of human life and to other moral principles.

These two distinct lines of response to orthodox secularism are not entirely incompatible. They agree that secularism itself is a sectarian doctrine with its own metaphysical and moral presuppositions and foundations, with its own myths, and, one might even argue, its own rituals. It is a pseudo-religion. Christians can also agree that orthodox secularism is caught in a dilemma. By defining "public reason" stringently enough to exclude appeals to natural law principles, secularism will make it impossible for its own proponents to meet its demand for public reasons. If, on the other hand, it loosens the definition of public reasons sufficiently to pass its own test, it will not be able to rule out principles of natural law, natural rights, or natural justice,⁴ as in "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their

Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—appeals to “the laws of nature and nature’s God.”

Both religious responses I have outlined deny that reason vindicates secularist morality. The first, however, denies that reason can identify moral truths, content with the claim that secularism is no more rational than, say, Christian belief. The second, by contrast, accepts the proposition that reason can and should be used to identify moral truths, including truths of political morality, but claims that Judeo-Christian morality is rationally superior to the morality of orthodox secularism. As already noted, this is my own position.

LET’S take the central issues of life and death. If we lay aside all the rhetorical grandstanding and obviously fallacious arguments, questions of abortion, infanticide, suicide, and euthanasia turn on the question of whether bodily life is intrinsically good, as Judaism and Christianity teach, or merely instrumentally good, as orthodox secularists believe.

If the former, then even the life of an early embryo or a severely retarded child or a comatose person has value and dignity. Their value and dignity are not to be judged by what they can do, how they feel, how they make us feel, or what we judge their “quality” of life to be. Their value and dignity transcend the instrumental purposes to which their lives can be put. They enjoy a moral inviolability that will be respected and protected in any fully just regime of law.

If bodily life is, as orthodox secularists believe, merely a means to other ends and not an end in itself, then a person who no longer gets what he wants out of life may legitimately make a final exit by suicide. If he is unable to commit suicide under his own power, he is entitled to assistance. If he is not lucid enough to make the decision for himself, then judgment must be substituted for him by the family or by a court to make the “right to die” effectively available to him.

Secularists would have us believe that, apart from special revelation, we have no reason to affirm the intrinsic goodness and moral inviolability of human life. That simply isn’t true. In fact, the secularist proposition that bodily life is merely instrumentally good entails a metaphysical dualism of the person and the body that is rationally untenable.⁵

Implicit in the view that human life is merely instrumentally and not intrinsically valuable is a particular understanding of the human person as an essentially non-bodily being who inhabits a nonpersonal body. According to this understanding—which contrasts with the Judeo-Christian view of the human person as a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit—the “person” is the conscious and desiring “self” as distinct from the body which may exist (as in the case of pre- and post-conscious human beings) as a merely “biological,” and, thus, sub-personal, reality.⁶ But the dualistic view of the human person makes nonsense of the experience all of us have in our activities of being dynamically unified actors—of being, that is, embodied persons and not persons who merely “inhabit” our bodies and direct them as extrinsic instruments under our control, like automobiles. We don’t sit in the physical body and direct it as an instrument, the way we sit in a car and make it go left or right.

THIS experience of unity of body, mind, and spirit is itself no mere illusion. Philosophical arguments have undermined any theory that purports to demonstrate that the human being is, in fact, two distinct realities, namely, a “person” and a (sub-personal) body. Any such theory will, unavoidably, contradict its own starting point, since reflection necessarily begins from one’s own

conscious awareness of oneself as a unitary actor. So the defender of dualism, in the end, will never be able to identify the “I” who undertakes the project of reflection. He will simply be unable to settle whether the “I” is the conscious and desiring aspect of the “self,” or the “mere living body.” If he seeks to identify the “I” with the former, then he separates himself inexplicably from the living human organism that is recognized by others (and, indeed, by himself) as the reality whose behavior (thinking, questioning, asserting, etc.) constitutes the philosophical enterprise in question. And if, instead, he identifies the “I” with that “mere living body,” then he leaves no role for the conscious and desiring aspect of the “self” which, on the dualistic account, is truly the “person.” As a recent treatment of the subject sums up the matter, “person” (as understood in dualistic theories) and “mere living body” are “constructs neither of which refers to the unified self who had set out to explain his or her own reality; both of them purport to refer to realities other than that unified self but somehow, inexplicably, related to it.” In short, “person/body dualisms” purport to be theories of something, but cannot, in the end, identify something of which to be the theory.

From these arguments one rationally concludes that the body, far from being a nonpersonal and indeed sub-personal instrument at the direction and disposal of the conscious and desiring “self,” is irreducibly part of the personal reality of the human being. It is properly understood, therefore, as fully sharing in the dignity—the intrinsic worth—of the person and deserving the respect due to persons precisely as such.

A comatose human being is a comatose person. The early embryo is a human being and, precisely as such, a person—the same person who will be an infant, a toddler, an adolescent, an adult. The genetically complete, distinct, dynamically unified, self-integrating human organism that we currently identify as, say, the sixty-three-year-old Father Richard John Neuhaus is the same organism, the same human being—the same person—who was once a twenty-eight-year-old civil rights and anti-war activist, a precocious sixteen-year-old high school student, a mischievous adolescent, a toddler, an infant, a fetus, an embryo. Although he has grown and changed in many ways, no change of nature (or “substance”) occurred as he matured—with his completeness, distinctness, unity, and identity fully intact—from the embryonic through the fetal, infant, child, and adolescent stages of his development, and finally into adulthood. He was a human being—a whole, living member of the species *Homo sapiens*—from the start. He did not become a human being sometime after he came to be; nor will he cease being a human being prior to his ceasing to be (i.e., his dying). In view of these facts, it is evident that the central ground of the secularist defense of abortion, infanticide, suicide, and euthanasia is decisively undercut. And it is undercut, not by appeal to revelation, as important as revealed truth is to the life of faith, but by engagement directly with the best arguments that secularists make on the very plane in which they make them.

MUCH the same is true in the area of sexual morality. Secularists would have us believe that marriage is a social and legal convention that in a variety of possible ways serves a purely emotional bond between two persons. (And if it is a purely emotional bond, some ask, why only two?) They believe that, apart from revealed religious doctrine (which other people may, in the exercise of their religious freedom, happen not to share), no one has reasons for believing marriage to be anything more. Again, this is untrue.⁷

Marriage is a basic human good. By that I mean it is an intrinsic good that provides noninstrumental reasons for choice and action, reasons that are knowable and understandable even apart from divine revelation. Rational reflection on marriage as it is participated in by men and women makes it clear: since men and women are essentially embodied (and not simply inhabitants of a suit of flesh), the biological union of spouses in reproductive-type acts consummates and actualizes their marriage, making the spouses truly, and not merely metaphorically, “two in one flesh.” The sexual union of spouses—far from being something extrinsic to marriage or merely instrumental to procreation, pleasure, the expression of tender feelings, or anything else—is an essential aspect of marriage as an intrinsic human good. Marital acts are the biological matrix of the multi-level (bodily, emotional, dispositional, spiritual) sharing of life and commitment that marriage is.

But, one might ask, is a true bodily or “biological” union of persons possible? Indeed it is. Consider that for most human functions or activities, say, digestion or locomotion, the organism performing the function or act is the individual human being. In respect of the act of reproduction, however, things are different. Reproduction is a single act or function, yet it is performed by a male and female as a mated pair. For purposes of reproduction, the male and female partners become a single organism, they form a single reproductive principle. This organic unity is achieved precisely in the reproductive behavior characteristic of the species—even in cases (such as those of infertile couples) in which the nonbehavioral conditions of reproduction do not obtain.

Properly understood in light of a non-dualistic account of the human person, the goodness of marriage and marital intercourse simply cannot be reduced to the status of a mere means to pleasure, feelings of closeness, or any other extrinsic goal. Indeed, it cannot legitimately be treated (as some Christians have, admittedly, sought to treat it) as a mere means to procreation, though children are among the central purposes of marriage and help to specify its meaning as a moral reality even for married couples who cannot have children.

So marital acts realize the unity of marriage, which includes the coming to be of children. In consensual nonmarital sex acts, then, people damage this unity, the integrity of the marriage, inasmuch as the body is part of the personal reality of the human being and no mere sub-personal instrument to be used and disposed of to satisfy the subjective wants of the conscious and desiring part of the “self.”

THE psychosomatic integrity of the person is another of the basic or intrinsic goods of the human person. This integrity is disrupted in any sexual act that lacks the common good of marriage as its central specifying point. Where sex is sought purely for pleasure, or as a means of inducing feelings of emotional closeness, or for some other extrinsic end, the body is treated as a sub-personal, purely instrumental, reality. This existential separation of the body and the conscious and desiring part of the self serves literally to dis-integrate the person. It takes the person apart, disrupting the good of acting as the dynamically unified being one truly is.⁸

Did our Christian forebears invent this idea of integrity? Did they dream up the notion that sexual immorality damages integrity by dis-integrating the person? No. Christianity has had, to be sure, a very important role in promoting and enhancing our understanding of sexual morality. But in the dialogues of Plato and the teachings of Aristotle, in the writings of Plutarch and the great Roman stoic Musonius Rufus, and, of course, in Jewish tradition, one can find the core of this

central, important teaching about the way sex is so central to integrity, and therefore so central not only to us as individuals but to us as a community.⁹ Dis-integrated, individual human beings cannot form an integrated community.

Secularist orthodoxy—unlike not only Christianity and Judaism but also the classical philosophical tradition—both misidentifies the good to be realized in marriage (imagining that the value of marriage and marital sexual intercourse is purely instrumental to other goods, rather than something good in itself) and overlooks the harm—the dis-integration of persons and the communities they form—which grounds the Christian, Jewish, and classical condemnations of nonmarital sex.

Of course, there are various possible objections to the arguments I have been advancing.¹⁰ Secularists cannot honestly say, however, that these arguments appeal to religious dogmas or fail to state public reasons for, say, forbidding abortion and euthanasia, or preserving the institution of marriage as traditionally understood. The reasons I have identified are central among the reasons why the Christian tradition has rejected abortion and euthanasia and supported the institution of marriage. This is not to deny that Christians, like our Jewish “elder brothers” in faith (to quote the words of Pope John Paul II), seek the illumination and full understanding of moral principles in the light of Scripture and sacred tradition. But Christians and other believers need not—and typically do not—suggest that abortion, for example, is wrong (or that we know it to be wrong) because God whispered it into our ear, or the ear of a pope or another religious leader, or even into the ear of a sacred writer.

The wrongness of abortion follows from the truth—fully accessible even to unaided reason—that the life of a human being is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, good. As a Christian, I believe that each human life is a precious gift from God. But even if one doesn’t share that belief, reason nevertheless grasps the truth that human life is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, valuable. Reason detects the falsity of the dualistic presuppositions of secularism’s belief that human life is merely instrumentally valuable. It identifies the unreasonableness of denying that every innocent human being—irrespective of age, size, stage of development, or condition of dependency—has an inviolable moral right to life.

Reason affirms that if any of us have a right to life, then all of us have it; if we have it at one stage of life, we have it at every stage of life; if we have it in the middle of life, we have it at both edges. There is no rational argument that anybody has been able to come up with—and the best and the brightest in the academy have struggled for more than twenty-five years to do so—that shows that a healthy thirteen-year-old or forty-two-year-old has a right to life, but a comatose eighty-year-old or an unborn child has no right to life. There is no rational basis for distinguishing a class of human beings who have a right to life (and other fundamental human rights) and a class of human beings who do not. This is the moral core of the great “self-evident truth” upon which our nation was founded: the proposition that all human beings are “created equal.”

Knowledge of this truth does not presuppose Christian faith, although biblical revelation profoundly enriches our understanding of it, and often enough leads to religious conversion. There are many examples of this. A notable recent case is that of Bernard Nathanson, a founder of the organization now known as the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. He was an atheist and a practicing abortionist who had taken the lives of many unborn children, including one of his own. But he gradually came to see that the deliberate killing of unborn

human beings is a violation of the most basic principle of morality and natural justice. So he abandoned the practice of abortion and relinquished his important role in the advocacy of abortion as a political matter. Soon, he joined the pro-life movement and began working to roll back the abortion license. A few years later, he abandoned atheism and entered into Christian faith—which to him made sense of, grounded, and profoundly enriched the basic moral understanding that he had initially achieved by way of rational, self-critical reflection.

ORTHODOX secularist moral belief portrays personal morality as being essentially concerned with extrinsic constraints upon appetite or passion. It presupposes that the ultimate motives for whatever we do are grounded in our desires; reason's role is purely instrumental. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, a founding father of modern secularism, summed up the position: "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and may never pretend to any office other than to serve and obey them."¹¹ Reason's role, in other words, is not to identify what is rational, what people should want, but merely to devise means of obtaining goals that people happen to want.

Ultimately, this view of reason makes it impossible to vindicate any fundamental moral principles, including any fundamental human rights. If reason is purely instrumental and can't tell us what to want but only how to get to what we want, how can we say that people have a fundamental right to freedom of speech? Freedom of the press? Freedom of religion? Privacy? Where do those fundamental rights come from? What is their basis? Why respect someone else's rights?

By contrast, the Christian understanding of morality starts from an appreciation of the basic human goods that provide more than merely instrumental reasons for action. In morally good actions, people choose for the sake of these goods in ways that are compatible with a will toward the integral fulfillment and well-being of individuals and communities. Moral norms govern free choices by excluding possible actions that are incompatible with such a will. Emotion or passion, when rightly ordered, supports what reason commends and helps us to accomplish the morally good ends that we have basic reasons to pursue.¹²

Here again the Christian view lines up in important ways with that of the pre-Christian Greek philosophers—Plato and Aristotle, in particular—in understanding reason to be the master of passion in what the ancient thinkers unhesitatingly referred to as the "rightly ordered soul."

Of course, Christianity, like classical philosophy, understands perfectly well that the soul can be wrongly ordered, that emotion or passion can overcome reason and reduce it to the status of a slave that produces rationalizations for morally wrongful behavior. That is what Christians call sin. Yes, it happens, but our goal should be to order our souls rightly so that reason controls passion, and not the other way around. When passion is in control, reason is reduced to a mere instrument, becoming its own worst enemy as it cooks up rationalizations for actions that we know to be morally wrong.

Christians can and should challenge at the most fundamental level secularism's instrumentalist view of reason and morality. Secularism's account of the relationship between reason and desire, far from being brutally rigorous in eschewing unprovable metaphysical hypotheses, rests upon and entails metaphysical propositions that not only are controversial, but in the end (say, in the case of person/body dualism) are demonstrably false.

CHIEF among secularism's philosophical vulnerabilities is its implicit denial of free choice or free will. People can make free choices just to the extent that they are capable of understanding and acting upon reasons that are not reducible to desire or emotion. In denying the possibility of rationally motivated action, secularism denies the possibility of free choice since it claims that we don't, in any fundamental sense, cause our own actions. What are they caused by? Either by the force of external pressures (whether one knows it or not), or by internal factors (such as desires). In the secularist worldview, "hard" and "soft" forms of determinism constitute the universe of possible accounts of all human behavior. Free choice is written off as an illusion.

Christian philosophers such as Germain Grisez, Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., and Olaf Tollefsen have rigorously shown, however, that the denial of free choice is rationally untenable, because it is a self-referentially contradictory claim, a self-defeating proposition.¹³ No one can rationally deny free choice, or claim as illusory our ordinary experience of freely choosing, without presupposing the possibility of free choice. To deny free choice is to claim that it is more rational to believe that there is no free choice than to believe that there is. But this, in turn, presupposes that one can identify norms of rationality and freely choose to conform one's beliefs to those norms. It presupposes that we are free to affirm the truth or falsity of a proposition, our desires or emotions or preferences to the contrary notwithstanding. Otherwise, the assertion of no free choice is pointless. The person who says people can't freely choose presupposes that there are reasons for accepting his claim, otherwise his act of asserting it would be pointless. But our ability to understand and act upon such reasons is incompatible with the idea that one is caused by his desires or by outside forces to accept or not accept such claims. So someone who denies free choice implicitly contradicts his own claim.

Here again, orthodox secularists are stuck, not because they have been beaten over the head with the Bible, but on the plane where they have made the argument—the plane of rationality. No position can be reasonable if it is self-referentially inconsistent, if it presupposes the opposite of the very claim it asserts. But if the "no free choice" claim is self-defeating, then we have an additional reason for affirming the existence of basic, intelligible, understandable reasons for action—reasons that are not reducible to desires or emotions or merely instrumental to the satisfaction of desires. And we have an additional reason for rejecting secularism's conception of morality as basically concerned with extrinsic restraints on appetite, rather than the integral directiveness of the basic human goods that provide such reasons for action.

ORTHODOX secularists typically say that we should respect the rights of others, even as we go about the business of satisfying our own desires. Ultimately, however, secularism cannot provide any plausible account of where rights come from or why we should respect others' rights. Of course, most secularists emphatically believe that people have rights. Indeed, they frequently accuse Christians and other religious believers of supporting policies that violate people's rights. We are all familiar with the rhetoric: You religious people shouldn't be imposing your values on other people. You are violating their rights! If it is between consenting adults, stay out of it! Any two (or more?) people have the right to define "marriage" for themselves. Women have a right to abortion. People have a right to take their own lives. Who are you to say otherwise?

But on the presuppositions of the secularist worldview, why should anybody respect anybody else's rights? What is the reason for respecting rights? Any answer must state a moral proposition, but what, on orthodox secularist premises, could provide the ground of its moral truth?

You may ask, Why doesn't the secularist cheerfully affirm moral subjectivism or moral relativism? Indeed, isn't some sort of moral relativism at the heart of secularism?

While one still hears subjectivism or relativism invoked at cocktail parties and in undergraduate classrooms—and even occasionally in faculty lounges—it seems that the heyday of moral relativism is over, even among doctrinaire secularists. Most sophisticated secularists have concluded that relativism is ultimately inconsistent with many of their own cherished moral claims, particularly those having to do with claims about rights—the right to abortion, the right to sexual freedom, the right to die. As the distinguished liberal political philosopher Joel Feinberg has warned: “Liberals must beware of relativism—or, at least, of a sweeping relativism—lest they be hoist on their own petard.”¹⁴

If relativism is true, then it is not wrong in principle to have an abortion, but neither is it wrong for people who happen to abhor abortion to attempt to legislate against it or to interfere with someone else's having an abortion by, say, blockading clinics or even shooting abortionists. Claims of a right to abortion are manifestly moral claims. Claims that it is wrong to shoot abortionists are moral claims. They could possibly be true only if moral relativism and subjectivism are false. So the mainstream of orthodox secularism at the end of the twentieth century has become self-consciously moralistic and nonrelativistic.

This is not to say that secularism is no longer, in significant respects, a relativist doctrine. It is merely to say that secularism is no longer a thoroughgoing and self-consciously relativist doctrine. Insofar as it remains relativistic, it has a massive philosophical problem. Secularism, at least in its liberal manifestations, makes the rights of others the principle of moral constraints upon action, relativizing allegedly self-regarding actions. But it generates a critical question it has no way of answering: Why should anyone respect the rights of others? Merely prudential answers—such as, people should respect the rights of others so that others will respect their rights, or people should respect the rights of others to avoid being punished—simply won't do. The fact is that people can often get away with violating others' rights. And they know it. And many do it.

If people shouldn't violate the rights of others, it must be because doing so is morally wrong, but on the secularist account, why is it morally wrong? What is the source of its moral wrongness? The eminent philosopher and Christian convert Alasdair MacIntyre observes that traditions of thought about morality go into crisis when they generate questions they lack the resources to answer.¹⁵ By this standard, orthodox secularism is a tradition in crisis. It generates the question, Why should I respect the rights of others? Yet it possesses no adequate resources for answering it.

BY contrast, Christian thought understands that human rights are rooted in intelligible and basic human goods. It, therefore, has no logical difficulty explaining why each of us has an obligation to respect the rights of others, as well as to act in conformity with other moral principles. And recent Christian teaching, including the teaching of popes and Protestant bodies,

speaks unhesitatingly of universal human rights, without fear of collapsing into relativism or individualism of the sort that is characteristic of orthodox secularism.

It is true that church teaching about human rights often overlaps with liberal secularist ideology. For example, Christian conservatives and liberal secularists agree on certain questions pertaining to religious freedom and have sometimes—as in the case of political advocacy in support of persecuted Christians and animists in the Sudan—joined together in political coalitions.

When church teaching and secularist ideology overlap, particularly on the question of rights, Christian thought has proved itself capable of giving a far superior account of these rights and why each of us has an obligation to respect the rights of others. From this I conclude that Christian teaching is rationally superior to secularism, not only when these worldviews disagree, as over abortion, euthanasia, marriage, and family, but even when they agree.

At the end of the day, whatever is to be said for and against secularism, there can be no legitimate claim for secularism to be a “neutral” doctrine that deserves privileged status as the national public philosophy. As MacIntyre has argued, secularism (which he calls liberalism) is far from being a “tradition-independent” view that merely represents a neutral playing field on which Judaism, Christianity, Marxism, and other traditions can wage a fair fight for the allegiance of the people. Instead, it is itself a tradition of thought about personal and political morality that competes with others.¹⁶

Secularism rests upon and represents a distinct and controversial set of metaphysical and moral propositions having to do with the relationship of consciousness to bodiliness and of reason to desire, the possibility of free choice, and the source and nature of human dignity and human rights. Secularist doctrine contains very controversial views about what constitutes a person—views every bit as controversial as the Jewish and Christian views. Secularism is a philosophical doctrine that stands or falls depending on whether its propositions can withstand arguments advanced against them by representatives of other traditions. I have tried to show that secularist orthodoxy cannot withstand the critique to be advanced against it by the tradition of Christian philosophy.

AN EXCHANGE WITH JOSH DEVER

Josh Dever

AS AN ATHEIST, a liberal, and a philosopher, I suppose I’m as likely as anyone to qualify as a proponent of Robert P. George’s “secular orthodoxy.” As such, I’d like to say a few words in defense of that orthodoxy. I want to raise three categories of objection to Professor George’s comments: first, that his characterization of that orthodoxy is highly tendentious; second, that the philosophical failings of that orthodoxy are not nearly so numerous as Prof. George takes them to be; and third, that the corresponding philosophical triumphs of the “Judeo-Christian” worldview are not so triumphant as he represents them.

Prof. George feels that committed members of the secular orthodoxy hold a number of unpalatable views. We are supposed to reject the “condemnation of...infanticide of so-called defective children,” and to believe that “marriage...is a legal convention whose goal is to support a merely emotional union”; that there should be “not even an opportunity for silent prayer in public schools”; that there should be “no legislation based on the religiously informed moral convictions of legislators or voters”; that a person desiring but unable to commit suicide is “entitled to assistance”; that if such a person “is not lucid enough to make the decision for himself, then judgment must be substituted for him by the family or court”; that reason is purely instrumental; and that persons lack free will (to pick a few of the ascriptions that struck me as most objectionable).

I suppose Prof. George is free to define his target category of “secular orthodoxy” in any way he sees fit, but if he wants his “orthodoxy” to be in any real sense an orthodoxy, I’m afraid he has set up a straw man. While I suppose I could hunt down individuals holding each of the views listed above, I think it’s clear that all of the above views (with the regrettable exception of the view that reason is slave to the passions, and even there I think recent work on externalism in practical reason is beginning to turn the tide) are extreme minority views. Were they not, Peter Singer’s notoriety would be hard to understand. If Prof. George is genuinely out to compare the prospects of secularism and Judeo-Christianity as philosophical foundations of morality, both charity and good academic practice would seem to require focusing on the best that secularism has to offer, rather than on its extremists.

THE characterization of the so-called secular orthodoxy (I’ll suggest below that there’s good reason to doubt that there is such a thing) is, however, the least of my three complaints. Let’s now consider more substantive issues, beginning with the particular philosophical charges that Prof. George raises against secular orthodoxy. According to him, those of us doing our moral reasoning within this tradition are guilty of the following crimes: endorsing a mind/body dualism, rejecting (in a self-contradictory manner) free will, eliminating any intrinsic reason for pursuit of the moral good, and embracing relativism. All of these charges are, I think, wholly false.

Prof. George claims that secularists who believe that bodily life is not intrinsically valuable are committed to mind/body dualism. The secularist view in question here holds that the mere fact that an organism is alive and of the human species is not enough to endow it with (full) moral worth—other qualities, such as consciousness, phenomenology, or future-directedness, are needed also. Since, however, mind/body dualism is almost entirely a dead philosophical position these days, secularists who have thought through their position carefully also believe that whether an organism has these further characteristics is entirely a function of the physical structure of that organism (as well as, perhaps, the causal embedding of that organism in some larger environment). Believing that these structural features are important to moral worth no more commits one to mind/body dualism than does believing that the structural features that come with life morally differentiate a person from a corpse. Views on when morally protected personhood begins and ends can vary greatly—at conception, at birth, after birth, before death, at death, after death—without in any way endorsing a metaphysical separation between person and body.

Deciding that not all living organisms of the human species are persons is dangerous territory, of course, and we must be guided by the terrible misdeeds of the past that have frequently come

under the banner of denying full personhood to various groups. But the line must be drawn somewhere by everyone, so mere accusations of line-drawing can carry no weight. And just as there is a price to pay for drawing the line too narrowly, there is also a price to pay for drawing the line too widely, since the moral duties owed toward persons can place a heavy burden on others. Thus there is reason to try to find the right place to draw the line, and not to fence about the law too broadly.

Furthermore, while secularists may deny the intrinsic value of bodily life by way of denying that all human life enjoys the full moral protection of personhood, they are not thereby committed to denying that persons have intrinsic value. This leads to the broader point of whether secularists must lose entirely the concept of intrinsic value. Prof. George seems to feel that they must, but I admit I see no reason why this is the case. It is true that British Empiricism left philosophy with a legacy whose twin denial of the motivational power of reason and of epistemic access to objective normative facts made it hard to find conceptual room for intrinsic values (although these difficulties hardly stopped people from trying). However, under the corrective influence of philosophers such as W. V. O. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, and Donald Davidson, strict empiricism has largely been abandoned as a philosophical position, and (while the philosophical problems certainly have not been fully resolved) a more full-blooded epistemology, which allows for real knowledge of moral facts, has been widely adopted. Similarly, Bernard Williams's work has led to a revival of interest in the broadly Socratic idea that reason can be intrinsically motivating.

THUS it is not all true to say that secular orthodoxy possesses no resources for answering the question "Why should I respect the rights of others?" We can offer both the "internal" reason that I should do so because it would be wrong to do otherwise, and at least the beginnings of an external reason based on considerations about the nature of agency. The latter reason is far from complete as of yet, but if one considers the corresponding questions about theoretical reason—"why should I obey the rules of logic in my thought?"—and looks at work arguing that it is in the nature of being a holder of beliefs (as opposed to wishes, desires, etc.) that one is committed to certain norms governing beliefs, the outlines of its future directions may become clear. That we don't yet have all the answers is, I take it, not a very serious charge against secular orthodoxy (especially since, as I'll suggest below, the same is true of the Judeo-Christian philosophical foundation).

Prof. George's charge that secular orthodoxy is committed to relativism I find particularly baffling, both because he gives no reason to think that this is the case, and because it runs so counter to my experience as a professional philosopher. Anyone who has spent time teaching in the philosophy classroom can tell you how much effort is devoted to trying to convince students that it's not acceptable to talk blithely about what's "true for you" and "true for me."

Prof. George's further charge that secular orthodoxy is committed to the denial of free will I also find baffling, since the view that there is no free will is an extreme minority position in philosophy. As I read Prof. George, we secularists are supposed to reject free will because it comes into conflict with "hard" or "soft" determinism. However, the dominant (although hardly universal) view among philosophers these days is that there is no genuine conflict between determinism and free will. Donald Davidson, for example, has said that arguments for that

supposed conflict are no more than “superficially plausible.” Far from being “written off as an illusion,” free will is alive and well under the secularist orthodoxy.

The argument that the denial of free will is “rationally untenable,” by the way, is fallacious. While it may well be the case that, if there were no free will, there would be no point in announcing that there is no free will, or even that the nature of our subjective experience is such that none of us can seriously doubt the existence of free will, this does nothing to show that there is free will. Those few who become philosophically convinced that there is no free will might be correct in what they announce, even if there’s no point in telling us and even if, like Hume, they immediately slip back into their pre-philosophical endorsement of free will.

I fail to see, then, that Prof. George has provided any evidence that secular orthodoxy suffers from philosophical bankruptcy. As I have said, the philosophical foundations of morality are a work in progress, and we certainly don’t claim to have all the answers yet, or even universal agreement about the right directions to go in, but I don’t see any reason to think that we’re obviously on the wrong track.

LET’S look now at some of the supposed philosophical successes of the Judeo-Christian orthodoxy: its account of free will, its defense of the rights of others, its explanation of the intrinsic value of bodily life, and its account of the intrinsic value of marriage. I don’t mean in any case to claim that the Judeo-Christian framework is a failure on these issues, but I do want to try to show that that framework is subject to the same difficulties as the secular framework.

Prof. George chastises secular orthodoxy for its (supposed) abandonment of free will in the face of determinism, but he gives no indication of how the Judeo-Christian framework will escape any threat that determinism poses to free will (if there is no threat, of course, there’s no problem for secular orthodoxy either). Will he deny determinism? This is a hard row to hoe in light of what we now know about the connections between brain states and mental life, and (as many philosophers have argued) it doesn’t seem to help with the underlying issues anyway. Will he appeal to “rationally motivated action”? Then he needs a theory of reason to back up this possibility, and an explanation of why deterministic control of which reasons we act on doesn’t threaten our freedom. None of these things appear (or are even alluded to) in the article.

Prof. George also suggests that Judeo-Christian moral foundations enjoy an explanatory advantage over the secular orthodoxy in that they are able to explain why one ought to respect the rights of others—by showing that these rights are “rooted in intelligible and basic human goods.” However, rooting the rights in basic human goods does nothing to solve the problem if there is not some further reason why we ought to pursue the good. If Judeo-Christian philosophy provides such a reason, Prof. George has made no mention of it. If it provides no such reason, then it is unclear why basic goods are any better than basic rights as a foundation that must be respected.

Prof. George also holds that Judeo-Christian philosophy, through its rejection of mind/body dualism, upholds the intrinsic value of bodily life. As I have argued above, there is no intimate connection between one’s views on mind/body dualism and the intrinsic value (or lack thereof) of the body. To show that bodily life is intrinsically valuable, one must give some explanation of the source of its intrinsic value; merely saying that there is no person separate from the body does nothing to provide such an explanation. Judeo-Christian philosophy, as I understand it, traditionally finds the roots of the intrinsic moral value of the human person in the scriptural

assertion that humanity is created in God's image, but until it is specified in what way we are in God's image, conclusions about what aspects of our existence give rise to our intrinsic value are premature.

FINALLY, Prof. George holds that Judeo-Christian philosophy can provide an explanation of the intrinsic value of marriage. Details of this explanation are sketchy in his article, but it would seem that the explanation derives from the biological fact that we come in two sexes who interact sexually. This fact, however, would seem to leave us very far from the desired conclusion. Some explanation of why this particular feature of our biology is normative (and normative only when sexuality manifests itself in the heterosexual variety) must be added, as well as a demonstration that the purported normativity of the biological facts requires the institution of monogamous and indissoluble marriage.

My own inclination would be to locate the intrinsic value, and non-conventionality, of marriage in (or at least in part in) the objective obligations incurred through the marital vows, but this is clearly common secular territory, and does little to capture specifically heterosexual or monogamous marriage.

Again, it is not my intention to claim that the secular orthodoxy is free of philosophical difficulties or that Judeo-Christian philosophical foundations are hopelessly flawed. My impression, rather, is that both philosophies are faced with many serious questions to which they lack complete answers, but few (if any) issues that threaten a complete overturn of the program. Indeed, I find it revealing that, for the most part, the very same questions hound both programs.

I want to close by commenting briefly on whether there is such a thing as "secular orthodoxy," and on whether such a thing could provide neutral territory for the pursuit of public debate. In my view, what is orthodox, and common ground for all, are the rules of right reason that situate the various philosophical tensions in conceptual space and provide the rules for navigating among those tensions. Provided one rejects (as I think one should) the pseudo-Kierkegaardian idea that religious faith is a rationally unwarranted leap into the dark, this orthodoxy is open to secularists and nonsecularists alike, because our reason is both universal and prior to our particular convictions as Christians, Jews, atheists, etc.

An orthodoxy based on rationality provides us a common arena in which to do battle, but I think it is an error to believe that any one view will emerge victorious from that arena. That's just not the way reason works. As Peter van Inwagen so eloquently observes, reason, outside of special fields like mathematics and logic, rarely delivers unequivocal responses. The typical situation is that many views will be rationally permissible, not that one will be rationally compelling. How to construct public policy when we cannot expect our best reasons to convince all good-willed rational agents is a problem to which I don't have a solution, but one that our sadly limited epistemic status seems to force on to us.

Robert P. George

I AM GRATEFUL to Josh Dever for his thoughtful challenge to my essay.

Professor Dever states candidly his religious views and moral-political commitments: he is an atheist and a liberal. He begins by proposing to defend the secularist orthodoxy, though later he suggests that no such orthodoxy exists. With a single exception—which, interestingly, Prof. Dever himself considers to be “regrettable”—he claims that the positions I have attributed to secularist liberalism are, in truth, “extreme minority views.” The most he is prepared to concede is that one could probably “hunt down individuals holding each of [these] views.”

I’m afraid I cannot yield to Prof. Dever’s claim. Perhaps things are different at the University of Texas, where Prof. Dever teaches, but even on a rainy day when most people stay indoors I could “hunt down” dozens of people who hold these views simply by taking a stroll across the Princeton campus.

Let’s consider some of the specific positions I attributed to the secularist orthodoxy. I said that orthodox secularists “reject traditional morality’s condemnation of abortion, suicide, infanticide of so-called defective children, and certain other life-taking acts.” That the overwhelming majority of Prof. Dever’s fellow atheists and liberals support abortion and suicide is hardly a disputable proposition. Indeed, Prof. Dever himself doesn’t dispute it. He complains about my claim that orthodox secularists reject the “condemnation of... infanticide of so-called defective children.” Readers will take note of what is omitted in the ellipsis.

What about infanticide? Is the “letting die” (as the more squeamish insist on describing it) of mentally retarded or severely physically handicapped babies an “extreme minority view” among orthodox secularists, as Prof. Dever maintains? It must be, he suggests, for otherwise “Peter Singer’s notoriety would be hard to understand.” It is true, of course, that Singer has been a particularly vocal (and notably non-squeamish) defender of infanticide. Nevertheless, Prof. Dever could not have chosen a worse piece of evidence for an alleged consensus among orthodox secularists against the killing of handicapped newborns. Opposition to Singer’s appointment as DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton has come *entirely* from outside the University faculty, mostly from outside the University community, and mainly from believing Jews and Christians. Among orthodox secularists at Princeton and elsewhere, Singer’s appointment is uncontroversial. With the single exception of John DiIulio—the eminent social scientist (and devout Christian) who has, alas, since resigned from the Princeton faculty to accept a new chair in faith and public policy at the University of Pennsylvania—I know of no member of the Princeton faculty who has publicly spoken out against Singer for his defense of infanticide.

I have no doubt that there are secularists who have qualms about killing handicapped newborns. (Prof. Dever himself suggests that infanticide is not part of “the best that secularism has to offer.”) Some—perhaps many—secularists believe that Singer’s defense of infanticide goes too far and would permit the practice in too many cases. But there are two points worth making.

First, even those secularists who oppose infanticide generally admit, in defending abortion, that it is difficult on their own premises to identify a mistake in Singer’s argument that newborns—particularly severely handicapped newborns—do not suddenly become “persons” merely by emerging from the womb. Second, the secularist orthodoxy—like any orthodoxy—

consists not only of those views which all members of the group share, but also of those views which are considered within the group to be reasonable and acceptable to hold, even if not everybody in the group happens to share them. (For example, Catholic orthodoxy holds that the Virgin Mary was, at the end of her life on earth, assumed bodily into heaven. Although most orthodox Catholics believe that Mary's assumption occurred after her death, it is a mark of Catholic orthodoxy to consider it reasonable and acceptable to believe, as others do, that Mary was assumed into heaven without dying.) No one can doubt that, among orthodox secularists, Singer's willingness to defend infanticide in the case of severely handicapped newborns is considered reasonable and acceptable in a way that it is not among observant Jews and Christians.

Another position that Prof. Dever insists is held only by "an extreme minority" of orthodox secularists is opposition to "even an opportunity for silent prayer in public schools." On this point, I must say, I am astonished by Prof. Dever's claim. The Supreme Court's anti-school prayer decisions, beginning with *Engel v. Vitale* in 1962, and including its 1985 ruling in *Wallace v. Jaffree* striking down even a minute of silence for "meditation or voluntary prayer" in public schools, have been joined by every liberal justice on the Court and applauded by liberals of every stripe. Neither Prof. Dever nor I would have the slightest difficulty "hunting down" secularist liberal pundits, constitutional scholars, political theorists, and others who enthusiastically support *Jaffree* and the other school prayer decisions. Indeed, the true challenge would be finding a few secularists who actually oppose them. Theirs would be an altogether *unorthodox* secularism.

Yet another issue Prof. Dever raises is assisted suicide and "substituted judgment" for mentally incapacitated people who are not able to make the decision whether to end their suffering by suicide. As with infanticide, I have no doubt that there are dissenters among secularist liberals on this issue; but the consensus is plainly in favor of assisted suicide and substituted judgment. Prof. Dever's field is philosophy. He is certainly aware of the celebrated amicus curiae brief filed by Ronald Dworkin, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Thomas Nagel, Tim Scanlon, and Judith Jarvis Thomson—arguably the six most influential liberal moral philosophers in the United States—asking the Supreme Court to invalidate laws prohibiting assisted suicide and to establish a right to assistance in dying. Dworkin is the author of a much-admired book defending euthanasia and substituted judgment. No one I know thinks that Dworkin's advocacy of a "right to die" places him on the extreme fringes of the liberal camp. I doubt that Prof. Dever actually thinks that.

I could make similar points about the issues of marriage and legislation based on religiously informed moral judgments, but at this point let me go straight to some of the big philosophical issues to which Prof. Dever devotes most of his space.

He concedes that most secularists subscribe to the "subjectivist" or "noncognitivist" view of practical reason as purely instrumental—the "slave of the passions," in Hume's famous characterization—though he himself happens to deviate from the secularist orthodoxy on this particular question. Indeed, he regrets the continuing dominance of the instrumental view of practical reason and hopes that the tide will soon turn against it. (This is the "regrettable exception" I made reference to at the beginning of these remarks.)

However, Prof. Dever thinks that I am wrong to ascribe to secularist liberals the belief that people lack what he calls free will (and what I call free choice). But if, as he concedes, the

instrumental view of practical reason remains dominant among secularists, then what grounds could those who hold to it possibly have for believing in free choice? The problem is that free choice is impossible if practical reason is purely instrumental. One chooses freely if, and only if, one has, is aware of, and chooses for the sake of more-than-merely-instrumental reasons for action. If reason *is* merely passion's ingenious servant—if *rationality motivated action* is impossible because our ultimate ends are necessarily provided by feeling, emotion, or other subrational motivating factors—then even externally uncoerced action cannot be truly freely chosen. Rather, our actions are the products of—are determined by—such factors.

Of course, people often cling to beliefs that are incompatible with other beliefs that they hold, but among those philosophers, social scientists, and people in other fields who subscribe to the instrumental view of practical reason, I perceive little evidence for Prof. Dever's claim that "free will is alive and well under the secularist orthodoxy."

Indeed, that claim is all the more remarkable in view of Prof. Dever's admission that secularist liberals, including himself, are in fact determinists. His method of squaring this particular philosophical circle is by endorsing what he says is now the "dominant (although hardly universal) view among philosophers these days...that there is no genuine conflict between determinism and free will." According to this view, our actions can be *both* determined and freely chosen. Determinism must be true, he suggests, in light of "what we now know about the connections between brain states and mental life."

But on both counts Prof. Dever is mistaken. An action is truly freely chosen if and only if two things are the case: (1) the choice to do it is between (or among) alternatives considered in deliberation, and (2) both (or all) of those alternatives are really possible in the sense that only the choosing itself settles which alternative will be realized. And nothing "we now know" about brain states, mental life, and their connections compels the conclusion that our actions are determined rather than freely chosen in light of reasons that provide motivation but do not compel a decision one way or another.

PROF. Dever bluntly claims that the self-referential argument I sketched to establish the rational untenability of the denial of free choice is "fallacious." He supposes (mistakenly) that my claim is merely that it is pointless for people who deny that there is free will *to announce their denial*, since "if there were no free will, there would be no point in announcing that there is no free will." He then replies: "Those few who become philosophically convinced that there is no free will might be correct in what they announce." But my argument had nothing to do with "announcements." Its focus is the activity that Prof. Dever misleadingly puts into the passive "becom[ing] philosophically convinced."

Philosophical reflection is a matter not simply of passively receiving the truth about, for example, free will. It is an activity in which one has every opportunity of falling into error unless one is willing to pursue truth with an energy and care that only devotion to truth can sufficiently motivate. In this activity, anyone motivated by concern for truth will be guided not only by the requirements of logic but also by the less formal norms of rationality that enable us to distinguish sound from unsound investigative procedures in science, history, philosophy, etc. These norms

direct sound thinking, but they can be violated, and are violated, in all shoddy investigations and inquiries in any and every field of intellectual endeavor.

The question whether people can make free choices is not a question settled by formal logic alone; rather, the investigation of it is addressed also by norms of rationality. Everyone who engages in this reflective investigation has the opportunity of violating those norms in the interest of reaching answers that his prejudices favor, or of taking shortcuts for other motives. Everyone is confronted, right here, with the opportunity of choosing to respect, or not to respect, rationality's norms.

Those who deny that people can make truly free choices cannot claim that the truth of their position is established by bare formal logic. They must contend that those who assert the possibility of free choices are failing to attend with sufficient care to the evidence (regarding, e.g., brain states, mental life, and their connections), and ought to think the issues through more carefully, listen to reason, etc. By that *ought* they concede the very claim they are concerned to deny: the claim that one can *choose* between, say, lazy reaffirmation of one's prejudices or wishes and authentic philosophical reflection and pursuit of truth. Thus their concern that they and we should get to the truth of the matter about (not simply "announce") freedom of choice refutes their own denial that free choices can be made, and sometimes are made.

PROF. Dever is also critical of my claim that the secularist denial of the intrinsic, and not merely instrumental, value of human bodily life entails a rationally untenable dualism of "person" and "body." "Mind/body dualism," he says, "is almost entirely a dead philosophical position these days." It is true that most philosophers have concluded that certain positions falling under the label "dualism" (including some, such as Cartesianism, that were once widely entertained) are untenable. But there is a particular form of person/body dualism that is far from uncommon today. It reduces the person to the intermittently conscious (genderless) subject, which regards its (male or female) body as a possession or instrument that unlike other property or tools is untransferable, though discardable by suicide. My claim is that the denial of the intrinsic value of bodily life which underwrites the secularist defense of abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, and other forms of homicide entails precisely this form of dualism.

Either the body is a part of the personal reality of the human being, in which case the human person, properly speaking, is a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit, *or* the body is a subpersonal dimension of the human being that functions as an instrument at the service of the conscious and desiring aspect of the self—the "person," strictly speaking, who controls and uses the body. The secularist position on issues such as abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia straightforwardly treats the body as a subpersonal reality: a living human body is not a person, or, at least, is not a person until it comes to be associated (somehow) with a mind or other center of conscious self-awareness; and a living human body ceases to be a person not necessarily by dying, but at any point at which it loses this association, which may be long before death. The body, as such, according to secularists, lacks the dignity of personhood—that is why they believe it isn't necessarily wrong to kill "pre-personal" or "post-personal" human beings (fetuses, handicapped infants, the irreversibly demented, or other human "nonpersons").

Prof. Dever seems to suggest that the secularist position avoids dualism because its understanding of human beings and their attributes and capacities is

purely materialist or physicalist. But that is, if I may borrow a term from Prof. Dever, fallacious. He says that “whether an organism has these further characteristics” that give it (full) moral standing and a right not to be killed (e.g., “consciousness, phenomenology, future-directedness”) “is entirely a function of the physical structure of that organism (as well as, perhaps, the causal embedding of that organism in some larger environment).” Note well: “a function of.” Of course, Prof. Dever wants to avoid the claim that the “physical structure” as such gives the organism moral standing. Rather, it is *something else*, albeit something that on Prof. Dever’s account is “a function of” the organism’s physical structure, that works the magic of converting what would otherwise be a *mere* physical organism with no right to life (e.g., a fetus, a severely demented person, etc.) into a “person” with a dignity so profound that it is morally wrong to kill it (e.g., a healthy infant, a normal adult).

THE dualism of orthodox secularism is not erased by the materialist insistence that the attributes of personhood are “entirely a function” of the physical structure of the human organism. For secularist liberals, it is the conscious, desiring, self-aware, and future-directed part of the human being that is truly the “person”; it is the psychological attributes of consciousness, self-awareness, etc. that confer “moral standing.” By contrast, the living body, as such, is not part of the *personal* reality of the human being. And it is the status of the body as *subpersonal* that accounts for the willingness of secularists to authorize the killing of human beings before they become “persons” (fetuses and even infants) and after they cease being “persons” (the demented, the permanently comatose, etc.). The dualism of orthodox secularism consists in treating the “person” and the “mere living body” as really separable. “Persons” have dignity and rights; (their) “mere” living bodies do not.

Prof. Dever concedes that we enter “dangerous territory” when deciding that not all living organisms of the human species are persons. (Note, once again, the fruit of the dualistic presuppositions: there are “persons” and then there are “living organisms of the human species”—e.g., unborn and some newborn human beings, the demented, those in permanent comas—who are human beings but, according to orthodox secularists, not persons.) But, he insists, “the line must be drawn somewhere by everyone, so mere accusations of line-drawing can carry no weight.” The fact, however, is that we needn’t and shouldn’t draw this line. The reasonable standard—the one that follows from a proper rejection of person/body dualism—is that living members of the species *Homo sapiens* are persons whose dignity is incompatible with a license to kill them.

Prof. Dever—believing that it is necessary to draw a line between “persons” and certain living human beings who are nonpersons—warns that “just as there is a price to pay for drawing the line too narrowly, there is also a price to pay for drawing the line too widely, since the moral duties owed toward persons can place a heavy burden on others.” I’m worried, on the other hand, about our natural human desire to be free of the moral duties we owe to others—particularly the weak, the infirm, and the dependent—a desire that tempts us to credit the idea of a distinction between “persons” and human nonpersons. The supposition that such a distinction can rationally be drawn does not merely place us in “dangerous territory”; it perforce implicates us in a form of injustice against the most vulnerable of our fellow human beings.

Prof. Dever professes bafflement at what he takes to be my charge that secular orthodoxy is committed to relativism. As a professional philosopher, he reports, he is at pains to talk his students out of the mindless relativism they bring to the classroom. On this point, however, he seems not to have understood my claim. Indeed, I went so far as to say that “the mainstream of orthodox secularism at the end of the twentieth century has become self-consciously moralistic and *nonrelativistic*.” The defense of relativism, I said, is today largely confined to “cocktail parties and undergraduate classrooms.” (On this score, at least, it sounds as though things don’t vary much between Austin and Princeton.) At the same time, I asserted that secularism remains *in significant respects* a relativistic doctrine. And how could it be otherwise, if, as Prof. Dever freely concedes, the mainstream of secularist thought clings to the Humean subjectivist account of practical reason and morality?

One area in which this subjectivism makes itself felt is by relativizing allegedly self-regarding conduct. The familiar idea here is that what goes on between consenting adults simply isn’t subject to critical moral evaluation. A moral issue arises only where the “rights of others” are violated or placed in jeopardy. Why, though, on a secularist understanding, should people restrain themselves—and even bear the sometimes heavy burden of moral duties—out of regard for the rights of others? On purely atheistic and materialistic premises, how can it be rational for someone to bear heavy burdens and suffer great cost—perhaps even death—to honor other people’s rights? No satisfactory answer is forthcoming. None, I submit, is possible.

Prof. Dever suggests that when Judeo-Christian philosophy confronts the same question, it relies for an answer on the bare “scriptural assertion that humanity is created in God’s image.” But here, as elsewhere, Jewish and Christian thinkers find in revelation the confirmation, but not the root, of their philosophical affirmation of the nature and value of the human person—an affirmation found clearly (though not unmixed with error) in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, as well as in the thought of the greatest Roman jurists. Christian philosophers in particular hold that there are sound philosophical reasons—having to do with the contingency and intelligibility of the universe—to judge that God is personal in nature, that is, able to envisage and choose between intelligible options.

IN concluding, let me return to that point about the nature of practical reasoning on which even Prof. Dever regrets the established orthodoxy of secular liberalism. He is part of a “moral realist” movement in contemporary analytic philosophy that seeks to dislodge the “twin denial of the motivational power of reason and of epistemic access to objective normative facts” that is a central “legacy” of British Empiricism. As Prof. Dever himself recognizes, this makes him something of an unorthodox secularist. Fine. I wholeheartedly approve his heresy. But until this movement gains the upper hand, it remains the case that secularist orthodoxy, on its own terms, “possesses no resources for answering the question ‘Why should I respect the rights of others?’” And, should it succeed in overcoming the Humean hegemony, it will be interesting to see whether the logic of moral realism begins to undermine the practical atheism, materialism, and, with them, the moral-political liberalism that are the defining features of contemporary secularism.

For my part, I am hopeful that people who come to see that the Humean tradition has been wrong, and that the Judeo-Christian tradition has been right all along, about the possibilities of free choice, rationally motivated action, and objective moral truth, will soon come to the

realization that these possibilities point beyond themselves to a more-than-merely-human source of meaning and value, a divine ground of human intelligence and free will who freely discloses Himself to us when we are prepared to open our minds—and hearts—to Him.