

Are infants with disabilities disposable?

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December 30, 2008

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It's okay to kill infants who are born with disabilities say some university types engaged in an ongoing debate about what it means to be human. To defend the idea that it's okay to kill infants with disabilities, practitioners of bioethics engage in some semantic gymnastics around the notion of "personhood." Persons are those who can value their own lives. In other words they have intrinsic moral worth only because they have sufficient cognitive capacity or self-awareness. Those who don't measure up are considered "non-persons" or, in the case of infants, only "potential persons."

"While personhood theory is not a unanimously held view among bioethicists, it is widely accepted, particularly among academics at the most elite institutions," says Wesley J. Smith author of *Culture of Death: The Assault on Medical Ethics in America*. "These ideas have grave consequences, particularly for people with serious cognitive or developmental disabilities who, I think, are the targets of this utilitarian thrust in medical ethics."

"Does human life have moral value simply because it's human?" he asks. "Do our human rights come with us as human beings? If we don't say yes to this question, then how can we have universal human rights? I submit that the mainstream view in bioethics says that we don't have these rights and therefore the most vulnerable among us can be exploited, oppressed or even killed. Personhood theory teaches that there are some people who we can kill and still get a good night's sleep."

"Worse it has been suggested that non-persons who have no moral value can be used as research subjects or sources of human organs. So now personhood theory when taken to its logical conclusion has reduced some human beings to the status of a natural resource to be exploited like a prize cattle herd.

"It wasn't many years ago that almost everyone accepted that infanticide is intrinsically and inherently wrong. Clearly, this is no longer true. With growth of personhood theory that denies the intrinsic value of human life, and with the invidiously discriminatory 'quality of life' ethic permeating the highest levels of the medical and bioethical thinking, we are moving toward a medical system in which babies are put down like dogs and

killing is redefined as a caring act.”

Smith made these observations during a recent lecture (listen to it below) sponsored by the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities as part of its series of presentations on life threatening public policy.

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