Abortion and Unborn Human Life, 2nd edition

by Patrick Lee

Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
xiii + 177 pp.

Patrick Lee's second edition of *Abortion and Unborn Human Life* ably defends an argument summarized at the beginning of the book: "Intentionally killing an innocent person is always morally wrong. Abortion is the intentional killing of an innocent person. Therefore, abortion is always morally wrong" (1). The book does not differ radically from the first edition, published in 1996, but includes certain updates, perhaps most importantly an engagement with David Boonin's *A Defense of Abortion* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). The book is organized by considering first whether human "personhood" begins after birth or during gestation or at conception (Lee's view). He then considers the view that abortion is not intentional killing but rather like unplugging oneself from a violinist, an analogy first introduced by Judith Thomson and later defended by Boonin. Next, Lee considers various consequentialist arguments in favor of abortion by critiquing consequentialism and utilitarianism as methods for moral reasoning. Finally, he considers the actual likely consequences of an abortion not just for the unborn child killed but also for the mother's physical and psychological health.

Lee's book offers an in depth critique of many justifications of abortion, perhaps most importantly a series of shifting rationalizations offered by Michael Tooley. Of particular importance is Lee's critique of body-self dualism, which undergirds many of these justifications. Lee and Robert P. George recently co-authored a book entitled *Body-Self Dualism*, a volume in the Contemporary Ethics and Politics series published by Cambridge University Press (2008), that treats this topic in even greater depth. The defender of body-self dualism holds that "I" am really my thoughts, memories, beliefs, and desires, but my body, the organism with which I am associated, is something else. On this view, the person with dignity and rights does not arise until my mental life is established. So, prior to

the establishment of a mental life, the destruction of a human organism does not destroy a person.

Lee undermines these sorts of views by an appeal to human understanding and human sensing. Human sensing is a bodily act: an act of the eyes in seeing, of the ears in hearing, and of the mouth in tasting. Human understanding is an act of the mind. But both of these kinds of acts are properly done by the human person. I am the person who understands; I am also the person who sees, hears, tastes, smells, and touches. "If that which understands and is self-conscious is identical with that which senses and perceives, and that which senses or perceives is a physical organism, it follows that that which understands and is self-conscious—what dualists themselves refer to by the word "I"—is a physical organism" (38). Lee also considers examples in favor of body-self dualism trading on mind-body switches. These examples are admittedly implausible, but it is helpful that Lee considers them since they often appear in justifications of both body-self dualism and abortion.

Also helpful are Lee's critiques of certain hylomorphic views advocated by Joseph Donceel, Thomas Shannon, and Allan Wolter. They place the beginning of personhood, the point at which the human soul begins to be present, later than conception. They hold that personhood begins when the mental structures of the brain are sufficiently developed to perform activities distinctive of the species. Lee writes that this "argument fails because it is based on too narrow a conception of soul. The proponents of this argument view the soul only in its synchronic function (its effect at a definite time) and ignore its diachronic function (its effect on a sequence spread out in time).... [T]hey ignore the hylomorphic theory's notion of the soul's diachronic function, that is, its function as the immanent design for the series of temporal

events which, possessing a certain intelligible relation among them, are recognized as events belonging to a single organism. The intelligibility, the immanent design, here, is that present among a series of events spread out in time, such that the earlier events can only be reasonably interpreted as intrinsically directed to an activity which may take place much later. On this view the soul is present from the beginning of that intelligible series, not just at its culmination" (86–87).

Lee's book is a good one. It is a readable, clear, and succinct defense of the pro-

life view from a philosophical perspective. It could be made even more comprehensive in a future edition, perhaps without unduly sacrificing brevity, by incorporating critiques of other important defenders of abortion, in particular the work of Jeff McMahan. Lee's work in this book—like his work generally—deserves wide readership and is well recommended.

*Christopher R. Kaczor, Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
Loyola Marymount University
Los Angeles, California*