

***SOCRATES' ARGUMENT FOR IMMORTALITY:
SOCRATES, MARITAIN, GRANT AND THE ONTOLOGY OF
MORALS***

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Socrates argued with Anaxagoras, so Plato records in the *Phaedo*.¹ The latter, Socrates declared, could not explain why he, Socrates, was about to drink the hemlock rather than escape to Thebes. The event – the observable event – of sitting in his cell is to be followed by another event; these events, which are given to us in our sensible experience of the world, are separable – the earlier does not, in itself, imply a later. Yet, why this event rather than that event follows the earlier needs an explanation, at least it does if we are to count things as rational, as having reasons. Anaxagoras argued that, in effect, people, like other animals, are skin and bones. But this does not explain: at best it leaves us acting like other animals, out of material self interest: if Anaxagoras were right he, Socrates, would flee prison for Thebes. Yet Socrates is about to do what the dog would not do, namely stay and drink the hemlock. He is doing this because (a) it is “for the best” – he is doing what he dutifully owes to Athens – , and (b) he is acting to bring about the best, so far as he can attain it. There is on the one hand the form of perfect human justice – the *a priori* form of human justice – *a priori*, because we have never experienced ideal morality in the ordinary world, only imitations that fall short, mere approximations to it – , and there is, on the other hand, the striving which is Socrates: Socrates, as an active being, so moves his body as to imitate in the world of ordinary experience the ideal form of human justice. It is this striving to imitate the form that explains why Socrates

¹ See Plato, *Phaedo*. Tr. G. M. A. Grube. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1977, 97c 1ff.

sitting in prison is to be followed by his drinking the hemlock rather than by his running off to Thebes.²

But place this argument in context.³ Socrates is arguing that the philosopher does not fear death. It follows from the argument against Anaxagoras that the soul must rise out of the world of sensible appearances, the world of separable parts and of change, to the timeless world of the forms. To the extent that the soul grasps the forms it passes outside of time to eternity, the realm of the divine,⁴ and there in the timeless realm of the forms it achieves immortality. In so far as the soul is imitating the form of human justice, in so far as one is acting on moral grounds, one has in fact achieved immortality. The philosopher, aiming to imitate the forms, is constantly turning away from the world of time and change to the timeless world of the forms, and in so acting, in so trying to be just, the soul achieves eternity, immortality. There is nothing to fear in death, which is a departure from the world of ordinary experience, from the sensible world of change, for the philosopher, in living the good life, the just life, is constantly doing that.

The argument for immortality has as its premise the principle that one explains the separable by appeal to an entity, the soul, the informed activity of which brings it about the one sensible event being present in it is followed by this other sensible event rather than that: *to explain is to unify by locating the separable in an active entity.*

It is this argument for the immortality of the soul that is taken up by subsequent thinkers and made into a central point of much philosophy. More important than the conclusion of immortality, however, is the metaphysics that Socrates develops to support that doctrine; in due course, this metaphysics, this ontological scheme of explanation, becomes, through Aristotle's working it out, the dominant metaphysical picture of the world.

But Aristotle had to work it out.

² For discussion of this argument against Anaxagoras, see R. Turnbull, "Aristotle's Debt to the 'Natural Philosophy' of the *Phaedo*," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 8 (1963): 131-143 and G. Vlastos, "Reason and Causes in the *Phaedo*," *Philosophical Review*, 78 (1969): 291-325. See also F. Wilson, *Socrates, Lucretius, Camus: Two Philosophical Traditions on Death*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2002, pp. 97ff.

³Cf. Wilson, *Socrates, Lucretius, Camus*, Ch. 3, pp. 84ff.

⁴:...when the soul investigates by itself it passes into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging, and being akin to this, it always stays with it whenever it is by itself and can do so; it ceases to stray and remains in the same state as it is in touch with things of the same kind, and its experience then is what is called wisdom... (*Phaedo*, 79d 1-5).

Note first, that it follows from Socrates' argument that the soul is simple, without parts. For, if souls had separable parts, then the coming together of those parts would require explanation. And that would require them to be unified by an active entity, by a soul. So one would need another soul to explain the activity of the first soul. But then, souls are not unified. So the second soul would require a third. And so on. One would never arrive at a satisfactory explanation, one that really explains. Thus, since it seems that one *can* explain by appeal to souls, entities which move the body, it follows that the soul is simple, without parts, inseparable from itself.

Second, Aristotle made two important corrections/additions.

One: Plato had the forms separate from the souls. What is separate is separable. It therefore needs to be explained why the soul strives after this form rather than that. Why, for example, does Socrates strive after the form of human justice rather than the form of doggie justice? On Plato's scheme, why the soul strives after the form of human justice must be explained in terms of the soul striving after a form. So if the separability is to be explained then one needs a further form after which the soul can strive. The third man. But this too is separate. So one needs a further form after which to strive. And so on. The regress is vicious: one never arrives at a case of explaining.⁵ Aristotle argued that the one can solve this problem by making the form an inseparable or necessary part of the soul: a soul without an intrinsic form, an intrinsic direction to its striving, is inconceivable – if Socrates ceases to be human he ceases to be.

Two: There is the problem of knowing the forms. Plato leaves this problem not only unsolved, but largely undiscussed. Aristotle proposes that when the form is known, this form is present in the mind of the knower– the knower comes to be identical (in this respect) with the known – like knows like, to use the old formula.⁶ When the form is in the mind of the knower, the latter has a rational intuition of the object known. For Aristotle, the form comes to be in the mind through a process of abstraction. Others argued that these ideas are innate. This difference matters little – it is a disagreement within the ring, as it were.⁷

Note that the form is not only descriptive, entering into causal explanations of how the substance behaves, it is also normative. It describes not only what people do but also what they ought to do. The inference to this dual role is this.

⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1079a 13, 1039a 2.

⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427a 27.

⁷ For more on this aspect of Aristotelean metaphysics, see F. Wilson, *The Logic and Methodology of Science in Early Modern Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, p. 44ff – hereafter referred to as *Methodology*.

The form yields the end towards which the substance, as active, strives. So far as the striving is successful, the form determines how the substance is. But also, there is no alternative to the end determined by the form; that is how the substance *must* strive, the goal at which it *must* aim. We don't deliberate about ultimate ends, says Aristotle:⁸ we can do no other than make a virtue of this necessity: what we must be, we ought to be.⁹ So the form, as determining the ultimate direction of the substance's striving, is not only descriptive of what the substance is but also normative, describing what the substance ought to be. Thus, for the substance metaphysics, the natural law determined by the form or essence is both descriptive and normative. Value is thus built into the objective structure of things, and enters inevitably into the explanation of how things behave. Socrates would have it no other way.

Plato's active soul thus becomes with Aristotle an active substance. This substance, as a tendency to action, is directed in a certain way, that determined by its form or essence. It is this striving that accounts for what the substance *is*, the properties that can be predicated of it; it accounts for why the world goes one way rather than another. This metaphysics found itself expounded by, expanded upon, and defended by Thomas Aquinas. Thomism in turn has its defenders. In the 20th century one of its major expositors has been Jacques Maritain.¹⁰

Maritain put the relevant points succinctly but in remarkably complete form in his little *Preface to Metaphysics*.¹¹

Thus, for Maritain, sensible appearances as separable in themselves are on one metaphysical side while on the other side is the substance which unifies those appearances and gives them being. "...[T]he object first attained by the human intellect..." is "being as enveloped or embodied in the sensible quidity; being 'clothed' in the diverse natures apprehended by the senses..." (p. 18). This substance is beyond the world of sense experience: "Metaphysics ... does not verify its conclusions in sense data..." (p. 22). Substance as the being of a thing comes *natured*: the thing "...is something confiscally contained in this or that

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1112b 13.

⁹ For more on this aspect of Aristotelean metaphysics, see Wilson, *Methodology*, pp. 41ff.

¹⁰ This metaphysics of substances of course had its critics, the most notable of which is David Hume. See his *Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

For discussion of Hume's critique, see F. Wilson, *Hume's Defence of Causal Inference*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, Ch. 1. See also Wilson, *Methodology*, Study One.

¹¹ Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1945. While slim, this book is an excellent introduction to Thomistic metaphysics.

particular nature for example, in the dog, the horse, the pebble, something clothed in this or that object and diversified by it" (p. 18). There is on the one hand the essence of the thing and on the other hand the *esse* of the thing, the way in which it is. These are inseparable: as Maritain puts it, these are the "two aspects" of itself that being presents (p. 19). He agrees with Aristotle in rejecting the "general tendency" of Platonists to confine the intellect to the essence alone (p. 10).

These essences are dynamic, they explain the being that things have: essences "are positive capacities of existence" (p. 19). What is crucial about being as the substance of things is its *dynamic* nature: "... I cannot posit this reality, grasped by my primary intuition of being as such, without at the same time positing a certain *tendency*, a certain inclination" (p. 68). The substance, in other words, the *natured* substance, is explanatory of the being of things: the activity which is the substance unifies the sensible parts, causing them to be.

The activity is given direction by the nature or essence of the substance: the explanation is teleological, with the goal or end determined by the nature or essence. The activity which explains has, since it is the activity of a natured substance, an end, a direction or aim as determined by that nature which is inseparable from it. The substance as the being of things points beyond the being that it now is, to a further end towards which it tends to move; in this sense it exceeds itself. There is in things "an ontological tendency indistinguishable from the essence itself, or the powers of the substance in question" (p. 71). The *esse* of the thing, its existence, the way it is, is "the end in which things attain their achievement, their act, their 'energy' par excellence, the supreme actuality of whatever is" (p. 19).

In knowledge, Maritain agrees with Aristotle, there is knowledge of sensible objects and then knowledge of the substance behind those appearances. Thus he tells us, there is on the one hand that "knowledge [which] is least ontological ...; [this is] when it is primarily concerned with mental constructions built up around a sensible datum – as in empirical knowledge, and in the sciences of phenomena ..." (p. 6). But then, on the other hand, there is knowledge of the substance which confers being on the sensible appearances, and, in causing them to be, explains their existence. The latter sort of knowledge, where the mind transcends sensible appearances, is in the intellect; it is a rational intuition. In such intellectual knowledge, where the mind or intellect knows a thing as a substance, the mind becomes the other which it knows, it "assimilates" that other. "In the act of understanding the intellect becomes what is other than itself, precisely as such" (p. 4). The object in knowledge presents itself as itself, and therefore as

objectively outside the intellect: "... the intuition of being is also the intuition of its transcendental character..." (p. 44).

Now, to be known and to know are objective tendencies in both the thing and the intellect. Substances as objects of knowledge have within them a capacity to be known, that is part of what they tend to be. "Objects, all objects, murmur this being," and "utter it to the intellect," making themselves known. But, Maritain adds, "not to all intellects, only to those capable of hearing" (*Ib.*). The mechanisms must be in working order, as it were. (And how do we know that they are in working order? asks Descartes, only to be ignored by Maritain, confident that he is right.¹²)

Value and being, for Maritain, again as with Aristotle, go together. The end at which the essence as tendency or inclination aims introduces the notion of value, of the good. The substance has or is a tendency which is the thing moving itself towards an end defined by its essence. "It is thus that every being loves itself ... but this 'natural,' or consubstantial, appetite which proceeds not from knowledge but from its very substance, and which exists in a stone or a tree as well as in man" (p. 71). This end towards which a substance moves itself, or tends to move itself, is of metaphysical necessity the good of that thing. "The goodness which is coterminous with being endows *being itself* with a tendency to expand and pass beyond itself, to communicate a surplus" (p. 79). There is as it were in being "a superabundance which is an inherent character of being itself, in as much as the notion of being ... exceeds itself and passes over into the notion of *goodness or good*" (p. 68). It "asserts merit" (*Ib.*). This good is a justification for being: "Being is justified in itself ... because it is good" (*Ib.*).

Maritain is thus arguing that value is built into the ontological structure of things. Now, from the principles of this ontological account of the world there follows a very important point. Since a thing has built into it the good towards which it strives, that implies that there is a *right* which that substance has for it to exist, that is, exist according to its kind, to be in the way that is its good. Here is how Maritain puts this important consequence: "In metaphysical good a new order is disclosed, a certain *right* to exist consubstantial with *existence*" (*Ib.*). And where there is a right to something there is a duty to not interfere with the exercise of that which is right.

Among substances, human beings are special. The form or nature of human being is a natural tendency for the substance through its activity to move itself towards the end defined by the form. In the case of human beings, there is not

¹² Cf. Wilson, *Methodology*, Study Seven, "Descartes' Defence of Traditional Metaphysics."

only the inclination in the human substance as such but there is also knowledge of the human form. There is therefore in our form an appetite which proceeds from our very substance, but also knowledge of that form which also inclines us towards the end defined by the form, towards that which is our good. We are part of the necessary ontological structure of the world, but also, through our knowledge of that form, we are moved to conform to that necessity as our good, at least so far as the world permits us to attain this reality which is also our good.

The Canadian philosopher George Grant shares this ontology with Maritain and Aristotle. He has in a very interesting way drawn moral conclusions from it.

Grant proposes that reality has the sort of ontological structure described by Plato and completed by Aristotle, and, following the latter, Maritain. Reality, Grant therefore concludes, has within it the ground of objective value. It is in terms of this objective value as located in a world of substances moved by a natural law that Grant finds important moral conclusions. This natural law is not only descriptive of things, descriptive of how they do move themselves, but also normative. Natural law not only as normative defines the end of the activity of a thing, its good, but also as explanatory describes the motion towards that end.

Grant accepts this ontology. According to him,¹³ morality is given to us in the form of Natural Law. "The theory of natural law is the assertion that there is an order in the universe, and that right action for us human beings consists in attuning ourselves to that order" (p. 28). This Natural Law is an objective moral order: "We do not make this law, but are made to live within it" (p. 29).

There are two assumptions. The first assumption is that the universe "conforms to law; and to conform to law is to be held in being by reason" (*Ib.*). The order that we discern in the universe is not merely matter of fact regularity, not merely the patterns that we perceive by means of our sense experience, but patterns that reflect the reasons for things, the essences or forms of those things, but essences or forms which also form the moral structure of the universe. All things live "within" this moral order, and are "attuned" to it: this is how they are "made." It is thus in the natures of things that each strives to reflect in the world of sense the divine transcendent and objective moral order. But as he says, this striving is not an arbitrary attachment. It is a natural "attunement" between the natures of things and how they act, on the one hand, and, on the other, the objective law. Things naturally move towards the form required by the law because the law itself moves them in that direction. The moral order thus has the power to move things, and is the reason why things are as they are. It is in this

¹³ George Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*. Toronto: Copp Clarke, 1959.

sense that things are “held in being by reason.” The order that we perceive in the universe is thus a teleological order deriving from the power of the transcendent moral order to draw things according to their nature into certain forms of being, to wit, those forms required by that divine law.

Thus, things have natures. These natures are such that things strive to reflect in their being the moral law. The moral law which so moves a thing that by its nature it strives to achieve, to be, provides the reason why the thing *is* as it appears to be; the thing is thus “held in being by reason.”

The second assumption which Grant makes is that in particular there is a universal human nature and that “this universal human nature is to be a rational creature” (p. 32). Other beings are held in being by reason, but human being alone has the capacity to grasp the reasons for things. The capacity to grasp the reasons of things is reason; rationality just is this power. But the moral, the good of things, provides the reasons for things. For humans, these reasons include the reasons for its own being. Thus, it is the essence of human being to grasp the moral law which constitutes the reasons of things and in particular the reason for its own being.

The natural law so moves things that they are held by it in being, in its own image. But there is also a natural attunement between this natural law and the reason that grasps it. There is a natural law for human reflection, a standard or norm to which it must conform: this is the standard provided by the natural law itself. Here, too, as everywhere else, there is a natural “attunement” between being in the world and the transcendent law of that being. Human reason thus naturally moves to grasp the transcendent moral order which itself draws the human mind toward it. The human reason, like all other things, is to be understood as part of a teleological order, in which what moves reason is the reasons for things.

Most things, the dog, for example, or the pebble, to use Maritain’s examples, strive to bring into being the transcendent order through a non-reflective, non-conscious motion. But the case of human being is special: the motion is not only there in the substance, but is also, or can be, consciously directed. Since to grasp the reasons of things is to grasp the objective moral order, and, since we, like all things, strive to achieve that order, it is our nature as rational beings to choose our intermediate ends so that they conform to this objective moral order as the necessary ultimate end, and in so choosing to bring about in our own being a reflection of this moral order: “justice is only the living out in time of a transcendent eternal model of justice” (p. 19).

There is an order in the universe which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act so that it can attune itself to the universal

harmony. Human beings in choosing their purposes must recognize that if these purposes are to be right, they must be those which are proper to the place mankind holds within the framework of natural law. We do not make this law, but are made to live within it. (p. 29)

We are not born fully attuned to the moral law. That we become so attuned, that we become fully moral beings, is the task of social and educational institutions. They must make us moral.

Education is seen as the process by which a person comes to think clearly about the proper purposes of human life.... In the old theory of education, when a man began to see what was the ultimate purpose of human life, he was said to be wise – to have the virtue of wisdom. Wisdom was then the purpose of education. (p. 32)

When wisdom is achieved we achieve an identity between our reason and the divine reason, when our own reason becomes one with the objective moral order, the objective reasons that hold things, ourselves included, in being. Thus, indubitable and incorrigible certainty of the objective moral reason that holds us in being is the consequence of an education the point of which is to cultivate reason as the capacity to achieve such incorrigible certainty.

To live according to nature is then the supreme good for a man, as it was for any being in the universe. But, of course, our nature being higher than that of an animal demands of us a higher way of life than that which is good for an animal. The good life for man includes within it the perfection of his rational nature. Man is to be perfected and brought to his highest possibility through the union of his reason with the divine reason. Thus, the logical completion of natural law is to pass beyond a simply practical life to a life of mysticism. Practice passes into adoration. (pp. 32-3)

Since humans are by nature rational animals, there is a natural tendency within us to grasp the divine truth, the objective moral law to which we must and ought to strive to conform our behaviour. This natural tendency explains our behaviour. If we do not conform to the objective standard, then that is because the natural tendency to grasp the truth has somehow been thwarted in its strivings. Grant argues that in fact persons in modern western society, the United States and Canada in particular, do not strive after virtue; they seem in fact to have forgotten it. This is, he suggests, because modern technological society has so managed to produce goods that satisfy our bodily wants and indeed has so managed to produce wants in us that demand even more material goods to satisfy them that we are totally involved with the satisfaction of wants to the exclusion of the search for justice and wisdom. The development of technological society and capitalism has succeeded in using us for its own material ends – we might recall “The Matrix” – and has done so by causing us to hide from ourselves the truth that, as natural beings, we are inclined towards an objective justice and

divine law that lies beyond, and indeed should control, the satisfaction of our material needs and wants.

This modern predicament is all the fault of the empiricist philosophers, starting, Grant argues, with Bacon:

...what meaning is there in Bacon's attempt to cut off truth humanly discoverable from the revealed dogmas of religion? Its only implication is that the truths of religion are not rational but arbitrary. Therefore, it leads to an exaltation of the truths of natural science, and such an exaltation, coupled with man's original sin, leads straight to the griming mask of scientific humanism at Hiroshima.¹⁴

The empiricists – Bacon, Locke, Hume – attacked the claim that there are forms or essences, they attacked the claim that there are parts, as it were, of things that are beyond ordinary sensible experience but explain what happens in our experience to those things. In attacking the very idea of essences or forms, the empiricists attack the notion that value is built into the ontological structure of the universe. But those forms are also the reasons for things, reasons both for what things are and for what things, especially ourselves, ought to be. That attack opened the way for the common taking as acceptable acts that are as a matter of objective fact morally reprehensible. It is the attack on the classical tradition in metaphysics that has made the world the evil place that it now is. So, at least, George Grant.

Grant stated the issue more completely, with reference to the modern world, in the twentieth century, in response to one whom he took to be a leading representative of the empiricist tradition, Bertrand Russell.¹⁵ Russell defended the Hobbes-Hume view of the world, in which there are no forms or natures and, in particular, no metaphysical human nature, nor therefore any objective values. At the same time Russell vigorously defended a variety of moral positions, including the claim which he apparently shared with Grant, that we *ought* to abandon nuclear weapons. Grant argues that Russell's position is clearly inconsistent.

As Grant puts it, Russell is acting as a moral leader when he issues his injunctions; but he does this without attempting “to discover the principles underlying these [Russell's] activities” (p. 323). But Russell proposes that such principles cannot be discovered; he cannot invoke any principles because, when he develops his empiricist picture of the world, there is no place for objective moral standards for reason to know. “Russell cannot have it both ways. He

¹⁴ George Grant, “The Philosophy of Francis Bacon,” *The George Grant Reader*. Eds. W. Christian and S. Grant. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, pp. 321-322, at p. 322 – hereafter referred to as *Grant Reader*.

¹⁵ George Grant, “Pursuit of an Illusion,” *Grant Reader*, pp. 323-334.

cannot be sceptical about the positive role of the philosopher in discovering ethical principles and also expect us to take with any seriousness his statements about how we ought to live” (*Ib.*).

This, however, is misleading indeed, and quite unfair to Russell and to his philosophical position. Russell is in fact not a sceptic about objective moral values. He argues that such standards do not exist: this is something that he *knows*. But knowing that, he also rejects any account of reason – human reason – that requires the latter to be able to discern objective values. But it does not follow from the fact that there are no objective values that therefore there are no values: for, there are still for all that values at which to aim and which can give life meaning. For, *there are relative values*. Grant is suggesting that if one rejects any claim that there are objective values then one has no right to pronounce moral judgments. He gives no reason for accepting that inference. In fact, if there are no objective values in the ontological structure of the world, then one cannot turn to them to justify his or her moral judgments; but it does not follow that one must refrain from making moral judgments. In fact, one can quite well argue, as Hume does, and as Russell also does, that there are grounds for some positions as more morally justified than others. To be sure, such a justification will not involve an appeal to objective standards; but it does not follow that there is no justification available in terms of which we can defend virtue and oppose vice.

We are told that “if Russell is right and reason cannot speak about the fundamentals of conduct, then he is using the word ‘should’ with no rational significance” (p. 324). But this assertion – and Grant leaves it at mere assertion – is simply a colossal begging of the question; it is not rational argument. Russell has argued that there are no reasons in Grant’s sense, in the sense of Plato and Aristotle – or, more recently, of Maritain. It does not follow that there cannot be good reasons for and against various proposals about what we ought to do. To be sure, they rest upon human feelings and passions, upon our subjective moral sentiments. But that does not prevent them from being reasons. To be sure, they are not reasons of the sort Grant would like, but there are none of the latter, so (Hume and Russell argue) we had best make do with what we do have. Grant suggests that relying upon our subjective moral sentiments means that our moral judgments are “no more than expressions of like and dislike or of command...” (p. 325). There is, however, a difference between our likes and dislikes, on the one hand, and our moral sentiments, on the other. The latter cannot be reduced to the former. Hobbes thought that could be done, but Hume, following Butler, argued that Hobbes was wrong, and Russell agrees with Hume. Likes and dislikes are arbitrary, where our moral sentiments are not in that sense

arbitrary. To be sure, they are arbitrary if one is a Platonist or an Aristotelian, but Hume and Russell deny that there is such an objective basis for our moral values. These latter philosophers therefore require a different sort of justification than that which we find in Plato and Aristotle. Hume suggested such a justification for the norms of civil society, and upon this reasoning these norms are far from arbitrary. To the contrary, they are, Hume argues, firmly rooted in the sorts of being that we as a matter of empirical fact are – empirical fact, not metaphysical and transcendent ways of being. Grant does not argue against Russell, or, what amounts to the same, against Hume: he merely asserts. But until he goes beyond assertion to present some arguments we have no reason to accept his rhetoric.

Again, Grant suggests that in making his moral judgments and recommending them to others means Russell is simply insincere and misleading. For, upon Russell's view, as construed by Grant, those principles are ones which he (Russell) "rejects as false" (p. 326). But Russell does *not* reject them as false; but neither are they true. There is simply no objective basis for saying that they are either true or false. It does not follow that there are no grounds for supposing that some moral judgments are better than others, and in that sense more reasonable. It is equally misleading for Grant to suggest that Russell, in making and recommending his values as justified, is "fostering illusion" (*Ib.*). For Russell, as for Hume, however, it is Grant who is fostering an illusion, the illusion of objective values. Again, it is misleading and simply question begging to assert that Russell's defence of certain forms of action as virtuous and others as vicious "can only lie in a completely irrational acceptance of one tradition as against another" (p. 327). Russell's defence is irrational only if one accepts Grant's position that there are objective values. But Russell, following Hobbes and Hume, is arguing that there are no such objective values, no such objective reasons to ground our moral judgments. It does not follow, however, to repeat, that there are no grounds for preferring one set of moral judgments against another, one tradition as against another; and in that sense the acceptance of a moral stance is far from irrational: what can be backed by reasons, the only sort of reasons that there are, is not to be condemned as irrational.

Grant suggests that he has "never met a human being who does not hold some conception of the highest good, however, imperfectly formulated and imperfectly followed. That is, I [Grant] have never met a human being who was not capable of giving some faint semblance of order to his [or her] desires" (p. 330). One such as Hume and Russell can only agree. But that ordering is not based on a set of objectively grounded values. It does not follow, however, that it is not grounded. To the contrary, our moral sense is grounded, however

imperfectly, in our common sense of humanity, a sense that we derive from our very human capacity to respond sympathetically to others. Is that not something itself to be valued, particularly when contrasted to what Hume and Russell must see as Grant's illusion of objective values?

Certainly, it is evident, Grant proposes, that the Hume-Russell view of human being in effect argues that people "are not rational animals, but clever beasts with a facility for mathematics" (p. 334). This is to suggest, wrongly, that if one rejects the claim – the illusion, as Hume and Russell would see it – of objective moral values, then one is holding that human beings are beasts with no moral sense, clever beasts but still essentially without moral values. We are back to the Anglican theologians who were the initial critics of Hobbes. Grant has not passed beyond them and certainly has not recognized how Hume made a serious advance on Hobbes, recognizing our moral sense and the rational basis in our common human sense of sympathy for others for our moral reasons for action.

One can make similar comments about another remark of Grant's. Commenting on Locke's moral philosophy, which, like that of Hobbes and Hume, denies that there are objective values, he (Grant) states that "the untruth of the traditional teaching means that there is no ... highest good given to human beings in their recognition of the way things are."¹⁶ The characterization of Locke is just: there are no objective values, and the tradition which says so, Grant's tradition, is untruth. The foundations of the rules of justice in civil society must be elsewhere than in the ontological structure of things. Locke's answer, like that of Hobbes and Hume, is that "justice is contractual, not natural" (p. 17), that is, not in the objective natures or forms of things. "Justice is those convenient arrangements agreed to by sensible men ..." (p. 18), or, rather, sensible persons. But Grant objects to the use of the term 'person' here.

To call human beings 'persons' is clearly not a scientific description. What is it then? If the word is a true description but not scientific, is it not then one of these supra-scientific metaphysical terms which analytical philosophy would have us eschew? (p. 32)

Grant is on to something here. If we do give up the traditional forms or natures, and in particular the form or nature of human beings, then we can no longer give the traditional account of human being: human beings are no longer to be construed as substances with a certain nature or form. But then, Grant says, to call human beings *persons* is something "mysteriously ... brought in to cover up the inability to state clearly what it is about human beings which makes them worthy of high political respect" (p. 32). Clearly, 'person' in the sense of

¹⁶ George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*. Toronto: Anansi, 1985, p. 17.

something *worthy* of respect can no longer be construed as a descriptive term, scientific as Grant would have it, but is rather normative: human beings are those beings to whom we *ought* to give political respect. As Locke was to put it, the term ‘person’ is a forensic notion, not a metaphysical notion. ‘Person’ “... is a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit, and so belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery.”¹⁷ Grant suggests that since the term no longer refers a metaphysical reality, it is therefore wrong for the empiricist, or the analytical philosopher, to use the term: values have disappeared. But only objective values have disappeared. Locke and the other empiricists have not given up, however, the moral sense of human beings, nor the capacity of human beings to make moral judgments. What are human beings, these being worthy of our respect? As Locke says, just those beings with whom we form civil society. To the extent that a member of the species *homo sapiens* is capable of living with others in civil society – to that extent we deem him or her *worthy* of respect and a carrier of human rights, that is, a person. ‘Person’ is thus a normative term, introduced to designate those beings whom we *ought* to treat as bearers of rights in civil society. Grant is correct: this term is not one of science, which uses only descriptive terms. It is indeed normative. But those norms are rooted in ordinary human empirical needs and being, not in the ontological structure of the universe. Or at least, Grant provides no argument for there being such a metaphysical grounding of value. And until he does the empiricist need not worry about his rhetoric.

But Grant is surely correct in one thing: What one holds with regard to objective metaphysical natures or forms of things has profound effects on how one defends or criticizes various moral claims.

For a substance, e.g., a person, to fulfill its nature is for it to be as it ought to be; the nature determines that at which it aims and so to be in that natural state is its good. To frustrate its movement towards its good is an evil, an objective evil grounded in the natures of things. Such an injury is the worse the greater the attainment of the goal of its natural motion is frustrated. Death is therefore the greatest evil,¹⁸ while murder, as Aquinas says, is an “injury to one’s neighbour against his will,” and is in fact the “greatest injury.”¹⁹ To be sure, lawful

¹⁷ J. Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, Bk. II. Ch. 27, sec. 26.

¹⁸ Compare F. Wilson, “Reflections on Kovacs’ Reflections on Death,” *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 25 (2002): 225-239.

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Fathers. New York: Benziger Bros.: 1947-48, II-II, Q 64.

execution can be justified. The “imperfect are for the perfect,” and from this it follows that it is “not unlawful to use plants for animals, and animals for man” (II-II Q 64 a1). For the same reason it is generally unjustified to kill a man: “to kill a man is evil in itself, since we are bound to have charity towards all men...” (II-II Q 64 a2 Obj 3). This charity that binds us to all men (and women) is built into our natures, and through that we are parts which form and contribute to the social whole. The part has as an aspect of its essential being that it is part of the whole. The whole is the perfection of the part, and the social the perfection of the individual: “every part is directed to the whole as imperfect to perfect, wherefore every part is naturally for the sake of the whole” (*Ib.*). Now, sometimes parts are diseased and threaten the well-being of the whole: the disease of a part can threaten the whole. Thus, “if the health of the whole body demands the excision of a member, through its being decayed or infectious to other members, it will be both praiseworthy and advantageous to have it cut away” (*Ib.*). The gangrenous foot ought to be removed, as ought the inflamed tooth. And equally, then, when a person who threatens the well-being of the whole community, it is praiseworthy and advantageous for a person “to be killed in order to safeguard the common good...” (*Ib.*). Thus, if a person is deemed by duly constituted authority to have harmed or to have threatened to harm the social whole, the common good, it is lawful to execute him or her as it is lawful to amputate the gangrenous foot. In short, criminal or various sinful acts are punishable by death, preaching heresy, for example, or blasphemy, but otherwise killing is wrong: it brings about the non-being of a substantial entity whose nature aims at its being, that is, being in its natural state. As we saw Maritain put it, “[i]n metaphysical good a new order is disclosed, a certain *right* to exist consubstantial with *existence*” (p. 68). Substances have a “right to exist,” and that right imposes a duty on that substance and on others to respect that right, and to not interfere with it. Murder is wrong simply because it interferes with the right of something to exist.

This provides the premise for Aquinas' argument against suicide. Suicide is in effect self-murder, and is forbidden for the same reason that killing another is forbidden: it is contrary to the natural order of being.

Suicide is forbidden: “It is altogether unlawful to kill oneself... .”²⁰ because it is contrary to its natural inclination of a substance to bring itself into being:

²⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 64, Art. 5, “Whether It Is Lawful to Kill Oneself.” Reprinted in T. Beauchamp and S. Perlin, *Ethical Issues in Death and Dying*. Page references are to this publication. This quotation is at p. 103. For more discussion of Thomas' argument, see Wilson, *Socrates, Lucretius, Camus*, p. 229ff.

...everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being, and resists corruption so far as it can. Wherefore suicide is contrary to the inclination of nature, and so charity whereby every man should love himself. Hence suicide is always a mortal sin, as being contrary to the natural law and to charity. (p. 103)

As we noted before, this argument clearly depends upon the substance metaphysics deriving from Socrates' model of explanation, as completed by Aristotle. The natured soul is active in establishing its own being in the world. Reason grasps the reasons of things, including the reason for its own being, the form or nature which of necessity it metaphysically is. When the soul grasps the Forms, or as Aquinas would put it, the Natures of things, it grasps the reasons for things; and in grasping its own Form or Nature, it is moved to imitate that Form in its own being in time in the world of sense experience. For the substance to *also* move itself towards its own *non-being* by committing suicide would, in effect, be for it to turn away from reason, and not only the reason that informs the intellect, but also for it to turn away from the reasons for things, and from the natural law which ought to move those things. For Aquinas, such turning away is a sin. In a case of suicide, save perhaps in exceptional circumstances, the soul, the seat of reason, would have to be moved by, say, the passions, by something in any case other than reason, that is, the reason that grasps the reasons for things. Suicide is not only an immoral denial of one's own right to life, it is thoroughly irrational, contrary to the rational structures of things.

Any reason that dictated suicide would at once be moved by a form or nature towards both its being and its non-being. So it contradicts itself, *formally*, in obliterating itself. It is thus formally self-contradictory to say that it is right and in conformity to reason that one commit suicide. So the suicide not only violates that natural law that each seeks to be, but also the rule that actions ought to be guided by reason.

Aquinas also argues that suicide is wrong because it injures the community: Suicide is forbidden, he argues,

...because every part, as such, belongs to the whole. Now every man is part of the community, and so, as such, he belongs to the community. Hence by killing himself he injures the community. (*Ib.*)

Socrates already in the *Phaedo* had made this point. Socrates there argues that "this seems to me well expressed, that the gods are our guardians and that men are one of their possessions." His interlocutor Cebes agrees, and Socrates goes on:

And would you not be angry if one of your possessions killed itself when you had not given any sign that you wished it to die...?

Again Cebes (we are not surprised) agrees.

Perhaps then, [Socrates continues,] put in this way, it is not unreasonable that one should not kill oneself before a god had indicated some necessity to do so, like the necessity now put upon us. (*Phaedo*, 62b4-c5)

The necessity, of course, turns out to be *moral* necessity, that which is required by duty. As for the gods, that which is divine, these turn out to be the forms, those entities that not only explain why things turn out as they do but also tell us how things ought to be. They, the forms = the divine, guard us in the sense of informing us of what is for the best; and we are their possessions in the sense that when we grasp them it is they who determine how we behave and act. We receive a sign from them precisely when we grasp them. In grasping them we understand, and act to realize, our moral duty. And so, for the gods to indicate that there is a necessity to kill oneself is simply to know that it is one's duty to do so. But the forms bring souls into being, that is, they cause the souls to have within them the characteristics that we observe. For it to be duty to suicide would be for a form which causes the being of things to also be the cause of the non-being of something. That, however, is impossible: it can never be our duty to commit suicide.

Aquinas repeats Socrates' argument that "life is God's gift to man, and is subject to His power, Who kills and makes to live. Hence whoever takes his own life, sins against God, even as he who kills another's slave, sins against that slave's master, and as he who usurps to himself judgment of a matter not entrusted to him" (p. 103). But Aquinas makes clear that he intends more than does Socrates: for Aquinas it is *never* the case that one ought to commit suicide: "It is *altogether unlawful* to kill oneself..." (*Ib.*). Thus, he quotes Augustine²¹ to the effect that suicide is forbidden by the divine commandment, which we are bound to obey, that "Thou shalt not kill":

Hence it follows that the words "Thou shalt not kill" refer to the killing of a man; – not another man; therefore, not even thyself. For he who kills himself, kills nothing else than a man. (*Ib.*)

Hume's essay "On Suicide"²² is perhaps the most notorious of the defences of the rationality of suicide. It can be seen as a direct reply to Aquinas.

Aquinas' position depends, as we have seen, on the natural law ethics deriving from the substance tradition and the Aristotelian model of explanation.

²¹ Augustine, *City of God*. Tr. H. Bettenson. Introduction J. O'Meara. London: Penguin, 1984, Bk. i, ch. 20.

²² Reprinted in T. Beauchamp and S. Perlin, *Ethical Issues in Death and Dying*. Page references are to this publication. For further discussion of Hume's argument, see Wilson, *Socrates, Lucretius, Camus*, p. 233ff.

Hume in this simply takes for granted that this position is mistaken; he makes the assumption that the arguments that he has deployed elsewhere against forms and natural necessities are sound. Thus, Hume understands the 'nature' of 'natural law' to mean nothing more than the empirical universe, and the 'law' of 'natural law' to refer to matter-of-fact regularities in the universe. And it is quite true that once the metaphysical basis for Aquinas' arguments concerning suicide are eliminated, those arguments lose most of their force. When Hume examines these Thomistic arguments from his own naturalistic and non-substantialist perspective, he finds them to be, not surprisingly, unconvincing.

Thus, to the Thomistic argument that "Life is God's gift to man, and is subject to His power," Hume replies that God exercises His power through natural causes, and that taking one's own life is simply one natural cause among others; it cannot, therefore, run counter to God's power. In fact, the argument is absurd, since it would equally argue against the protection of our lives from threatening natural causes.

Were the disposal of human life so much reserved as the peculiar province of the Almighty that it were an encroachment of his right for men to dispose of their own lives; it would be equally criminal to act for the preservation of life as for its destruction. If I turn aside a stone which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature, and I invade the peculiar province of the Almighty by lengthening out my life beyond the period which by the general laws of matter and motion he had assigned it. (p. 107)

Where you have a distinction between natural causes, those that flow from the Natures of things, and unnatural causes, those that act contrary to the Natures of things, then Aquinas' point can be made; but no such distinction is available in the empiricist philosophy of Hume (and Russell) that denies that there are any such entities as the Natures of things. Hume, therefore, *from this ontological perspective* rightly rejects this Thomistic argument against suicide.

The next argument that Hume considers is the Thomistic argument that in suicide a person harms the community. But, Hume argues, "a man who retires from life does no harm to society; He only ceases to do good; which, if it is an injury, is of the lowest kind." Hume is prepared to allow that we do have obligations to the society in which we live; but there are limits, and other considerations, in particular those of self-interest, may on occasion override those duties towards others.

All our obligations to do good to society seem to imply something reciprocal. I receive the benefits of society and therefore ought to promote its interests, but when I withdraw myself altogether from society, can I be bound any longer? But, allowing that our obligations to do good were perpetual, they have certainly some bounds; I am not obliged to do a small good to society at the expense of a great harm to myself; why then should I prolong a miserable existence, because of

some frivolous advantage which the public may perhaps receive from me? If upon account of age and infirmities I may lawfully resign any office, and employ my time altogether in fencing against these calamities, and alleviating as much as possible the miseries of my future life: Why may I not cut short those miseries at once by an action which is no more prejudicial to society? (pp. 109-10).

For Aquinas, of course, removal from society is contrary to human nature which establishes us, through our natural charity, to be essentially social, and suicide therefore constitutes an injury to society; but that argument assumes the doctrine of Natures which Hume rejects. Hume, therefore, *from the empiricist perspective* rightly rejects the Thomistic argument that suicide is always, of its nature, injurious to society. Once that general conclusion is withdrawn, it is easy for Hume, to counter, on the basis of considerations of utility and self-interest, that suicide does not always constitute a blameable harm to others with whom we are bound up through our social relations into larger social units. Indeed, Hume goes on, when life has become an intolerable burden, suicide itself may acquire social utility. For, in that way I relieve society of the burden of supporting me:

...suppose that it is no longer in my power to promote the interest of society; suppose that I am a burden to it; suppose that my life hinders some person from being much more useful to society. In such cases my resignation of life must not only be innocent but laudable (p. 110).

Indeed, in such circumstances suicide is

...the only way that we can then be useful to society, by setting an example, which, if imitated, would preserve to everyone his chance for happiness in life and would effectually free him from all danger or misery (*Ib.*).

In general, Hume concludes,

That suicide may often be consistent with interest and with our duty to ourselves, no one can question who allows that age, sickness, or misfortune may render life a burden, and make it worse even than annihilation...If suicide be supposed a crime 'tis only cowardice can impel us to it. If it be no crime, both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence, when it becomes a burden (*Ib.*).

Thus, contrary to Aquinas death is not always an evil, and we cannot conclude that “a bad end is in store for us all.” Hume’s point is that we do have aims, and dying prevents, often, the fulfilment of those aims and projects. But if we have completed our projects, if we have more or less satisfied our life aims, then death is no “bad end”: in dying nothing is lost. And in other contexts, it may be that there are projects unfinished but the loss that occurs through death is outweighed by some gain or other, say the avoidance of pain. There is no metaphysically grounded end that aims simply at our being, and which, by virtue of the metaphysical necessity, has our continued being trumping all other, more specific, ends.

But Hume also notes also that we often have reasons *not* to commit suicide, reasons for wanting to go on living, things we want to do and ought to do. "I believe that no man ever threw away life while it was worth keeping. For such is our natural horror of death that small motives will never be able to reconcile us to it..." (*Ib.*).²³ A premature death that prevents one from fulfilling his or her potential or aims or commitments may well yield grounds for regretting that death. To that extent, death may at times amount to a "bad end." But where a person has fulfilled their hopes, as for the most part Hume himself had when he felt death approaching, there is nothing to regret. Once again, it is simply not true that death is a "bad end" that awaits us all.

It is evident that there is a disagreement between Hume and Aquinas. In one sense, it is over suicide. But beyond that it is over the sorts of argument that Aquinas' used to condemn suicide and the sorts of argument that Hume proposed could be used to justify it. The arguments are in fact radically different in kind. Hume and Aquinas are arguing in their different ways which simply bypass each other because there is a deeper difference. This deeper difference is over the issue whether there are natured substances or not: Aquinas argues that there are and relative to that position his arguments against suicide are sound; and Hume argues that there are no substances and no natures or forms and relative to that position his arguments in defence of suicide are sound. The issue is one of ethics, about what ought to be done, but before the issue of ethics can be settled, it is first necessary to settle the deeper metaphysical issues in terms of which the arguments are framed. But of course Hume, in making his case, has done just this: he has argued on empiricist grounds that there are no substances and no objective necessary connections, that is, no natures or forms, there are only the sensible events in the world of ordinary experience. This defeats Aquinas' case, removing the presupposition upon which the soundness of his arguments rests. And it establishes his own metaphysical position, allowing his arguments that suicide can be justified to stand as sound.

Still more interesting is the similar point that must be made about the morality of abortion.

²³ We would likely, now after Darwin, add that our natural horror of death is biologically determined by natural selection: such an impulse makes us biologically more fit.

There are no doubt similar good biological reasons why, as we become old, this natural horror of death becomes attenuated, why towards our natural ends we no longer fear such an end. For discussion of this latter point, see Wilson, *Socrates, Lucretius, Camus*, Ch. Two.

Assuming that the ovum when fertilized becomes as the foetus a substance, then, upon the substance ontology, at that point it has a nature or form, in this case the form of being human that it shares with other human beings; it is as such a substance, a person. Since to abort the foetus would prevent that person coming to be what, by virtue of its form, it aims naturally to be, an evil befalls it, in fact the greatest evil of death. Abortion is therefore, like suicide, and for the same reason, forbidden as contrary to law – and contrary to our natural charity towards other persons. As one of the defenders of the Roman Catholic position on abortion has put it, “The greatest physical evil one can suffer is to lose one’s life and existence, not just because one’s ‘person’ or ‘personal’ capacity to relate with others is lost, but because the very existence itself of the individual is lost in death,”²⁴ Now, as we have seen in discussing the morality of suicide, death need not be the greatest evil; indeed, there is no reason at to think that non-being is, in itself, any sort of evil, and every reason to think that in certain contexts our non-being, our death, is a relief from evil. At least, that is so if one rejects, as Hume and Humeans such as Russell do, the notion that persons are, metaphysically, natured substances. It is central to the claim that abortion from the moment of fertilization on is immoral that the foetus is a substance which has, of necessity, a form or nature, where this form or nature is an active potentiality the activity of which creates the being of the foetus as a maturing person. Thus, Catholics, in defence of their position on abortion, argue that

The person is the being which causes the development of these states [the states of consciousness that are successively the stages in life’s history] as well as human bodily states, and personhood is not the consequence of these states but is their cause. (p. 161)

The teleological nature of the explanation is clear: the cause is the end itself, pulling as it were from in front, rather than pushing from behind. That the nature is conceived to be an active form the striving of which for actuality is the cause of the development of the adult which is, normally, also the person, that at which the thing, the substance, aims to be and which, because that is its aim, it also ought to be.

Natural potentialities need nothing but the proper matter to be reduced to action, and the potentiality of the fetus to become an adult is an active natural potentiality or tendency which is guaranteed as long as no external factors intercede. (p. 164)

The appeal to a Thomistic metaphysics of the sort defended by Maritain is clear. This means that the difficulty is, or ought to be, not merely moral but more

²⁴ Robert Barry, “The Roman Catholic Position on Abortion.” Ed. Rem B. Edwards. *Advances in Bioethics: New Essays on Abortion and Bioethics*, pp. 131-182, at p. 160.

deeply the metaphysics, the ontology of natural forms. It is the assumption that there is in the structure of things forms that determine objectively moral value. It is those forms that the empiricist rejects. For such a philosopher there is no objective standard of value or of moral worth: "is" does not imply "ought." As Hume had made the point,

In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.²⁵

For the empiricist, then, the fact that a fertilized ovum, if left to normal processes, will develop into a being of the sort that we reckon a person and therefore something that is a bearer of moral rights – , this fact does not, as a mere fact, imply that it, too, as a fertilized ovum, ought to be treated as a bearer of rights. The fact that a fertilized ovum has in some sense the potentiality to become a person does not make it into a person. The potentiality is nothing other than the *empirical fact* that if such and such happens then so and so eventuates. The issue, on the non-substantialist ontology, is this: *ought* a fertilized ovum be treated as a bearer of rights. The fact that it is a fertilized ovum does not by itself establish this norm. To establish that the fertilized ovum is the bearer of rights because it is already a person requires a defence of the Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics of objective value. One does not validate one's position on abortion by simply taking that ontology for granted.²⁶ At the same time, one does not validate the opposite position on abortion simply by ignoring the underlying metaphysical issues – in this Grant is surely correct.

Those who argue for what is if you wish a more liberal view of abortion have a view of human being very different from the Aristotelian account that Grant defends, or, at least, accepts. It is often argued that the appropriate stance

²⁵ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 469

²⁶ Thus, Robert Barry, "Personhood: The Conditions of Identification and Description," *Linacre Quarterly*, 45 (1978): 64-81, simply begs the question on the issue that divides him from his opponents.

definitive of the moral is that of “welfarism.” This is the view that “the ultimate point of morality is to ensure that individuals’ lives go well rather than badly, thus to protect and promote their well-being.”²⁷ Now, welfare is “subjective”: what is relevant is how well life is going for him or her, how satisfying and fulfilling it is. But “the bare minimum necessary for having a welfare is *sentience...*” (p. 208; his italics). It is concluded that the criterion for being (barely) a person is sentience. “The threshold of moral standing for a developing human being is therefore the stage when it first acquires the most primitive form of conscious feelings or affect – the capacity to experience pleasure and pain” (p. 208). Since neither the newly fertilized ovum nor the growing foetus for some time is sentient it is not a person and so has no moral standing. Abortion is therefore permissible at that time, at any time until the foetus becomes sentient.

It is clear that “welfarism,” taking welfare alone as a criterion of the morality of human acts, neglects the moral sense of human beings. Preserving and promoting the welfare of human beings provides prudential reasons for instituting and conforming to the norms of civil society. But those norms become binding morally and not just prudentially by virtue of the sympathetic response of human beings to one another’s pain and pleasure, our natural charity towards others. This suggests an alternative to sentience as a criterion of personhood. This would be the capacity of the foetus to elicit a sympathetic response from members of civil society. *An entity ought to be taken as a person when we can respond to it as we respond to members of our moral community.*

This has implications for what one says about the morality of abortion. Sentience is not the point at which there are such sympathetic responses from members of the mother’s moral community. Since before birth such a response to the behaviour and actions of the foetus could come only from the mother who is bearing it, she alone determines the point at which the foetus acquires moral status.

The role of our moral sense is important, but whether one adopts the criterion of sentience or adopts the role of our moral sense as determining moral status, both presuppose a certain metaphysics of persons. Both reject the doctrine that a human form or nature or essence forms the basis for moral status in civil society. One can imagine the response of the Anglican critics of Hobbes to this view of human being. Like Hobbes’ view, the account of human being presupposed by “welfarism” does not acknowledge that there is a basis in human

²⁷ L. W. Sumner, “Moderate Views of Abortion,” Ed. Rem B. Edwards. *Advances in Bioethics: New Essays on Abortion and Bioethics*, pp. 203-226, at p. 208.

nature for moral awareness, where it is that moral sense that separates us from lesser creatures. Hume's defence of a moral sense remedies this defect. But there is something deeper, something that confronts both "welfarism" and the Humean view of morality. For the critics of Hobbes, this moral sense finds its objective basis in a metaphysically rooted human form or nature. The criticism that this is ignored confronts the other views on abortion. Any defence of these views requires antecedently rejection of the metaphysics that implies its rejection. The issue about abortion is in the end a metaphysical issue: are there or are there not metaphysical forms or natures determining the personhood and moral status of human beings. If Grant begs the question against Russell and Hume, then it is equally true that the defenders of "welfarism" beg the question against such thinkers as George Grant.²⁸

Here George Grant saw things clearly.

The need to justify modern liberal justice has been kept in the wings of our English-speaking drama by the power and strength of our tradition. In such events as the decision on abortion it begins to walk upon the stage. To put the matter simply: if 'species' is an historical concept and we are a species whose origin can be explained in terms of mechanical necessity and chance, living on a planet which can also be explained in such terms, what requires us to live together according to the principles of equal justice?²⁹

The issue is indeed one, as Grant says, of "theoretical differences in 'world views'" (p. 74). Before any "moderate" view of abortion can be established the metaphysical issues must first be settled. The issue is not merely one of morals; it is also one of ontology: the metaphysics of the substance tradition must be defended or rejected, and it is upon the outcome of *this* debate that the moral issue depends, at least in the two not unimportant cases we have examined – suicide and abortion. This metaphysics has its roots in the ancient world, in Socrates' argument against Anaxagoras, but the issues it establishes as important remain, as George Grant makes clear, to this day.

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²⁸ But Hume himself does not beg the question. He wrote the *Treatise of Human Nature* well before he wrote his essay on suicide. The *Treatise* provides a critique of Aristotelian and rationalist metaphysics, that is, those metaphysical positions deriving from Socrates' critique of Anaxagoras. It is only after this critique is available that he can advance the arguments that he does in defence of suicide.

²⁹ Grant, *English Speaking Justice*, p. 73.